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ROMANTIC PEDANTRY :  
PERSONIFYING THE INTELLECTUAL  
FROM MR. SPECTATOR TO REV. CASAUBON

by

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Romantic Pedantry:

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This dissertation examines how the pedant, a seemingly familiar object of satire, came to personify passionate intellectual absorption in romantic-era writing. The pedant's ostentatious displays of erudition might seem antithetical to the spirit of an age conventionally associated with the veneration of nature, childhood innocence, and untutored genius. Indeed, pedantry had first attracted attention in eighteenth-century British literature as a problem concerning the performance of specialized knowledge, exemplified by professionals who use jargon outside its proper context. For advocates of polite conversation, excessive attachments to useless knowledge threatened social intercourse by making an individual's preoccupations a matter of public discourse. Various romantic-era texts, however, imagine other ends for these objects of polite

Augustan censure as sources of rhetorical suasion and aesthetic delight. From the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries, British writing celebrated the figure of the rambling professional: soldiers, sailors, lawyers, clergymen, and authors whose ardent attachments to useless knowledge structure their conversation and writing. In fact, the romantic pedant's digressions furnish a recurrent model for literary forms strongly associated with the period. William Hazlitt's familiar essays, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's fragmentary autobiography-cum-philosophical treatise, the blathering personae of Walter Scott's novels, and the antiquarian-inflected speakers of ballads by Robert Burns and William Wordsworth each characterize the relation between feeling and language as an ambivalent product of life in a fragmented world defined by professional specialization. The lyric involution of Wordsworth's solitaires, the historical musing of Scott's narrators, and the political and erotic infidelity of Coleridge and Burns are motivated by simultaneous feelings of immersion and rootlessness. Absorbed in process, whether at the level of minute detail or grand abstraction, the romantic pedant loses sight of outcomes and practical ends. In pedantry, romantic-period writing adopted an ubiquitous term of rebuke and refashioned it into a characteristic mental and physical disposition, an individuated persona that typifies impassioned expression.

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## INTRODUCTION

From Lydus, the *servus paedagogicus* of Plautus's *Bacchides* (c. 188 BCE), to Jack Gladney, Professor of Hitler Studies in Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985), from Greco-Roman comedy to the postmodern novel, the pedant has proven a reliable object for satire, perhaps never more so than in eighteenth-century arguments favoring polite style. During the romantic period, however, British writing appropriated this familiar target of mockery, transforming the pedant into as a persona for powerful feelings of attachment. If romanticism is the internalization of quest-romance, then the pedant is its *chevalier errant*.<sup>1</sup> Romantic pedantry names the passionate attachment, the chivalry as it were, that animates tedious expression from the lyric effusion of "I wandered lonely as a cloud" to the periphrastic narration of the Waverley novels. More than a mere bore, the romantic pedant personifies a tendency to wander from paths of useful knowledge and political fidelity, paths that would end in uniformity of style and opinion. In word and deed, romantic pedants ramble. Self-absorbed, but also absorbed in process, they digress from the points of their stories, collect curious relics, needlessly coin new words, and otherwise number the streaks of the tulip. The pedant's romance with useless knowledge imbues shambolic literary forms and irrational tropes – including picaresque narrative, superstitious exclamations, non sequiturs, and tautologies – with a humor that is at once insufferable and irresistible.

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<sup>1</sup> While I wish to appropriate Bloom's sense that romanticism reframes the quest-romance by orienting it "downward and inward," what I describe as the romance of useless knowledge and the spirit of pedantry that drives it emphatically lack the clear sense of telos Bloom attributes to the poet-quester in pursuit of imaginative freedom. See Harold Bloom, "The Internalization of Quest-Romance," in *Romanticism and Self-Consciousness*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York, Norton, 1970) 3-23.

The Preface to *Don Juan* (1819) exemplifies this romance when it asks readers to “suppose” a litany of details concerning the time, place, and company of the poem’s narration. It surveys every particular of the scene, from the remnants of the story-teller’s dinner of *Olla Podrida* to the blood that stains the bandaged forehead of an imprisoned French Hussar who watches a group of peasants dancing the Fandango some distance from the clutch of old men who linger over wine and cigars, listening to tales of Don Juan. In Byron’s evocation of Spain, the end of the Napoleonic wars transforms a remote village in the Sierra Morena into a space for simultaneous, discontinuous cultural exchanges between local peasants, a Portuguese servant, French soldiers, a pair of “foreign” travelers, and a Story-teller who is “either an Englishman settled in Spain, or a Spaniard who had travelled in England.”<sup>2</sup> Conceived as a moment of rest that punctuates an era of global conflict, the context of the story-teller’s performance links the epic dimension of Juan’s adventures to its romance with unobserved or neglected detail.<sup>3</sup> At once tedious and distracting, superfluous detail invites digressive questions that draw attention away from the Story-teller: who are these foreigners at the center of the tableaux? Where and how was the Hussar injured and captured? Who listens to an old man’s stories when beautiful young women are dancing? Such detail resists the forward momentum of narrative. It exists somewhere on the road between Monasterio and Sevilla, hinting at the penchant for rambling that will eventually move the Story-teller to confess

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<sup>2</sup> George Gordon, Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Anne K. Mellor observes that the Preface divides the public’s attention in the village green so that the story-teller’s audience is aged and the beautiful dancer attracts the interest of the young. Mellor’s account of irony in the Preface and in *Don Juan* more broadly points toward the paradox that defines what I describe as the pedant’s passionate commitment to faithless rambling. See Anne K. Mellor, *English Romantic Irony* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).

the obvious: “If I have any fault, it is digression” (3.96.2).

The Preface frames this detailed scene-setting as a parodic imitation of the lengthy note in which William Wordsworth describes the narrator of his 1798 poem, “The Thorn.” Addressed to a “Reader who has acquiesced in Mr. W. Wordsworth’s supposition that his ‘Misery oh Misery’ is related by the Captain of a small, etc.,” Byron’s Preface requests a “like exertion of the Imagination” on behalf of the Story-teller who relates *Don Juan*. On the one hand, the Preface dismisses Wordsworth as “half Enthusiast and half Impostor,” regarded by a few hundred as a poetical Emanuel Swedenborg, Richard Brothers, Parson Tozer, or, above all, Johanna Southcott.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, it describes Wordsworth’s tale of rural infanticide and his detailed characterization of the poem’s narrator as representative of “the Sort of writing which has superseded and degraded Pope in the eyes of the discerning British Public”(DJ 2). Although Byron withheld the Preface and its imitation of the note to “The Thorn,” it attests to a conflicted sensibility concerning Wordsworth’s significance and the import of his pedantry.<sup>5</sup> Wordsworth is a madman, but his exactingly specific poetry reflects a shift in national taste.

The parody of “The Thorn” in the Preface is all the more remarkable given how few readers Wordsworth’s poems reached in comparison to Byron’s. In *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, William St. Clair substantiates the long held generalization of Byron’s astonishing popularity, providing a clearer picture than has previously been available of just how vastly he outsold contemporaries, including

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<sup>4</sup> In the Preface, Byron likens Wordsworth’s critical pronouncements to Johanna Southcote’s prophecies of impending apocalypse and her announcement that she was pregnant with Shiloh, the Messiah of Genesis. Byron would repeat his comparison between Wordsworth and Southcote in Canto Three, insisting that their delusions, “Are things which in this century don’t strike / The public mind”(3.95.3-4).

<sup>5</sup> Marchand notes that the Preface remained unpublished until 1901, *DJ*, 459 n.

Wordsworth.<sup>6</sup> St. Clair stresses that in an economy where the value of paper often exceeded the value of what was printed on it, booksellers frequently remaindered Wordsworth's poems, a fact that Byron gleefully records in a snatch of verse for Thomas Moore:

Of Turdsworth the great Metaquizzical poet  
A man of vast merit, though few people know it;  
The perusal of whom (as I told you at Mestri)  
I owe, in great part, to my passion for pastry.<sup>7</sup>

Given the many respects in which St. Clair objectively documents Wordsworth's status as a relatively minor poet among the period's authors, how should we understand the parody of the note to "The Thorn"? Fully aware that his own poems sold better than those of any other living poet (Walter Scott excepted) and utterly delighted that Wordsworth's poems were more likely to end up wrapped around a piece of cake than stored on a bookshelf, Byron rails against a British public that seems to have placed Wordsworth's "Sort" of poetry above Pope's. Despite their scanty numbers, the Preface to *Don Juan* interprets Wordsworth's few hundred followers as an especially pernicious manifestation of the spirit of an age that threatens to discard the *Essay on Man* for *The Excursion*.

Byron's repeated attacks on Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge align their verse not only with opportunism and political infidelity, but also with a tedium and digression that links the apostate Lake Poets to the narrator of *Don Juan*. Castigating the Lakers for the hypocrisy of their "loyal treason" and the "*longueurs*" of their poetry, Byron

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<sup>6</sup> St. Clair estimates that about 200,000 copies of *Don Juan* and another 200,000 copies of Byron's remaining works were printed during the period in comparison to 13,000 copies of all Wordsworth's poetry. William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge, 2006), 217, Table 12.1.

<sup>7</sup> George Gordon Byron, *Byron's Letters and Journals, Volume VIII: 'Born for opposition', 1821*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, 66. Quoted in St. Clair, 26.

contributes to an emergent sense of “romanticism” that brings together a disparate corpus of writing under a markedly unstable generic label (3.94.3, 3.97.1).<sup>8</sup> In her analysis of nineteenth-century comic opera, Carolyn Williams observes that parody’s imitative function constitutes the negative or oppositional moment of genre formation and that, in holding up its object for critique, parody may in fact *create* what it seems to imitate.<sup>9</sup> Playing tediousness for laughs, Byron’s parodies of the Lake Poets contribute to the formation of a modern romance in which the poet-as-quester pledges himself to an endless pursuit of useless knowledge. In a Preface that suggests men of action will prefer to watch beautiful women dance, in Canto One’s critique of libidinous desire displaced onto the natural world, and in Canto Three’s rambling contemplation of the *Ave Maria*, *Don Juan* repeatedly connects the Lake poets’ apostasy and tediousness with its own faithless rambling.

Byron’s story-teller typifies the simultaneous feelings of immersion and rootlessness that motivate the performance of knowledge across a range of romantic literature. In Byron’s endless, epic satire, in the circumbendibus style of *The Author of*

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<sup>8</sup> *Don Juan* continuously blurs the lines between epic and romance even as the narrator fulminates against the impropriety of the Lake Poets’ low subject matter. St. Clair overstates the extent to which the term “had a precise application” during the period(). Antiquarian scholars and poets of the late-eighteenth century and early nineteenth centuries, such as Richard Hurd, Thomas Warton, Thomas Percy, and Walter Scott, apply “romantic” to ballads, folktales, and children’s stories. See W.P. Ker “Romance,” from *Collected Essays*, (London: Macmillan, 1925) 310-326; Arthur Johnston, *Enchanted Ground*, (Oxford UP, 1964) 32-50; Susan Manning, “Antiquarianism, Balladry, and the Rehabilitation of Romance,” *Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature*, (Cambridge, 2009) 45-70. Furthermore, British writers during the period are most keenly engaged with early-modern *antiromances* – including *Orlando Furioso* (1516-1532), *The Faerie Queene* (1590, 1596), and *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615). On the generic instability of romance, anti-romance, and true history see Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel* (1987; repr., Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2002), 52-64.

<sup>9</sup> Williams exemplifies the irresolvable ambiguity of the complex temporality that governs parody in her analysis of the dialectical relation between Du Maurier’s caricatures of aestheticism, Oscar Wilde’s celebrity persona, and Gilbert and Sullivan’s *Patience*. Carolyn Williams, *Gilbert and Sullivan: Gender, Genre, Parody* (Columbia, 2011).

*Waverley*, in the esemplastic coinages of *Biographia Literaria*, and in the lyricism with which Wordsworth makes much of little, the pedant's compulsion to wander provides a way of rethinking familiar romantic preoccupations with solipsistic egotism and apostasy. By assimilating an eighteenth-century critique of alienating individual interests, romantic-era writers re-imagine the pedant as a persona whose absorption in useless knowledge forges a new set of relationships between attachment and expressive poetics. Through pedantry, romantic writing explores passionate intellectual commitment through principled refusals to pursue useful ends.

The romantic pedant personifies the intellectual in terms that create surprising affinities between disparate conceptions of British masculinity.<sup>10</sup> But while romantic era writing embraces pedants who range from bumbling effetes to hyper masculine rovers, it typically rejects female intellectuals. Whereas *Don Juan* parodies the Lake poets, Plato, and a host of others for what it presents as their mistaken intellectual priorities, Canto One famously castigates female learning *per se*. Describing Donna Inez's rigidly dogmatic approach to matters of education, the narrator invites his male audience to confess that a learned wife exerts a corrosive effect on domestic relations in a wittily turned feminine rhyme: "Oh! ye lords of ladies intellectual / Inform us truly, have they not hen-pecked you all?" (1.22.7-8).

In a cultural context where virtually any claim to the life of the mind on the part of women might be decried as female pedantry, it seems little surprise that women writers

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<sup>10</sup> See Tim Fulford, *Romanticism Masculinity: Gender, Politics and Poetics in the Writings of Burke, Coleridge, Cobbett, Wordsworth, De Quincey and Hazlitt*, (London: MacMillan, 1999), 31 - 65; Susan Wolfson, *Borderlines: The Shiftings of Gender in British Romanticism*, (Stanford, 2006) 1-38; Mike Goode, *Sentimental Masculinity*. (New York: Cambridge, 2009), 26-50.

of the romantic period were rarely inclined to defend their own knowledge as pedantic. Rather, advocates for women's share in the life of the mind such as Mary Wollstonecraft champion female intellectualism with hard-nosed appeals to reason and usefulness. Wollstonecraft's eviscerating analysis of Burke in the first *Vindication* could fairly be described as an unflinching indictment of the patriarchalism that subtends romantic pedantry. And even female writers with a strong investment in antiquarianism and romance share Wollstonecraft's interest in vouching for the rational, useful basis of women's intellectual pursuits. Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan treats prejudice concerning female learning as equalling bigoted English attitudes concerning the Irish. *The Wild Irish Girl*, for instance, disabuses its English protagonist not only of his presupposition that the Irish are savages and bumpkins, but also of the view that women who read Latin are pedants.<sup>11</sup> While this dissertation limits itself to examining the recuperation of pedantry as a masculine posture in romantic-era literature, a more sustained consideration of the way that "female pedantry" was used to discredit women writers and of the various responses that such accusations elicited from authors including Wollstonecraft, Lady Morgan, Maria Edgeworth, and others deserves further elaboration in another context.

The chapters that follow examine a group of texts that challenge the proposition that learning should advance a practical economic or political end, instead celebrating useless knowledge. In order to contextualize the romantic pursuit of useless knowledge,

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<sup>11</sup> Owenson's narrator-protagonist, Horatio M-, exemplifies the intertwined bigotries that Morgan attacks early in the novel when he assures himself that Glorvina, the titular wild Irish girl, is "a pedant, red-headed and a romp," aligning a caricature of female learning and Irish primitivism. Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan, *The Wild Irish Girl*, (Oxford University Press, 2007), 42.

this study begins in the early eighteenth century, when neoclassical attacks on excessive bookishness shaped critiques of pedantry as the encroachment of professional or otherwise specialized knowledge into polite conversation. As my first chapter shows, moral philosophy, periodical essays, and works of rhetoric and *belles lettres* construct pedantry as an epithet for displays of personal interest. The writings of rhetoricians and grammarians at the dissenting academies, at Scottish universities, and as far abroad as Fort William College in Calcutta championed English as the vehicle of useful knowledge and damned pedantry as the enemy of perspicuity. William Hazlitt, however, inverts these Augustan critiques of indecorous expression in order to celebrate the mind's power of forming profound attachments. Hazlitt proposes that pedantry is not merely a failure to write clearly but rather a distinct affect, a heightened mode of absorption in trivial or unpleasant pursuits. For Hazlitt, this absorption contributes to a renewed appreciation for classical learning, and it structures his encounter with Roman antiquity in *Notes on a Journey Through France and Italy*. Whereas radical journals such as William Cobbett's *Political Register* had attacked the study of ancient works of literature, Hazlitt valorizes those same works as profoundly strange, even unintelligible. Through Hazlitt's pedantic appreciation of classical learning, an intellectually curious sort of literary radicalism emerges.

While Hazlitt's vehement opposition to the Bourbon restoration and Coleridge's defense of the establishment have often been seen as placing them at loggerheads, both authors embrace incomprehensibility for its surprisingly democratic potential. Chapter two considers the relation between the anti-classicism of the popular, radical press which



saw the learned languages as imposing needless obscurity on legislative questions and Coleridge's ambitions to cultivate a public that would recognize its own incomprehension as the precondition for understanding what it reads. Digressing from its stated philosophical aims, the *Biographia Literaria* repeatedly depicts Coleridge in dialogue with readers who accuse him of pedantry. He finally accepts the charge, demonstrating a willingness to engage the varied capacities and limitations of his audience. Inviting readers to censure its author when they do not understand, the *Biographia* transforms reading from a passive process of recognizing what we already know to a shared process of working toward comprehension. At times Coleridge dismissed the reading public as a pernicious side effect of the growing audience for literary productions. By contrast, his pedantry draws attention to the disparate training and abilities of readers as preparation for an act of genuine communication.

My third chapter considers the digressive prose style of Walter Scott's "Author of *Waverley*" and his other authorial personae as a corollary for the errant storytelling and picaresque wandering of characters such as Dugald Dalgetty in *A Legend of Montrose* and the Baron of Bradwardine in *Waverley*. Walter Scott's novels and his young, mediocre heroes have most often been understood as indulging the urge to ramble before finally settling down—they move, that is, from romance to history. Digression, however, characterizes not only Scott's narratives, but also his storytellers. The narrators, editorial personae, and pedantic characters of Scott's fiction bring a still uncertain political and cultural future into being through stories that their own idiosyncratic, even myopic attachments compel them to recount. Eschewing disinterested objectivity, Dalgetty and

the Baron achieve a vivid—if partial—perspective as interpreters of political slogans and historical narrative. Through them, Scott explores pedantry as a vehicle for working out the tensions manifest in the competing impulses of the historical novelist: a progressive, professional, cosmopolitan futurity and a tedious inclination to retrace the past in exceedingly minute detail. In this way historical fiction comments upon its own position in the history of the novel, a form that simultaneously looks backward to romance and beyond realism to the reflexivity of postmodern fiction.

If Coleridge and Scott are decisive candidates for a study of romantic pedantry, my fourth chapter considers less immediately pedantic poets: Robert Burns and William Wordsworth. Both poets' engagements with the ballad revival of the eighteenth century are now well studied. My chapter builds on currently scholarly interest in folk culture, orality, and the disciplinary formation of history by showing how antiquarian collecting—an activity that Enlightenment historians frequently decried as pedantic for making mountains out of mole hills—in fact helped Burns and Wordsworth imagine a distinctly modern version of pastoral retirement. To be sure, aged pastoral characters have a lineage that stretches back at least as far as Vergil's *Ecloga*, in which Meliboeus addresses Tityrus as "senex." Romantic pastoral is indebted to this tradition, but Burns and Wordsworth supplant the ancient ideal of sedentary *otium* with ramblers who collect and share historical narrative and cultural relics. They were aided not only by the rising number of former soldiers and sailors relocating on half-pay to the English and Scottish countryside but also by Captain Francis Grose. A caricaturist, lexicographer, and antiquarian, Grose satirizes retirees who collect Roman coins and old books, emphasizing their senescence,

corpulence, and infirmity. But the declining bodies of Grose's antiquaries also contain

active, sociable minds. In lists, tautologies, and non sequiturs, Grose, Burns, and

Wordsworth adopt a range of personae who experience retirement without rest.

Collecting cultural detail they make much of little. Whether in the form of a garrulous

retired sea captain, a fat, drunken army veteran, or a ploughman who pauses to observe a

mouse turned out of its nest, these speakers personify a deeply fraught relation between

the pedant's isolated absorption in an object of contemplation and a hunger for larger

meaning validated by communal recognition.

A brief postscript considers the fate of the romantic pedant in the Victorian era.

For John Stuart Mill, a speaker absorbed in passionate contemplation and indifferent to

an audience represents poetry itself. Other Victorians, including Matthew Arnold and

John Keble, inveigh against passionate expression as irrational. George Eliot's

*Middlemarch* offers a particularly instructive instance of how this apparent ambivalence

suggests the tragic outcomes of a world where passionate feeling has been distanced from

intellectual attachment. For Eliot, whatever absorption *The Key to All Mythologies* might

afford Edward Casaubon proves joyless. Meanwhile, Tertius Lydgate is forced to

abandon his study of "primitive tissue" thanks to his imprudent choice of Rosamond

Vincy. Some sixty years earlier, Scott had insisted that pedants like the Baron of

Bradwardine and Dugald Dalgetty not only survive moments of historical upheaval but

actually structure the way those events will come to be understood in the future.

Abandoning the tincture of romance and the fantastic that pervades Scott's fiction,

*Middlemarch* makes its pedants increasingly miserable, kills them off, and sees their

wives remarried to other men who make them happy. Directing readers to more useful ends, the realist novel registers the dangers and the allures of its forerunners' romantic pedantry.

## Chapter One

### What is Pedantry?

#### Definitions of Useless Knowledge from Montaigne to Hazlitt

During the eighteenth-century, British neoclassicism constructs “pedantry” as an epithet for displays of personal interest. In works of moral philosophy, rhetoric and *belles lettres*, and the periodical essay, attacks on excessive bookishness describe pedantry as the encroachment of professional or otherwise specialized knowledge into polite conversation. This chapter demonstrates how critiques of indecorous expression among the Augustans establish a sense of the pedant as the mouthpiece for useless knowledge. In the writings of Adam Smith, the periodical essay’s conception of the pedant as a threat to polite conversation acquires heightened significance as a failure to moderate idiosyncratic emotional attachments in public expression. Drawing on Smith’s account of the division of labor, William Hazlitt refashions pedantry from a conversational impropriety into a persona for powerful feeling, and in doing so reconceives the value of classical learning as the basis for a radicalism tolerant of ambiguity and driven by intellectual curiosity. Hazlitt’s embrace of pedantry as fundamental to art grows out of a long and varied struggle among advocates of conversation and sociability to distinguish their writing from the useless prattle of pedants, a struggle that repeatedly begins by posing an answer to the question, “What is pedantry?”

I. “Pedantry is the unseasonable ostentation of learning.”

—Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, No. 173 (1751)

From its inception, the modern essay has continuously wrestled with the pedant as if that figure personified the essayist’s evil twin. In *Du pédantisme*, Montaigne measures the humanist pedagogues of the sixteenth century against the standards of antiquity in order to distinguish *Les Essais* from the performances of the schoolmen. Montaigne celebrates figures like Cicero for unifying vigorous public service and the contemplative life of the mind and mocks *pédantes* for their failure to put their knowledge to use. Among the moderns, knowledge is consequently reduced to a mere performance, a recitation: “We know how to say, ‘Cicero says this, such are the morals of Plato, these are Aristotle’s very words.’ But we, what do we ourselves say? How do we judge? What do we do? A parrot could well say as much.”<sup>1</sup> Of course, Montaigne’s own writing – including *Du pédantisme* – is generously interspersed with paraphrases, pithy anecdotes, and quotations of ancient texts. Montaigne implicitly asks the reader to decide: are *Les Essais* the idle squawks of a parrot? Among the copious “*allongeails*” that he scribbled in the margins of the Bordeaux copy is an answer of sorts. Feigning surprise, the author records a sense of self-recognition as he describes the transmission of undigested quotation from pedant to student: “It is a marvel how well this folly fits my own example. Is it not doing the same, that which I do in the greater part of this composition?”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Nous sçavons dire: Cicero dit ainsi: voilà les meurs de Platon; ce sont les mots mesmes d’Aristote. Mais nous, que disons nous nous mesmes? que jugeons nous? que faisons nous? Autant en droit bien un perroquet.” I, 25, p.137. Web. The Montaigne Project.

<sup>2</sup> “C’est merveille combien proprement la sottise se loge sur mon exemple. Est-ce pas faire de mesme, ce que je fay en la plus part de cette composition?” I, 25, 136. Web. Montaigne Project.

The same question that animates Montaigne's reflections on *pedantisme* would continue to shape British essayists' disavowals of what they variously deem useless knowledge throughout the eighteenth century. "Pedantry" would thus come to name far more than needless bookishness. Whereas Montaigne assails narrow scholasticism, British essayists from Steele to MacKenzie deride the man of the town with the same term they use to dismiss erudite fools. As a consequence of this far more flexible usage, English definitions of pedantry are often marked by a sense that the writer must *renegotiate* what counts as pedantry. Written at mid-century, Samuel Johnson's *Rambler* 173 exemplifies the sense that genuine instances of pedantry must be distinguished from reasonable displays of knowledge. For Johnson, an individual is guilty of pedantry when he fails to judge his company and displays his learning before an audience "unable to judge of his proficiency, and from whom as he cannot fear contradiction, he cannot properly expect applause."<sup>3</sup> While Johnson is confident that anyone who *intentionally* makes himself incomprehensible is guilty of pedantry, he also argues in favor of the assumption that an audience *is* capable of following an author, until it proves otherwise. Johnson defines pedantry both in order to establish that there are modes of conversation that deserve censure as pedantry because they are "unseasonable," and to assure readers that the *Rambler* is not guilty of pedantry.

In its entry for "pedant," Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755) emphasizes the ambiguity of the term, its status as a French loan-word, and its place in discussions of conversation. It first defines the pedant as "a schoolmaster," a sense of the term not so apparent in

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<sup>3</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*; Number 173, *Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, Volume V., ed. W.J. Bate and Albrecht B. Straus (Yale, 1969) .

*Rambler* No. 173 as it had been in *Les Essais*. In the Dictionary, Johnson presents the pejorative connotations of pedantry as arising from one of those “metaphorical acceptations” that the Preface to the *Dictionary* describes as tending to obscure the original meaning of a word. Johnson’s entry neatly captures not only the amorphous quality of the term “pedant,” but also the eagerness to denounce useless intellectualism that connects Montaigne’s attack on *les pedantes* with British neoclassicists such as Joseph Addison. According to the second entry, a pedant is “a man ostentatious of *his literature*” (my emphasis). Johnson exemplifies this sense of “pedant” with a passage from the *Whig Examiner* of 14 September 1710, in which Addison writes, “the preface has so much of the pedant and so little of the conversation of men in it, that I shall pass it over.” Addison here posits a spectrum of discourse that runs from “the pedant”—the voice of a cloistered scholasticism unfit for the world of sociable discourse—to “the conversation of men”—a figure for polite exchange between coequal participants. In the relation between Johnson’s definition and the illustrative quotation from Addison we catch at a glance the currency at mid-century of the pedant as an individual who awkwardly displays his excessive attention to objects that consensus regards as trivial.

Simon Jarvis notes that the dichotomy between pedantry and the conversation of men forms a prevalent figure in the self-representations created by eighteenth-century critics in the process of attempting to “form the basis of a pure and stable language” by adapting classical humanism to vernacular texts.<sup>4</sup> In his analysis of textual criticism and the editing of Shakespeare during the early-eighteenth century, Jarvis argues that many

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<sup>4</sup> Simon Jarvis. *Scholars and Gentlemen*. (New York: Oxford UP, 1995) 11.



English critics feared the corruption of the language by “an increasingly historicist philology which seemed to its opponents to be the fiefdom of impolite pedants less interested in restoring or polishing the canon of admired classics than in sceptically disintegrating it”(12). In a study that moves further into the century and takes into account textual criticism not only of Shakespeare, but also of Spenser and Milton, Jonathan Kramnick describes the process of canon formation as a “dialectical development of publicity and specialization.”<sup>5</sup> Kramnick demonstrates that a line of criticism—extending from Shaftesbury through Addison and a host of lesser-known critics—invokes pedantry to denigrate specialized historicist criticism, especially that criticism originating in the universities.

Both studies emphasize that from the vantage of gentlemanly editing, the historicist critic mires himself in minutiae as he performs philological analyses of vernacular texts. Preoccupied with the wrong object, he compounds his error by addressing the wrong audience. The pedant-critic addresses readers who lack the knowledge to judge his claims. Catering to a vulgar audience who consume the product of his scholarship as a commodity, he simultaneously rejects the sociability that a modernizing narrative about the cultural and linguistic transparency of canonical texts would confer. Whereas men of polite learning address their readers as standing on equal footing and from a perspective outside the text, the historicist addresses readers from a position deeply entrenched within the work. The professional methods of the historicist critic reflect not only a disproportion between the parts and wholes of texts, but also a

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<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Kramnick. *Making the English Canon*. (New York: Cambridge UP, 1999) 5.

disproportion between the professional investment of the critic and the investment of the general reader.

The periodical essay confronts pedantry as a threat not only to literature as a shared object that unites an emergent national culture, but also to the ethos of conversation that binds the coffee house, the club, and even the home. *The Tatler* exemplifies this tendency in its overlapping discussions of pedants and virtuosi, those amateur students of natural philosophy whose attention to curious and grotesque specimens renders them unfit for polite conversation. Isaac Bickerstaff scoffs at Tom Folio, a book-seller and collector, in terms closely linked to those with which he ridicules Nicholas Gimcrack, whose last will and testament meticulously bequeaths a collection of curious specimens to his wife, children, and more distant relations as if they were precious commodities.<sup>6</sup> Like the value Gimcrack places on his specimens, Tom's interest in classical literature is minute in a perversely material sense. The only faults he attributes to Virgil concern the placement of punctuation – punctuation that, of course, originates with eighteenth-century editors. Thus the pedant, like the virtuoso, fails to treat his studies as “the diversions, relaxations, and amusements; not the care, business, and concern of life.”<sup>7</sup> A pedantic “broker in learning,” Tom Folio's attitudes suggest how an august literary tradition becomes a mere physical commodity under the conditions of modern trade. While Tom is insupportable, Bickerstaff judges the “editors, commentators, interpreters, scholiasts, and critics” of classical literature as instances of an even more galling kind of pedantry. They unite the book-seller's impertinences with “greater

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<sup>6</sup> *Tatler* 216 and 159, respectively.

<sup>7</sup> *Tatler*, No. 216

superstructures and embellishments of Greek and Latin” in order to celebrate the “trifles of antiquity” (191). Crucially, these scholar-pedants’ principle failing arises from the disproportionate value they credit to their own labors and, in turn, themselves. Preening over trivial accomplishments makes them unfit for society.

Looking beyond the narrowness of Tom Folio, Nicholas Gimcrack, and the textual editors lampooned in *Tatler* 159, Addison proposes that anyone whose conversation focuses exclusively on a single object makes for insipid company – whether he talks incessantly about books, commerce, or gentlemanly entertainment. Thus *Spectator* 105 mocks the man of the town, Will Honeycomb, as a pedant in his own right. Addison crafts a scene at Mr. Spectator’s club in which Honeycomb invokes the opposition between gentleman and scholar to defend his meager knowledge of polite letters in comparison to his fellow club members. Honeycomb brandishes his knowledge of the town and deprecates the finer points of spelling. In turn, the members of the club “take Revenge upon him by [their] Knowledge of Books.”<sup>8</sup> Conceding that a man whose conversation does not extend beyond books makes for poor company and deserves to be called a pedant, Mr. Spectator goes on to suggest that the title should *also* be applied to “everyone that does not know how to think out of his Profession and particular way of Life.” Consequently, Will Honeycomb numbers among a class of “rank Pedants” who “value themselves most on their exemption from the Pedantry of the Colleges.” Proposing that “a *mere* anything, is an insipid Pedantick Character,” Addison takes stock of an imaginary host of coffee-house personalities, and insists that the monomaniacal

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<sup>8</sup> Joseph Addison. *The Spectator*, No. 105, 30 June 1711. Web. The Spectator Project: <<http://meta.montclair.edu/spectator/text/june1711/no105.html>>.

attachment of any of them to their profession proves anathema to lively and varied conversation.

In the process of extending the category to professionals of all stripes, *The Spectator* also mounts a measured defense of those “Book-Pedants” Addison and Steele had repeatedly mocked in the *Tatler*. Mr. Spectator suggests another individual might “turn to his own Advantage” knowledge that originated as pedantry. The essay expresses a humanist ideal that we pursue knowledge with an eye constantly fixed on what is useful, diverse, and moderate—a conception of learning ratified by the essay’s motto:

—Id arbitror  
Adprime in vita esse utile, ne quid nimis.<sup>9</sup>

Addison’s allowance for the pedant—that his labors *might* prove useful to someone else of a more moderate temperament—offers a fairly modest redemption. Indeed, the penultimate paragraph shifts its attention entirely away from the self-satisfied Honeycomb and launches into a vitriolic lampoon against philological scholarship. Book-pedants, it seems, are only supportable provided they avoid “Vain and Arrogant” self promotion: “To read the Titles they give an Editor, or Collator of a Manuscript, you would take him for the Glory of the Commonwealth of Letters, and the Wonder of his Age, when perhaps upon Examination you find that he has only rectified a *Greek* Particle, or laid out a whole Sentence in proper Commas.” In the final moments of the essay, Addison turns the conversation back to this perennial concern when writing on the

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<sup>9</sup> [The most useful thing in life is to do nothing to excess.] In these lines from Terrence’s *Andria* the freedman Sosia (a variation on the *servus callidus*) echoes the pleasure expressed by Simo, his former master, regarding the temperate pursuits of his son. Given that the ‘ne quid nimis’ is one of the three phrases inscribed on the temple at Delphi, in their original context the lines implicitly question whether we should judge Sosia’s sentiment as adprime utile.

subject of the pedant. We can extend the category of pedantry to any profession, but the concept begins and ends with the opposition between the cant of scholars and the conversation of gentlemen. *The Spectator* may find it possible to imagine that polite society will find a use for the labors of pedants, but the vanity and arrogance of their criticism and scholarship elicits Mr. Spectator's bile to a far greater degree than Will Honeycomb's foppery. In the final account, after all, Will is a member of the Club. He may lack an appreciation of literature or the ability to spell properly, but he "shines in mixt Company." His failings and his excellences are alike a matter of conversation. By contrast, the pedant who corrects Greek particles and lays out commas has the temerity to commit his offenses in a form that will never shine in mixed company.

II. "Of those Passions which take their origin in a particular turn or habit of the Imagination"

—Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759)

*The Spectator* registers the way that emergent regimes of professional specialization came to define pedantry as an outgrowth of any professional pursuit, as a seemingly inevitable consequence of the narrow attention called for by the division of labor. In this sense, Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) provides an obvious counterpoint to the essayists' diatribes against the pedant's misplaced interest in some narrow concern. Smith famously celebrates the division of labor for its tendency to increase efficiency. According to the *Wealth*, when a laborer must direct his attention among a host of different tasks, his consequent lack of focus prevents him from

discovering readier and more efficient means of achieving his object. “But,” Smith argues, “in consequence of the division of labour, *the whole of every man’s attention* comes naturally to be directed towards some *one very simple object*.”<sup>10</sup> Focused on achieving a single task in the most efficient manner, the laborer will invent the means that make his task easiest, a principle Smith demonstrates with the anecdote of a child who discovers that, by tying a string between two pieces of machinery, he can sneak off to play with other children instead of opening and shutting a valve.<sup>11</sup>

By conceiving of the division of labor as an inescapable fact of modern life, Smith’s writings in fact amplify and disperse the threat of pedantry imagined in the belletristic tradition that runs from Montaigne to Addison. Where *The Spectator* describes courtiers, soldiers, scholars, and men of the town as each liable to converse pedantically, the division of labor affects a far wider swath of society. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith brings pedantry out of the rarefied confines of the academy and the club, observing that the natural direction of men’s whole attention to the single simple object of a trade or profession gives rise to peculiar habits of labor, of speech, and of affect. Smith sees the exclusive interests cultivated by specialized labor as the basis of professional identity. All professionals feel the pedantic attachment to their particular interests, but normally we moderate the evidence of that attachment to the inevitable

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<sup>10</sup> Adam Smith, *The Origin and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, eds. R.H. Campbell, A.S. Skinner & W.B. Todd. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1984), I. 20, my emphasis.

<sup>11</sup> Marshall Brown has argued that in the *Theory* and the *Wealth*, specialization constitutes “the specific nostrum to the anxieties of a world grown too large.” In labeling specialization a nostrum, he suggests the implicit threat that Smith’s division of labor poses to the same society of professionals that specialization makes possible. *Nostrum*, after all, enters English use in the seventeenth century as a description for quack remedies – the term signifies a body of arcane and potentially specious knowledge that creates barriers to sympathetic interaction. See Brown, *Preromanticism*, (Palo Alto: Stanford, 1991), 102.

arcana of our occupations when we converse with people who do not share out preoccupations:

The objects with which men in the different professions and states of life are conversant, being very different, and habituating them to very different passions, naturally form in them very different characters and manners....[I]n each rank, or, if I may say so, in each species of men, we are particularly pleased, if they have neither too much, nor too little of the character which usually accompanies their particular condition and situation. A man, we say, should look like his trade and profession; yet the pedantry of every profession is disagreeable.<sup>12</sup>

Whereas Addison explicitly broadens the category of what should count as pedantry in the *Spectator*, Smith presents pedantry as “naturally” applicable to “every profession.” Here occupation defines identity through habit, and an identity that too ostentatiously manifests the stamp of profession deserves censure as pedantry. While a golden mean of professional specialization serves as the basis of productive social and economic relations, the same mechanism threatens to derail the machinery of social sympathy should the individual make what is sufficiently clear in his appearance painfully obvious in his speech.

Pedantry elicits this momentary worry in the *Theory* because it runs contrary to the central value Smith’s social model attaches to proportion. Like Addison, Smith conceives of pedantry as a failure to maintain disinterestedness sufficient to achieve a sense of proportion – a mechanism fundamental to the achievement of sympathy theorized in the *Theory*. When a spectator considers someone else’s emotions, he gauges the proportion between the behavior that manifests the feeling and the object or event that arouses it. Likewise, in eliciting others’ sympathy, an individual attempts as best he can to

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<sup>12</sup> Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. eds. D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1984), 201. Subsequently abbreviated *TMS* and cited parenthetically.

manifest his feeling in behavior that an impartial spectator would regard as proportionate to the cause. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* further proposes a tiered system of propriety in the expression of emotion. The individual anticipates the fullest sympathy from friends, a slighter degree from common acquaintances, and still less from strangers. Smith imagines that human beings take stock of their surroundings and modulate their expression of emotion accordingly. Thus, “if we are at all masters of ourselves, the presence of a mere acquaintance will really compose us, still more than that of a friend; and that of an assembly of strangers still more than that of an acquaintance” (*TMS* 23). According to Smith, in order to engage another person’s sympathy as I experience a given emotional state requires that I assess the proportion between what I feel and the degree of intimacy between me and the person I address. Unlike dead people and madmen –Smith’s limit cases for the workings of modulated feeling – the pedant who fails to account for these proportional relations may in fact represent a necessary contributor to the systems of exchange in whose service professionalism divides labor. If only for a moment, Smith recognizes the possibility that the pedant may throw a wrench in the social machinery by talking excessively about his particular preoccupations.

In its survey of socially acceptable feeling - “The Degrees of the Different Passions Which Are Consistent With Propriety” - the *Theory* classes the pedant’s unsympathetic expression of professional interests among those feelings which originate in a “Particular turn or habit of the Imagination” (31). Smith presents these passions as “almost unavoidable” and “always, in some measure, ridiculous.” They include our feelings toward our professions, our studies, our friends, and, most of all, our lovers.



Insisting on the ridiculous appearance of “all strong and serious expressions of” love, Smith argues that any lover who manages to retain his “sober senses” will “treat his own passion with raillery and ridicule”:

It is the only style in which we care to hear of [love]; because it is the only style in which we ourselves are disposed to talk of it. We grow weary of the grave, pedantic, and long-sentenced love of Cowley and Petrarca, who never have done with exaggerating the violence of their attachments; but the gaiety of Ovid, and the gallantry of Horace, are always agreeable. (31 - 32)

Lovers, friends, objects of study, and professions are all objects that can never interest our companions as much as they interest us. Smith describes the social costs of these passions in terms that echo the connection Mr. Spectator draws between book-pedants and Will Honeycomb: “it is for want of this reserve, that the one half of mankind make bad company to the other. A philosopher is company to a philosopher only; the member of a club, to his own little knot of companions” (34).

The implication that only Lara could read the *Rime Sparse* without rolling her eyes reflects not only the extent to which propriety governs a standard of literary judgment for Smith, but also the way in which pedantry’s meaning shifts between *The Spectator* and *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* when it comes to discussions of literature. While the *Theory* shares many of the familiar priorities of early eighteenth-century neoclassicism (including a strong emphasis on clarity and a Horatian preoccupation that verse delight and instruct), pedantry is no longer most useful as an epithet for literary criticism that needlessly describes minutiae for a vulgar audience, nor for shallow displays of learning by hack poets. Instead, it represents the poet’s failure to reserve feelings that are in themselves innocent enough. The error lies in what the pedantic poet

expresses publicly. Smith censures Cowley and Petrarch for boring readers with the details of their infatuations, for verses composed of “grave, pedantic, long-sentenced love.”

Smith’s use of Cowley and Petrarch to exemplify pedantically passionate expression in conversation as well as in poetry reflects a tacit assumption throughout his writing that literature represents a shared point of reference for his readers, as well as a store of instructional simulations that make the boundaries of propriety apparent. In order to instruct, Smith urges that poetry must not only achieve clarity of expression, but also gain readers’ sympathy. When it simulates objects that fall within the range of propriety, poetry elicits readers’ sympathy and thus cultivates fitting responses to the misfortunes of others. Consequently, Smith argues that “poets and romance writers” are “much better instructors” of sentimental propriety than Stoic philosophers (143). Folded within Smith’s allusions to literary examples of variously insupportable and praiseworthy works of poetry and fiction is a curriculum of texts for the reader that helps establish not only how we should read feeling in imaginative literature, but which texts we should pay attention to for models to shun or follow. Crucially, Smith tells his reader what and how to read by allusion, as if it were unnecessary to specify which of Cowley’s poems he has in mind, as if we know just what makes Petrarch such a bore. Smith invokes literature conversationally, as a gentleman speaking to gentlemen, but he does so in a fashion intended to shape his reader *into* a gentleman.

This concern with training polite sympathetic response by learning to discriminate pedantic effusions from morally instructive literature reflects the affinities between

Smith's moral philosophy and what remains of the lectures he delivered first at Edinburgh and then again many times at Glasgow in his course on rhetoric and belles lettres.<sup>13</sup> When Smith addressed his students and when he addressed the emergent British reading public, he ranked Thomas Gray first and foremost on his list of recommended poets. While the executors of his last will and testament incinerated his unfinished treatise on the "different branches of Literature," there seems little doubt that the work would have contained further praise for Gray.<sup>14</sup> In the *Lectures*, Smith presents Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Church-yard* and the *Eton College Ode* as "lighter pieces," a heading under which he includes odes, elegies, and pastorals. He groups these forms together based on their common length and affective register.<sup>15</sup> The same proportional logic that defines the tenor of our emotions in conversing with another person governs the relationship between the length of a work and the affective response the poet can reasonably expect to produce in his audience. Decorum dictates that a poem cannot arouse great passion in a brief work. "An Ode or Elegy...which differ little from the common state of mind are what most please us. Such is that on the Church yard, or Eton College by Mr Grey [sic]"(127). Shakespeare can, as it were, expect us to know Lear sufficiently to sympathize with the violent emotions he manifests by the fifth act, while

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<sup>13</sup> That the two strains of Smith's thinking bear a strong resemblance was a point of particular critical excitement when the notebooks containing a student's lecture notes from his course on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres at Glasgow were first discovered in 1958 and subsequently published. See: Vincent Bevilacqua, "Adam Smith's Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres." *Studies in Scottish Literature*, (3), 1965, 41-60; Wilbur Samuel Howell. *Eighteenth-Century British Logic and Rhetoric*. (Princeton, 1971) 547-76.

<sup>14</sup> Adam Smith, *Correspondence of Adam Smith*. ed. Ernest Campbell Mossner and Ian Duncan Ross. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987) 286-87; On the subject of Smith's uncompleted works on literature and the history of jurisprudence and their relevance to an account of Smith's career see, Maureen Harkin, "Adam Smith's Missing History." *ELH*, 72(2) 429-51.

<sup>15</sup> Adam Smith. *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*. ed. J.C. Bryce. 126.

Gray depicts the speaker of his *Elegy* as addressing strangers, before whom he must remain composed in order to elicit sympathy. On the basis of this critical standard, Smith rejects short poems that articulate pronounced states of emotion. Smith's commentary on Gray illustrates the reciprocity between the understanding of literature as morally instructive that emerges in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and the use of a nascent version of that moral philosophy as a standard for literary critical judgments in *The Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*.

Shortly after Smith's death, his interest in literature became a subject of debate in ways that draw together several senses of pedantry in order to contest the social status of literature and to question whether (and in what sense) Smith himself might be described as a pedant. Posthumous commentary consistently presents literature as an ornament of Smith's intellect and a feature of his conversation. But the various contexts in which Smith's literary conversation enters memorials varies from celebrations of his wide-ranging erudition to assurances that his accomplishments as a philosopher were incompatible with an appreciation of poetry. Smith's former student, David Steuart Erskine, later Earl of Buchan, railed against the publication of his former teacher's literary opinions in the *Bee or Weekly Intelligencer*, fulminating, "I knew him too well to think he would have liked to have had a pishah view of such frivolous matters obtruded on the learned world after his death" (quoted in *LRBL* 32). Lord Buchan objects not only to the publication of private anecdotes that contain the philosopher's half-formed opinions on trivial matters, but asserts that Smith in fact had no opinions worth publishing: "He had no ear for music," Buchan reports, "nor any perception of the

sublime or beautiful in composition, either in poetry or language of any kind. He was too much of a geometrician to have much taste” (*LRBL* 32). According to Buchan, then, Smith’s professional preoccupations crowd out the possibility of achieving any nice discrimination in subjects of polite conversation. In Buchan’s account professional achievement comes at the expense of gentlemanly sociability. The price of Smith’s greatness was fixing the whole of his attention on one very complicated object, an integrated system of moral philosophy and political economy. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and the *Wealth of Nations* require the kind of pedantry that Smith himself describes as a threat to a functional division of labor.

Dugald Stewart allows for a greater division of Smith’s attention in his memorial address to the Royal Society of Scotland. Intent on securing Smith’s reputation as an important contributor to British philosophy, Stewart presents his friend and colleague’s interest in literature in terms that resemble the *Tatler*’s recommendation that literature should constitute a diversion, not business. Stewart wryly assures his audience that while Smith’s familiarity with English poetry “appeared surprising even to those, whose attention had never been directed to more important acquisitions,” the study of verse remained “a less severe occupation” that Smith pursued in his “leisure hours.”<sup>16</sup>

The commentary on Smith’s literary opinions that had compelled Lord Buchan’s denunciation was a pseudonymous essay in James Anderson’s *Bee* in May 1791. In the essay, “Amicus” submits a series of anecdotes that he purports to have taken down during conversations with Smith in 1780 during a period of intimacy. Like Stewart, Amicus

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<sup>16</sup>Dugald Stewart, “Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith, LL.D., in Adam Smith, *Essays on Philosophic Subjects*, ed. I.S. Ross, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982) 272.

describes his anecdotes of the philosopher's literary opinions as a diversion. It was only "[w]hen business had ended," he explains, that "our conversation took a literary turn" (*LRBL* 228). Amicus's anecdotes proved both controversial and popular. They were reprinted in the August 1791 *European Magazine*, in the *Whitehall Evening Post*, and in *Occasional Essays on Various Subjects* (1809). Anderson justifies printing the anecdotes because he regards Smith's literary opinions as offering a chance to "see some features of his mind fairly delineated" (227). In the *Bee* literature remains an object for leisure hours, but it also occupies a privileged position in the life of the mind, revealing the workings of the philosopher's intellect in ways that his published works do not. Even more than Stewart, the *Bee* presents Smith's literary opinions as evidence he was not a pedant in the sense described in the *Theory*. After business hours, he was able to set aside abstract questions of moral philosophy and converse like a gentleman.

According to Amicus's anecdotes, Smith's conversational remarks on literature unite the pedantry of the specialist's too close attention to detail with the pedantry of the antiquarian who focuses on historically remote detail simply for the sake of its remoteness. According to the *Bee*, Smith subjects Augustans like Pope and Johnson, the Scots poet Allan Ramsay, and anonymous balladeers each alike to the standard of gentlemanly style. Whereas Amicus defends the works of Ramsay as authentic products of poetic feeling, he reports that Smith categorically rejects the aesthetics of the ballad: "It is the duty of a poet to write like a gentleman. I dislike that homely stile which some think fit to call the language of nature and simplicity, and so forth" (*LRBL* 230). Like Mr. Spectator's ridicule of the textual editor who attends to minute details in ancient texts

instead of celebrating their transcendent value as part of an international cultural patrimony, Smith similarly rejects Thomas Percy's editing of the *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765). According to Smith, the *Reliques* contain no more than "a few tolerable pieces [...] buried under a heap of rubbish." From that heap, Smith singles out "Adam Bell, Clym of the Clough, and William of Cloudsley" as not worth the trouble of printing. Whereas Joseph Ritson famously criticizes Percy for insufficiently rigorous scholarship and for an overzealous hand in "purifying" the ballads he collected, Amicus insists that for Smith the *Reliques* were unfit for a polite, modern audience. They needlessly preserve and reprint antiquated, "homely" poetry out of a pedantic attachment to the past. The failures of antiquarians and Scots poets to write like gentlemen erects barriers to intelligibility and to sympathetic reading, thus threatening to undermine the value of literature by rendering poetry an object of interest only to initiates who share the editors' and authors' peculiar turns or habits of the imagination and their corresponding passions.

For Smith poetry and fiction are valuable insofar as they express sympathetic feeling in a lucid fashion without regard for context. In order to judge the moral value of odes by Gray alongside those by Horace, it's necessary to level historical and linguistic difference, evaluating the mechanics of feeling without reference to the particulars of context. For Smith, the scholarly editor who belabors the historical dimensions of a text separating it from the present and the poet who emphasizes the specificity of his infatuation with the addressee of his verses, each indulge in an excessive attention to detail that makes literary texts too particular for the general reader to sympathize with

their feeling, thus nullifying the potential use value of poetry and fiction to cultivate proper sentiment. Historically remote works are remarkable not because they represent feelings and experiences remote from the understandings of contemporary readers, but because they articulate perfectly familiar sentiments despite their antiquity. Smith's contemporary and successor to the chair of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres at Glasgow, Hugh Blair, defends James McPherson's Ossian fragments on precisely this basis. According to Blair, the works attributed to Ossian articulate refined, moderate feeling in the uncorrupted idioms of ancient Gaelic verse. Likewise, Smith, Blair, and a host of others construe the literature of classical Greece and, especially, Rome as part of a familiar corpus of texts that conveys intelligible feeling that is of immediate and universal use. From this belletristic perspective the attachment of antiquarian scholars like Percy to the remains of an obscure and unrefined poetic culture appears perverse. Ossian excepted, the poetry of ancient Britain, especially its ballads, appears corrupted, vulgar, and suspect. Worse than useless, such poetry and the criticism that validates it undermines the usefulness of gentlemanly writing by shifting focus from the instructional value of literature as a transparent medium for feeling to more peculiar interests that originate in some turn or habit of the imagination.

### III. The Form of the Essay

Smith and Blair figure among the ranks of educators stretching from the Scottish universities to the English dissenting academies and as far abroad as Fort William



College in Calcutta who champion English as the vehicle of useful knowledge and damn pedantry as the enemy of perspicuity. The efforts of these teachers of rhetoric and *belles lettres* as well as the writings of popular grammarians contributed to a massive shift in the social function of the essay from a pedagogic instrument isolated to the spatial and cultural fringes of the British Isles to one of the Empire's most widespread tools of classroom instruction and evaluation. Histories of English literature and composition studies have established that the vernacular essay's success in Anglophone secondary and tertiary classrooms was the result of dispersed cultural forces, including efforts at the Scottish universities and dissenting academies, as well as the educational reforms initiated by Utilitarians, including their establishment of the so called "Red Brick Universities."<sup>17</sup> In secondary schools, textbooks like John Walker's *The Teacher's Assistant in English Composition* (1801) and Daniel Jaudon's *Union Grammar* (1812) introduced ciceronianism and the assignment of short formulaic essays known as "themes" to remarkably large numbers of English pupils in their native language.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, in both theoretical treatments like Robert Lowth's as well as in works addressed to schoolmasters such as the preface to Joseph Priestley's *Rudiments of English Grammar*, instructors were encouraged to treat the English language as it appeared in the best vernacular examples available and to eschew rubrics and technical vocabularies

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<sup>17</sup> See Thomas P. Miller, *The Formation of College English, Rhetoric and Belles Lettres in the British Cultural Provinces*, (Pittsburgh, PA: U of Pittsburgh Press, 1997); Robert J. Connors, *Composition-Rhetoric, Backgrounds, Theory, Pedagogy*, (Pittsburgh, PA: U of Pittsburgh Press, 1997); Lina Ferreira-Buckley and Winifred Bryan Horner, "Writing Instruction in Great Britain: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *A Short History of Writing Instruction*, ed. James Murphy, (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.), 173-212.

<sup>18</sup> Connors notes that Walker's textbook went through eleven editions between 1801 and 1853, while Jaudon's went through at least four printings between 1812 and 1828 (304).

borrowed from Latin and Greek. Through the exercise of these institutions, cultural movements, and pedagogies, over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the essay in English gradually displaced Latin composition.

But the essay's ascent in British education comes at a distinct cost. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the English essay had become a familiar pedagogic instrument. Consider the portrait that introduces Miss Peecher in *Our Mutual Friend*, which encapsulates her pedagogy in the figure of the essay: "She could write a little essay on any subject, exactly a slate long, beginning at the left-hand top of one side and ending at the right hand bottom of the other, and the essay should be *strictly according to rule*."<sup>19</sup> Dickens suggests that essay has been diminished to a thoughtless mechanism, a characteristic of an instructor's "little" approach to education. By the time readers encountered Miss Peecher, the essay's pedagogic form had become sufficiently familiar to the reading public that they could recognize it as one of the increasing number of rule-bound features of life in British school rooms, an environment in which increasing numbers of Britons and British colonial subjects had first-hand experience. In popular magazines the question of vernacular pedagogy was treated directly alongside reviews of essayistic prose. So for instance, in an 1819 issue of the *Quarterly Review* a lacerating attack on William Hazlitt's *Round Table* directly follows a lengthy article concerning recent public debate regarding the continuation of the East India College at Haileybury and Fort William College. Offering extensive praise for Thomas Malthus's recent arguments in favor of the College at Haileybury (where he taught history and political

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<sup>19</sup> Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, ed. Adrian Poole (New York: Penguin, 1997) 219

economy from 1805 until his death), the *Quarterly* presents the production of lucid and efficacious writers through education of the Company's functionaries as a matter of high importance. The *Quarterly* in fact defends the undertaking in ways that directly intersect with the profound impatience that the next essay in that issue directs toward Hazlitt's lapidary style, his neologisms and loan words, and his willingness to dwell in ambiguity and paradox. While Hazlitt would accuse the *Quarterly* of willfully misunderstanding him in his *Letter to William Gifford* (1819), the review accurately gauges Hazlitt's antipathy for an instrumental approach to the essay that treats it as the transparent medium of pre-established meaning. In the *Round Table*, and indeed, throughout his writings, Hazlitt urges that utilitarian attitudes toward the essay, especially in the form of presumptions concerning the pre-conceived outcomes of writing, threaten to enervate the intellectual energy of a form that began in the modern tradition as an exploratory genre uniquely suited to unsettle received opinion. In many professional and educational contexts the essay became a transparent medium for content, and in the judgment of a body like the *Quarterly Review* there could often seem little patience with the kind of self-examination that animates not just Hazlitt, but even Montaigne, Johnson, Addison or MacKenzie when they attempt to distinguish useful essay writing from pedantry. When it came to promoting the usefulness of the English composition as a pedagogic tool in the early decades of the nineteenth century, there seems to have been little interest in cultivating essayists who would linger over their writing and ask as Montaigne had: "Am I not guilty of the very same idle shows of learning that I decry among the pedants who occupy the school room?"

In those years, students throughout the gradually expanding range of British educational institutions across the Empire were asked to compose essays in English as a central feature of their instruction. While students at Oxford and Cambridge continued almost exclusively to compose academic work in Latin until late into the century, young gentlemen trained to administer the Empire were called upon to compose essays in English.<sup>20</sup> An 1802 issue of *The Critical Review* reports with great satisfaction on the essay's place in the pedagogy instituted at Fort William. Reviewing a volume of student work published that year by the College, the *Review* notes that Fort William's statutes require students to complete "Public disputations in Oriental languages" as preparation to "exercise high and important functions in India" and to compose "one essay or declamation in the English language during the course of each term."<sup>21</sup> Whereas the College's statutes offer elaborate justification for the requirement that students learn to speak oriental languages "with fluency and propriety," the requirements concerning English composition receive no exegesis. For those charged with organizing the College the need to measure students' capacity to compose articulate dispatches from the colony was self-evident. Fort William would ensure the ability of students to communicate events in India clearly to their superiors in London.

In its analysis of the educational aims at Fort William and Haileybury, the *Quarterly* emphasizes that these institutions shape young men's intellectual and moral character, enabling them to *act*. The administrators who executed Wellesley's plan for a

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<sup>20</sup> Lawrence James argues that "[t]hanks to Wellesley [who founded Fort William College], ruling India had become a vocation of an elite...it was a profession that could be pursued by gentlemen without loss of dignity or status." *Raj: The Making and Unmaking of British India*. (Boston: McMillan, 2000) 154.

<sup>21</sup>"Essays by the Students of the College of Fort William in Bengal." *Critical Review; or Annals of Literature*, Vol. XXXIX (London: S. Hamilton, 1803) 308-312.

college in Calcutta, the rhetoricians at the Scottish Universities, and the dissenters held a common faith in the practical value of the essay in the schoolroom and beyond.

Proponents of these institutions and their pedagogies often described their practices over and against those of Oxford and Cambridge. Graduates of Scottish universities like Smith and Edward Gibbon, who came south after finishing degrees in Scotland, complained that English students and faculty alike lacked intellectual rigor (Miller 64-66). Barred from the English universities by the Act of Uniformity, the dissenters were outspoken critics of Oxford and Cambridge. Writing to Pitt, Joseph Priestley argued that the dissenting academies “being formed in a more enlightened age, are more liberal, and therefore better calculated to answer the purpose of a truly liberal education. Thus while your Universities resemble pools of *stagnant water* secured by dams and mounds, ours are like *rivers*, which taking their natural course, fertilize a whole country” (quoted in Miller, 86, Priestley’s emphasis).

Although he and other dissenters included Latin and Greek in the curricula for their schools, Priestley frequently defined the unique benefits of the academies in terms of a usefulness closely associated with training in English composition. Thus, Priestley appealed to supporters of the New College at Hackney on the basis of practical, civic value:

Places of truly *liberal education* in this country are few indeed, compared to the number in which youth receive something that is merely called education. But alas! in too many of them, perverted by time and various circumstances, the tendency of

systems is rather to contract the faculties of youth, and to stifle that generous ardour toward objects of public utility, which they ought to encourage and direct.<sup>22</sup>

Representing the English universities as adherent to ossified systems of aristotelianism and ciceronianism, Priestley argues that it behooves the public to support liberal education in the interest of “public utility.” To do otherwise would be to consign the advancement of knowledge to institutions whose very constitution reflects a lack of practical civic values. Priestley further justifies the study of English as a practical means of advancing liberal education in the preface to his *Rudiments of English Grammar*: “The present age may hope to see a new and capital aera in the history of every branch of useful knowledge; and I hope that the English language which cannot fail to be the vehicle of a great part of it will come in for some share of improvement and acquire a more fixed and established character than it can boast at present.”<sup>23</sup> Priestley presents the English language as a fit object for study because it constitutes “the vehicle of a great part” of “useful knowledge.”

IV. “The power of attaching interest to the most trifling or painful pursuits, in which our whole attention and faculties are engaged, [and] one of the greatest happinesses of our nature.”

—William Hazlitt, “On Pedantry” (1816)<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Joseph Priestley, *The Proper Objects of Education in the Present State of the World: Represented in a Discourse delivered on Wednesday, the 27<sup>th</sup> of April, 1791, at the Meeting-House in the Old Jewery, London to the supporters of the New College, Hackney*, (London: J. Johnson, 1791) 4. Web. Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph Priestley, *The Rudiments of English Grammar adapted to the use of schools*, (London: T. Becket and P.A. De Hondt in the Strand, and J. Johnson in Paternoster Row, 1768) xv-xvi. Web. Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

<sup>24</sup> William Hazlitt, *Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P.P. Howe (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1930), 4.80. Subsequently abbreviated *CWH* and cited parenthetically by volume and page.

The thirty second of Hazlitt's essays for *The Round Table* embraces useless knowledge in ways that invert the values of the periodical essay, Smithian moral philosophy, and utilitarian approaches to the essay. In "On Pedantry," Hazlitt celebrates the kind of singular focus Smith attributes to the division of labor as "the greatest happiness of our nature." Rejecting the premise that the pedant merely fails to keep his feelings to himself, Hazlitt proposes a robustly conceived, distinctly romantic pedantry. "On Pedantry" refashions a familiar term of rebuke into a distinct affect that makes the pleasures and satisfactions of professional life possible. "He who is not in some measure a pedant," Hazlitt writes, "though he may be wise, cannot be a very happy man" (4.80).

As a celebration of essayistic obscurity, "On Pedantry" offers a rejoinder to the clarity championed by many of the educational and literary institutions that this chapter describes above. Indeed, as a student for two years at Hackney and a pupil of Priestley, Hazlitt was intimately familiar with the tenets of dissenting pedagogy and its emphasis on useful, forward looking approaches. Tom Paulin argues that, despite the brevity of Hazlitt's experience there, New College left an indelible mark on his thought and his writing.<sup>25</sup> On the one hand, the curriculum at New College contributed to Hazlitt's faith in the essay as a vehicle for the advancement of knowledge and the disinterested reconsideration of what passes as common sense. On the other, the relationship between classical learning and the form of the essay that emerges from the *Round Table* suggests a flight from the utility and perspicuity recommended by Priestley and like-minded educational reformers. In a national literary culture dominated by the essay, Hazlitt writes

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<sup>25</sup> Tom Paulin, *The Day Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt's Radical Style* (London: Faber, 1998) pages

with the conviction that the tradition inaugurated by Montaigne had become vulnerable to the demands of utility.

In fact, Hazlitt would repeatedly characterize “On Pedantry” as representative not only of his techniques in the *Round Table*, but also of his attitudes toward essay writing as such. After the *Quarterly Review* excoriated the *Round Table* for a love of paradox and indecorousness, Hazlitt responded in his *Letter to William Gifford* (1819) that those features of his writing were calculated to counteract prejudice. “I wrote for instance an Essay on Pedantry,” Hazlitt explains, “to qualify the extreme contempt into which it has fallen, and to shew the necessary advantages of an absorption of the whole mind in some favourite study and I wrote an essay on the Ignorance of the Learned to shew that it is not everything”(9:30). Hazlitt would again appeal to “On Pedantry” and “On the Ignorance of the Learned” in “On the Causes of Popular Opinion” (1828), and as he had in the *Letter* nine years earlier, Hazlitt there presents the pair as representative of his assault on complacently held belief. For most critics Hazlitt’s recourse to “On Pedantry” and “The Ignorance of the Learned” as a synecdoche for the *Round Table* (and later for his larger corpus) attests to an abiding disinterest, a catholicity of taste and sentiment that pervades Hazlitt’s writings and by which the essayist occupies opposed intellectual positions without contradiction.<sup>26</sup> But “On the Ignorance of the Learned” remained unpublished until 1821, two years after the *Letter* assailed Gifford and the *Quarterly*. Hazlitt might easily have selected another pair of similarly antithetical essays. That he chose to exemplify his attack on received opinion with “On Pedantry” despite the fact that its

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<sup>26</sup> See David Bromwich, *Hazlitt: The Mind of a Critic*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1999); Uttara Natarajan, *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense* (New York: Oxford UP, 1998); Paulin;



companion piece had not appeared in the *Round Table* suggests that the essay spoke powerfully to Hazlitt's understanding of his writing.

"On Pedantry" stands out among Hazlitt's essays not only because it counter-intuitively celebrates a concept that most would unthinkingly dismiss as a fault, but because it defends "habit and prejudice" as "the root of our personal existence," complicating familiar accounts of Hazlitt's principled opposition to narrow-mindedness (4.84). As Kevin Gilmartin observes, recent scholarship has focused so intently on the ambivalence and motion of Hazlitt's prose that it has deflected attention from "a more synthetic and even utopian strain in Hazlitt's political writing."<sup>27</sup> Hazlitt's attempt to qualify readers' contempt for pedantry celebrates exclusive attachments, particularly those of scholars, poets, and essayists. In ways that Hazlitt's recent admirers have tended to downplay or dismiss as mere contrarianism, "On Pedantry" explores the benefits and pleasures of total absorption in what most concerns us, promoting values that sit uncomfortably within a body of writing better known for its contemptuous assault on prejudice.

Proposing that we can be wise but not very happy without pedantry, Hazlitt suggests that a term readers might have mistaken for a familiar pejorative turns out to have implications for a perennial question of moral philosophy. Namely, faced with "trifling and painful pursuits" how are we to make and keep ourselves happy (4.80)? The opening paragraph of "On Pedantry" takes as its premise that, despite a host of presuppositions to the contrary, an honest reckoning will reveal that we find happiness in

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<sup>27</sup> Kevin Gilmartin, "Hazlitt's Visionary London," *Repossessing the Romantic Past*, eds. Heather Glen and Paul Hamilton, (New York: Cambridge UP, 2006) 41-56. 42.

the world by means of pedantry. This proposition disputes a broad and heterogeneous body of philosophical writing. Stoic *apatheia*, Epicurean *ataraxia*, and the disinterestedness of seventeenth and eighteenth-century British moral philosophy each theorize a calm remove from the affairs of the world offers as the surest means by which we can come to happiness.<sup>28</sup>

“On Pedantry” begins by repurposing the division of labor, including some of the terms central to Smith’s discussion of the concept. The first paragraph of the essay begins with an oblique challenge to the assumption that holding oneself at a tranquil remove from the world constitutes the first step in adopting philosophy as equipment for living, and it ends by divorcing wisdom and happiness:

The power of attaching an interest to the most trifling or painful pursuits, in which our *whole attention and faculties are engaged*, is one of the greatest happinesses of our nature. The common soldier mounts the breach with joy; the miser deliberately starves himself to death; the mathematician sets about extracting the cube-root with a feeling of enthusiasm; and the lawyer sheds tears of admiration over Coke upon Littleton. It is the same through human life. He who is not in some measure a pedant, though he may be wise, cannot be a very happy man. (4.80, my emphasis)

At the outset of the essay Hazlitt unsettles received opinion, in part, by virtue of delay. Rather than immediately identify pedantry as the subject of this essay, the opening paragraph only explicitly names the “power” described in the first sentence in the last sentence of the paragraph, after describing the essay’s subject in some detail. The sense of delay created by Hazlitt’s circumlocutory definition of his subject was even greater when “On Pedantry” first appeared in *The Examiner* on 3 March 1816. In that context

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<sup>28</sup> On the discourse of happiness in ancient philosophy and the sustained engagement with that tradition during the long eighteenth century see Annette Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1991); Julia Annas, *Morality of Happiness* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993); Terence Irwin, *The Development of Ethics*, Vol. 1 (New York: Oxford UP, 2007).

none of the essays bore the descriptive titles Hazlitt added for Archibald Constable's two-volume collection of the series in 1817. The periphrasis Hazlitt employs in the first sentence prevents the reader from immediately calling upon preconceptions, while simultaneously modeling a digressive, pedantic style employed throughout the essay's two parts. In the process of this paragraph, the embrace of pedantry emerges as an alternative to philosophical doctrines concerning the pursuit of happiness from the Athenian stoa to the University of Glasgow. Considering the matter in its fullest scope, Hazlitt argues, we will find that mankind deals with the trifling and the painful by *attaching* interest, not by holding the world at arm's length.

For Hazlitt, pedantry is not only a matter of powerful attachment to the world but a refusal to engage in the kind of circumspection and self-questioning promoted by, among others, Scottish common sense philosophers and their followers. "When our follies afford equal delight to ourselves and those about us," Hazlitt asks, "what is there to be desired more? We cannot discover the vast advantage of 'seeing ourselves as others see us.' It is better to have a contempt for any one than for ourselves!" Paraphrasing the final stanza of Burns's "To a Louse," Hazlitt pushes against the wide-ranging influence of Smith's moral philosophy by rejecting the benefits supposed in Burns's verse.<sup>29</sup> Hazlitt's relationship to Smith has most often been regarded as that of an intermediary and developer of Smith's account of disinterestedness, especially as that concept would

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<sup>29</sup> Nigel Leask observes, however, that "To a Louse" at once reveals an acceptance of Smith's account of impartial spectatorship, while the poem's satire undermines the esteem for the rich that cements social relationships. See "Robert Burns and Scottish Common Sense Philosophy," *Romantic Empiricism*, ed. Gavin Budge, (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell UP, 2007), 64-87, 67.

eventually contribute to Keats's account of negative capability.<sup>30</sup> In his own *Principles of Human Action*, Hazlitt had adumbrated a theory of the mind as naturally disinterested, a view of human nature to which he remained committed throughout his writings.

Hazlitt presents those interested passions that arise from the peculiar turns and habits of the imagination as waning in influence in the modern world. Departing from the view that pedantry is a peculiar feature of modern life that follows from the division of labor, "On Pedantry" narrates "the transition from the pedantic to the popular style" as the story of a literary field in which the rise of literacy entails a decline in the distinctness of authorship as a profession. In Hazlitt's account, the essay constitutes a tradition in decline, but unlike the declining prestige of classical learning discussed in another of the *Round Table* essays, the essay suffers not by virtue of neglect but as a consequence of its increasing popularity. When anyone can become an author, all distinctions between authors and readers disappear, creating a world where authors desperately seek the notice of an audience. Early in his essay, Hazlitt exploits the same shift in the meaning of "pedant" that Johnson records in the *Dictionary* in order to describe the transformation of intellectual culture that he sees as a consequence of the emergent reading public: "Learning and pedantry were formerly synonymous and it was well when they were so." According to the literary history that "On Pedantry" tells its readers, the *Tatler* and *Spectator* separate those terms, so that learning is celebrated while pedantry is castigated. Without intending to, the earliest English periodical essayists contributed to the decline of the author in British society. For Hazlitt, the *Tatler* and *Spectator* occupy an anomalous

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<sup>30</sup> See Walter Jackson Bate, *Keats* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP 1964); James Engell, *The Creative Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1981).

position in literary history because Addison and Steele wrote during the “honey-moon of authorship” in which “mutual understanding and good-humoured equality” flourished between the periodical essayists and their readers. In that unique moment inhabited by Isaac Bickerstaff and Mr. Spectator, “On Pedantry” imagines that authors commanded the respect of all. They were regarded as geniuses by “the better sort” and prodigies by “the vulgar”(4.83). The eventual familiarity of the periodical essayists has bred contempt between author and reader, and the subsequent emergence of the reading public and the critical reviews has further diminished the essayist’s place in national culture.

Instead of cementing the author as a professional category according to the logic that governs the division of labor, the rise of the reading public produces the appearance of democracy masking a patronage system. When “the town becomes a club of authors,” Hazlitt posits, a “species of universal suffrage is introduced into letters which is applicable only to politics.” Incapable of attracting the attention of a readership amid the tumult of competing literary products in the marketplace, authors accept the intercession of critics, who “come forward as beattles to ward off the crowd, [...] pointing out [authors’] faults and passing over their beauties” (83). The reviews produce coteries of authors sanctioned by the critics, authors who are exempted from competing amid the tumult of the crowd so long as they comply with the tastes of their critical patrons. Hazlitt describes the ascent of the vernacular essay as giving rise to a literary culture in which the reviews accrue the authority to police the bounds of expression, privileging partisan opinion and popular appeal while damning pedantry.

Only a few months after the *Round Table* appeared as a two-volume collection, Hazlitt published *The Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, including the celebrated essay on *Coriolanus*. There, Hazlitt famously attributes the exaltation of “magistrates into kings, kings into gods” to the powers of the imagination and the passions. William Galperin has argued that, in fact, a fear of democracy’s potential to aggrandize authority – whether that of magistrates or poets – resides at the heart of Hazlitt’s Shakespeare criticism, particularly the *Coriolanus* essay.<sup>31</sup> “On Pedantry” anticipates this concern about democratic institutions when it imagines London literary culture as itself a democracy in which the universal suffrage of letters elevates critics into beadles, and, we might anticipate, beadles into magistrates.

#### IV. Melodious, Strange Antiquity

Boldly insisting that “the knowledge of languages leads to pedantry,” Hazlitt’s “On Classical Education” (1816) registers the gap between the comfortable neo-classicism of the mid-eighteenth century and the hostility to Greek and Latin letters that had come to prominence in the British radical press during the early decades of the nineteenth century. Writing in defense of classical learning, Hazlitt declares “we mean absolutely to deny the application of the principle of utility to the present question” (4.6). Hazlitt’s defense of an unprecedentedly vulnerable classical learning adopts a vocabulary of uselessness that is nonetheless strangely evocative of Smith’s discussions of

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<sup>31</sup> William Galperin, *Return of the Visible*, (Johns Hopkins, 1993) 147-155.

sympathetic attachment and the direction of the individual's whole attention to a single object under the conditions of the division of labor. The study of ancient texts, Hazlitt insists, leads to the mind's absorption in what has no practical application, cultivating the student's intellectual attachments to remote ages and dead writers.

The value of classical learning had of course been subjected to serious scrutiny throughout the eighteenth century, particularly in the frequently critical commentary of Scottish alumni of Oxford and Cambridge, including Smith. Notwithstanding Smith's reservations concerning the passive, dilettantish quality of classical learning in the English universities, Greek and Latin literature remain the basic currency of the literate, as his invidious comparison between Petrarch and Ovid suggests. But in Hazlitt's writings classical antiquity becomes unprecedentedly strange. Rather than the grounds of a shared cultural inheritance, Rome becomes a site of jarring discontinuity. Latin literature remains linked to the sounds and sights of the modern world for Hazlitt, but its *meaning* becomes sublimely unintelligible.

Insisting upon the specificity of textual detail and lived experience in ways that would have registered as counter-productive and alienatingly pedantic to mid-century neoclassicists, Hazlitt records his visit to Rome in 1825 as fundamentally strange. Hazlitt was sorely disappointed by the encounter. The son of a Unitarian minister, he had received rigorous training in classical and vernacular letters. In his twenties he had studied painting, visiting various English galleries and the Louvre, but most often he experienced canonical art as reproductions, particularly as casts and engraved outlines. Hazlitt's educational experiences had thus fostered great expectations of Rome and for

years he tried to persuade publishers to finance a continental tour. Only after his second marriage—to a widow with an income of £300—would Hazlitt realize this ambition. In September 1824, shortly after their wedding, the couple embarked on a thirteen-month Grand Tour. Hazlitt recorded their travels in a series of letters published in the *Morning Chronicle*, collected and reprinted as *Notes of a Journey Through France and Italy*.

Hazlitt arrived in Rome in April 1825. At the moment of unmediated encounter with the object of his long-felt desire, he reeled in disappointment. “This,” Hazlitt lamented “is not the Rome I expected to see” (10.232). The *Notes of a Journey Through France and Italy* suggest that rather than arriving in Rome and experiencing what was already familiar in a heightened form, Hazlitt instead encountered the city as profoundly foreign. On the one hand, Rome’s genuine difference – its modern, Italian, Catholic, urbanity – disappoints the desire to ratify a lifetime’s worth of expectations. On the other hand, Hazlitt’s *Notes* suggest that the disappointment born of these impressions disabuse the traveler of any sense that he *possesses* Rome by virtue of the images he has consumed prior to his arrival. Rome remains strange.

Throughout the *Notes* Hazlitt juxtaposes his travels with recollections of Paris as he saw it twenty-three years earlier. During the Peace of Amiens he had traveled to France for four months, commissioned to copy five paintings by old masters. In his frequent retrospections of the trip he claims to have spent virtually every moment in the Louvre. Also known at the time as the Musée Napoleon, the Louvre’s collections were greatly expanded by the spoils of French campaigns in Italy. The museum enthralled Hazlitt. On his return to Paris in September 1824, he records his delight in revisiting



those works that remained and the pang of nostalgia for those that had been dispersed. In Rome, Hazlitt expected to see not only works that had been returned to Italy following Waterloo, but also works whose scale prevented the French from removing them in the first place, particularly Raphael's stanze and Michaelangelo's frescoes in the Sistine chapel. "I thought," Hazlitt writes, "that here were works immovable, immortal, inimitable on earth....I find them not, or only what I had seen before in different ways." The long anticipated view of the frescoes conveys no more than the reproductions Hazlitt had long since encountered in London print shops.

The disappointment that pervades the *Notes* arises in part from an antiquarian-like fixation on the specificity of the artwork as unique. Scholarly attention to Hazlitt's disappointment with Rome has tended to focus on his encounter with the Vatican's celebrated works of renaissance art. Such studies have compellingly argued that what might appear as the carping of an English tourist besotted by frustrated Jacobin sympathies in fact reveals the complexity of Hazlitt's thinking on art.<sup>32</sup> Jonah Siegel argues that the *Notes* simultaneously embraces the radically expanded accessibility of art and a newly discovered potential that the real might fail to exceed the reproduction. In Siegel's account, Rome's centrality as a locus of art has been fundamentally undermined by the prospect that all works of art can be divorced from place, whether by the effects of war or imitation. If on the one hand this radical restructuring of the relationship between the art object and the spectator democratizes the experience of art, it also seems to frustrate Hazlitt's desire to discover works of art that are at once "immovable, inimitable,

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<sup>32</sup> Jonah Siegel, *Desire and Excess: The Nineteenth-Century Culture of Art*, (Princeton, 2000), 165-180.

immortal.” These requirements set Hazlitt in direct opposition to a thinker like Smith, for whom the place and time from which a work originates has no bearing on its success in eliciting readers’ sympathy, making it possible to compare the odes of Horace and Gray. Whereas Smith and similarly minded mid-eighteenth century neoclassicists deem a work of art transcendent on the basis of feeling that is uniform everywhere and at all times, Hazlitt seeks art that transcends history precisely by virtue of the impossibility of divorcing it from its locality, the impossibility of treating the ceiling of the Sistine chapel as anything but Italian.

This emphasis on the specific sets Hazlitt at odds not only with the neoclassical traditions of mid-eighteenth century writers, but also those of his contemporaries who shared a veneration of Roman antiquity, but who lacked his aspiration for a historically grounded aesthetic. In fact, the disparity between Rome as an object of the imagination and as an object of empirical observation constitutes not a problem, but a desideratum of conservative nineteenth-century aesthetic theory. Archibald Alison’s popular *Essays on the Nature and Principle of Taste* present the prospect of Rome as an exemplary instance of the distinction between what the eye beholds and what association supplies. “What is it,” Alison demands, “that constitutes that emotion of sublime delight, which every man of common sensibility feels upon the first prospect of Rome?”<sup>33</sup> In answer, Alison enumerates a series of prospects that the “man of common sensibility” does not see, including general destruction, the Tiber diminished to a paltry stream, and “the triumph of superstition over the wreck of human greatness.” Instead, Alison assures the reader, “It

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<sup>33</sup> Archibald Alison, *Essays on the nature and principles of taste* (Dublin: P. Byrne et al., 1790) 25. Web. Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

is *ancient* Rome which fills his imagination. It is the country of Caesar, and Cicero, and Virgil, which is before him. All that the labours of his youth have acquired open at once before his imagination. Conceal from him that it is Rome that he sees, and how different would be his emotion!” (25). Strikingly, Alison will not name that emotion—his faith that what confronts the spectator is *ancient* Rome seems to demand that he not reflect too long on the feelings that might arise from looking intently at the litany of prospects that, he assures readers, they will not behold on first glimpsing Rome. Alison’s point is ultimately that his readers should be grateful that they are possessed of the sublime associations that their youthful study of Latin has furnished. Francis Jeffrey, who championed Alison’s *Essays* in the *Edinburgh Review* and later in an entry on “Beauty” for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, judges this account of Rome’s aesthetic appeal especially persuasive, suggesting that the “influence of the same studies may be traced through almost all our impressions of beauty.”<sup>34</sup> For Jeffrey, as for Alison, Caesar, Cicero, and Virgil constitute not only a canon of basic literacy in Latin, but also a universal standard of cultural capital that allows “the man of common sensibility” to transcend the particulars of the modern Roman landscape (Alison 25). At least initially, we can look forward to overlooking any discord between the Rome we have imagined and that which we observe.

Whereas Alison and Jeffrey transcend their impressions of the modern city, the *Notes* insists upon the sights and smells of nineteenth-century Rome. The image Hazlitt offers seems almost parochially British, bemoaning “an almost uninterrupted succession

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<sup>34</sup> Francis Jeffrey, “*Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste*---By Archibald Alison, LL.B., F.R.S., Prebendary of Sarum (May, 1811), in *Contributions to The Edinburgh Review*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1846) I, 43. Web. Googlebooks.

of narrow, vulgar looking streets, where the smell of garlick prevails over the odour of antiquity.” It might be tempting to dismiss Hazlitt as an ugly Englishman. He is offended by the smell of “putrid trattorias” and the “mass of tawdry fulsome commonplaces.” Yet while Hazlitt betrays his offense at the banal sights and smells of modern Rome, he also insists on the immediacy of these material experiences. They cannot simply be erased or deferred by privileging the imagination and drawing on the store of classical knowledge at his disposal. As his *Notes* proceed to take in more and more of Rome they convey contradictory impressions of the city’s prospects. Banality, yes, but also what they present as the absurdity of Catholic spectacle and the sublimity of ruins.

Rome achieves sublimity most clearly in Hazlitt’s prose in juxtapositions of the banal and the transcendent—juxtapositions made visible to him by his perception of classical learning’s suddenly, unprecedentedly vulnerable position in British intellectual culture. One such juxtaposition occurs in a sketch of the Roman country side that proceeds from blandly pastoral imagery to an imaginative transport below ground into the ruins of the Domus Aurea. Hazlitt begins his sketch by engaging the reader as a companion in a favorite walk around the Via Sistina and along the Via Quattro Fontane, overlooking the city from the northeast. Slipping almost absent-mindedly from the present to past tense, Hazlitt blurs the line between recollection and experience as he begins to produce a recognizably picturesque landscape—one that, at least initially seems difficult to identify as distinctly Roman:

As we loiter on, our attention was caught by an open greensward on the left, with foot paths, and a ruined wall and gardens on each side. A carriage stood by in the road just by, and a gentleman and a lady with a little child had got out of it to walk. A soldier

and a girl were seen talking together further on, and a herd of cattle were feeding at their leisure on the yielding turf. The day was close and dry—not a breath stirred.

The only cues that this tranquil, virtually unremarkable landscape and the figures who populate it are Roman rather than English come some sentences later when Hazlitt acknowledges the background of his sketch: “On one side were seen the hills of Albano, on the other the Claudian gate.” At the moment Hazlitt identifies the frame of his sketch, he moves beyond the image he has slowly constructed to the Domus Aurea: “Close by was Nero’s Golden House, where there were seventy thousand statues and pillars, of marble and silver, and where senates kneeled, and myriads shouted in honour of a frail mortal, as of a God.” While the remains of Nero’s palace lie underground, beyond the prospect of the scene that has been unfolding, they initiate a movement away from one kind of commonplace – pastoral, everyday, ordinary – that have dominated the account of Rome up to this point toward a more familiarly transcendental experience of the Eternal City. The presence of the Domus, *felt* but not perceived, serves as the transition from the unremarkable Rome to the astonishing prospects of the Baths of Titus and the Coliseum. But before Hazlitt turns his attention to these visible ruins, he depicts himself transported by his own awareness that he stands near the Domus Aurea. “Come here, oh man!” Hazlitt exclaims “and worship thine own spirit, that can hoard up as in a shrine, the treasures of two thousand years and can create out of the memory of fallen splendours and departed grandeur a solitude deeper than that of desert wildernesses.” Hazlitt reaches a sublimely ecstatic experience of Rome in a moment when his attention is

When Hazlitt had defended the nature of classical learning in the *Round Table*, he produced a similarly reflexive, privative account of the value that inheres in such

knowledge. “Knowledge is only useful in itself,” he writes, “as it exercises or gives pleasure to the mind: the only knowledge that is of use in a practical sense, is professional knowledge. But knowledge, considered as a branch of general education, can be of use only to the mind of the person acquiring it.” Drawing on the vocabulary of exclusive attachment of the whole attention that Hazlitt employs in his definition of pedantry, both the *Notes* and “On Classical Education” imagine the student of classical letters entering a sublimely egotistical reverie that “strongly attach[es]” the student to his studies and yet engenders disinterested contemplation of remote ages and personalities.

When the *Notes* first appeared in the *Morning Chronicle*, Hazlitt dramatized how the pedantic attachments generated by a classical education might foster associations between disparate forms of antiquity. Before departing Brighton via steam packet, he describes contemplating the prospect of the ocean and its sound. Hazlitt finds himself transfixed by the “strange, ponderous, riddle” of the tide’s cacophony. In a short digression, he relates a similar moment some weeks earlier when he and his wife visited Scotland. Seated on a melancholy shore looking toward England, Hazlitt reports hearing some lines repeated out of Virgil. The verses cause Hazlitt to remark “the sound of the Latin language was to me like the sound of the sea—melodious, strange, lasting! So the verses we had just heard had lighted on the ear of memory, had flowed from the learned tongue for nearly two thousand years.” Here the sound of Virgil’s poetry transcends time remaining as alien as the inhuman music of the tide. The comparison draws on the ubiquity of the ocean in romantic era accounts of the sublime, linking the persistence of poetic tradition to the crash of waves across unnumbered millennia. And yet within

Hazlitt's figure of Virgil's triumph over time is a reminder of the incommensurability of the connection between the waves as product of impersonal laws of physics and the reliance of poetry upon readers for its continued intelligibility.<sup>35</sup> The figure of the "learned tongue" is both a metonym for the Latin language itself and a synecdoche for the scholars who preserve and transmit ancient poetry. In so describing the persistence of Latin poetry, the *Notes* connect Virgil not only with the scene itself but with the Gaelic oral traditions familiarly associated with the Scottish landscape in romantic-era literature.<sup>36</sup> The recital of Virgil is thus tinged with both the lively associations of a primitive Scottish orality and with the perusal of dusty texts that merit the textual editing, commentary, and correction of the philological critic. Hazlitt's sensitivity to the strangeness of classical antiquity leads him to reject the transparency of ancient poetry and the Roman landscape and to instead embrace "useless" knowledge on the basis of its sublimely foreign character. Seated on a shifting, tidal border that separates Scotland from England, Hazlitt faces the decline of classical learning as an instance of sublimity. The same tradition of classical scholarship that had prompted Addison and Steele to revile textual editors and book collectors for their needless commentary and perverse fixation on the forms of modern editions, here contributes to a perception of Virgil's poetry as an oral tradition as inscrutable as the sound of the sea.

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<sup>35</sup> On the subject of knowledge lost through disuse, there was perhaps no greater example on the minds of regency-era Britons than the ongoing developments in the effort to decipher the Rosetta stone. See [find reference].

<sup>36</sup> Scott similarly depicts a moment of Scottish Latinity on the maritime border between Scotland and England with the exchange between Alan Fairford and Nanty Ewart aboard the *Jumping Jenny* as the cross the Solway Firth in Chapter XIII of *Redgauntlet* (1824). As Nanty recounts the events that lead to his career as a smuggler, Alan interrupts the narrative to ask whether his education was of any use, to which Nanty replies: "my handful of Latin, and small pinch of Greek, were as useless as old junk, to be sure[.]"

## V. The Imagination

Hazlitt's defense of classical learning as useless contributes to an intellectually adventurous radicalism. Thinking about the convergence between the artist's exercise of the imagination and the way that the division of labor foster a pedantically exclusive interest in a single object of interest, Hazlitt proposes that understanding and recognizing pedantry as artifice makes visible the exercise of power by political and religious authorities. Rather than simply dismissing pedantry as such, Hazlitt encourages us to tolerate and even acknowledge the craftsmanship and skill with which the pedant pursues his singular focus in order that we might recognize the self-interest that art serves, and in so recognizing that self-interest come to recognize the mad quest that the pursuit of artistic excellence in fact represents.

The distinction "On Pedantry" makes between universal suffrage in letters and politics reflects Hazlitt's consistent eagerness to separate the republic of taste from the political republic, a feature of his writing convincingly demonstrated by, among others, John Barrell and Kevin Gilmartin.<sup>37</sup> Upholding what Gilmartin describes as Hazlitt's "split social vision," the attempt to reconsider the value of useless knowledge in "On Pedantry" fosters a renewed appreciation of exclusive attachments manifest in great art, thus underscoring the artifice at work in the spectacles employed by political and religious authorities. Having defined pedantry as "the power of attaching interest to

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<sup>37</sup> John Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt: 'The Body of the Public'*, (Yale, 1985), 308-338; Kevin Gilmartin, *Print Politics: the Press and Radical Opposition in Early Nineteenth-Century England*, (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996) 227-233.



trifling or painful pursuits,” Hazlitt provocatively suggests that appreciating that power makes it possible to achieve a more intimate understanding of other sorts of power, their conditions, and limits.

Although Hazlitt wishes to effect a careful division between the realms of politics and the arts, he also recognizes their bearing on one another. So, in his analysis of poetry’s tendency to “fall in with the language of power” in the essay on *Coriolanus*, he notes bleakly that “what men delight to read in books, they will put in practice in reality” (IV, 216). David Bromwich argues that undergirding Hazlitt’s account of the imagination and its attraction to power is a tendency to misapprehend the nature of grand spectacles. For Hazlitt, Bromwich argues, “any grandeur sufficiently remote will be treated *as if* it were disinterested.” This slippage, whereby distance comes to resemble disinterest, illuminates the particular allure of Greek and Roman literature that Hazlitt propounds in “On Classical Education”: “By conversing with the mighty dead, we imbibe sentiment with knowledge; we become strongly attached to those who can no longer either hurt or serve us, except through the influence which they exert over the mind.” Here, Hazlitt obliquely responds to the radical, anti-classicist polemic of writers like William Cobbett, whose *Political Register* inveighs against a boot-licking Virgil and a servile Horace.<sup>38</sup> Whereas Cobbett fears the ideological impact of reading the *Aeneid*, Hazlitt proposes Virgil’s partisanship has become a matter of no practical consequence. Incapable of effecting ends in the world, Tityrus appears disinterested even as he makes the forest resound with praise for Augustus thundering in war by the deep Euphrates.

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<sup>38</sup> See William Cobbett, *The Political Register* ; for a discussion of Cobbett’s antipathy for Virgil see Leonora Natrass, *William Cobbett: The Politics of Style* (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Hazlitt clarifies the misapprehension of distance for disinterest by exposing the overlap between pedantry and the imagination. In both “On Pedantry” and in his analysis of the imagination a few months later in the *Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays*, Hazlitt proposes that the exclusive attachments fostered by the division of labor are necessary for excellence in art. According to “On Pedantry” the arts have always demanded the prejudice and narrowness of the pedant, but modern criticism misguidedly demands polymathy: “An artist is no longer looked upon as any thing, who is not at the same time ‘chemist, statesman, fiddler and buffoon’” (4.85). Real critical insight recognizes the artist’s consummate immersion in his practice and makes explicit the peregrinations of a mind energetically at work on a single object. Hazlitt elaborates this view of the pedantry that makes great art possible in an 1828 supplement to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*:

There is a certain pedantry, a given division of labour, an almost exclusive attention to some object, which is necessary in Art, as in all the works of man. Without this, the unavoidable consequence is a gradual dissipation and prostitution of intellect, which leaves the mind without energy to devote to any pursuit the pains necessary to excel in it, and suspends every purpose in irritable imbecility.<sup>39</sup>

For Barrell, this passage attests to Hazlitt’s assault on civic humanist notions of public art. Perhaps even more importantly to Hazlitt’s understanding of the imagination and the division of labor, the *Britannica* supplement also unpacks the expressive implications for the work of art produced by a mind, *per* Smith, focused on a single object. Pedantry constitutes the precondition of great art. In the absence of this passionate, exclusive attachment, the mind recoils from the pain that inevitably arises from the pursuit. Read as

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<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Barrell, 337.

such, the work of art discloses the artist's attachment to a painful pursuit in which his full attention and faculties have been exclusively engaged.

Already in "On Pedantry," Hazlitt had suggested that a closer examination of the pedantry that makes painful labor possible might reveal the fundamentally self-interested nature of spectacle, the distortion by which power misrepresents distance as disinterest. Employing the same terms he would later use in the *Britannica* supplement, Hazlitt argues that the forward march of "civilisation" tends "to dissipate all intellectual energy." In this whiggish historical paradigm, the Protestant Reformation represents a blow not only against the institutions of the Catholic Church and absolutist continental monarchs, but also the political efficacy of pedantic artifice. "Since the Reformation," Hazlitt writes, "altars, unsprinkled by holy oil, are no longer sacred and thrones, unsupported by divine right, have become uneasy and insecure" (4.4.88). When the essay originally appeared in the *Examiner*, Hazlitt punctuated the pedantic artifice that once propped up these political and religious institutions by wryly noting, "It has been found necessary to cement them with blood" (4. 378, n.). The violence necessary to restore the Bourbon monarchy makes explicit pedantry's former power in Catholic superstition. It is precisely in this respect that Hazlitt's account of pedantry converges with the picture of the imagination established in the essay on *Coriolanus*. In that context, Hazlitt describes the imagination as "an exaggerating and exclusive faculty [...] it accumulates circumstances together to give the greatest possible effect to a favourite object. [It produces] inequality and disproportion." For Hazlitt, pedantry and the imagination alike create insight into why individuals and societies have so often behaved in a manner painfully contrary to their

own self-interest. As the love of power in others makes men slaves, so pedantry makes the soldier mount the breach with joy. So too civilizations have prostrated themselves before Church and State in passionate, exclusive attachment. In the final sentence of “On Pedantry,” Hazlitt implies that carefully reconsidering the power and aesthetic appeal inherent in a seemingly unlikable thing unexpectedly reveals the vulnerability of institutions that would make us slaves.

## Chapter Two

### The Fox-Brush of Pedantry, the *Sans-culotterie* of Ignorance, and the Incomprehensible Coleridge

Among the various faults for which the *Quarterly Review* censures Hazlitt's *Round Table* is its profusion of unintelligible neologisms. This aspect of Hazlitt's writing is most memorably exemplified by his idiosyncratic definition of "*gusto*," but, as the *Review* observes, the *Round Table* contains a number of other inventions. Hazlitt's penchant for coining terms pales in comparison with Coleridge's wordsmithery, but both authors embrace neologisms as a means of shaking readers from the torpor of received opinion in an effort to communicate unfamiliar ideas. Each acknowledges that the unfamiliarity of neologism exposes an author to the charge of pedantry, and each courts this accusation in the hope that incomprehensibility might represent a means of circumventing passive reading. Notwithstanding their well-known antipathy and frequent derision of one another in print and in private correspondence, Hazlitt and Coleridge each embrace the pedantry of incomprehensible neologisms in for its potential to cultivate patience with difficulty on the part of the reading public.

Coleridge defends the use of such neologisms explicitly in a footnote to *On the Constitution of Church and State* (1830). An author, Coleridge writes, "who to escape the charge of pedantry will rather be misunderstood than startle a fastidious critic with an unusual term, may be compared to the man who should pay his creditor, in base or

counterfeit coin [...].”<sup>1</sup> According to the footnote, when an author uses only common language he traffics in forgeries that lull readers into a comfortable but mistaken sense of comprehension. Throughout his writings, Coleridge startles his readers with neologisms that produce incomprehension, and he repeatedly draws attention to the tactic by anticipating his reader’s objection to pedantry.

Thus, early in Chapter Ten of *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge depicts an exchange between himself and an aggrieved reader. In the first sentence of the chapter the reader complains that he has never encountered the term “*esemplastic*” before. “*The word,*” he remarks, “*is not in Johnson, nor have I met with it elsewhere.*” The passage shifts directly into the voice of the author, who claims that he coined the term “from the Greek words, *eis en plattein* i.e. to shape into one.”<sup>2</sup> The author proposes that the term will aid readers’ recollections and avoid the familiar connotations of “imagination.” “*But this,*” erupts the reader, “*is pedantry!*”<sup>3</sup> In response, the author defends his technical philosophy, insisting that the neologism is rhetorically appropriate to the occasion. Just a few pages earlier he quotes long passages of sixteenth century Latin without providing any translation, and untranslated Greek phrases occur with some frequency throughout the *Biographia*. In all probability, most early readers faced these aspects of the

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *On the Constitution of the Church and State*, ed. John Colmer, (Princeton University Press, 1976), 108 n.

<sup>2</sup> In his unsigned *Blackwoods* essay, “The Plagiarisms of S.T. Coleridge,” James Ferrier retorted, “We beg your pardon, sir; but you did nothing of the sort – you met with it in Schelling’s ‘Darlegung,’ p. 61. You there found the word ‘In-eins-bildung’ – ‘a shaping into one’ –”, *Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine* 47 (1840) 287-299. For Thomas McFarland, Ferrier’s commentary exemplifies a strain of unsympathetic criticism that “exhibits open glee at the especially blatant evidences of Coleridge’s thefts.” *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition*, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1969), 4.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria, or, Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, ed. James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate (Princeton University Press, 1983), I, 153-4. Hereafter abbreviated *BL* and cited parenthetically.

*Biographia* armed with at least some Latin and Greek. In other contexts Coleridge explicitly forswore an uneducated audience.<sup>4</sup> It seems remarkable, then, that Coleridge depicts a reader of the *Biographia* who lacks the Greek to reflexively disassemble “esemplastic” and intuit its meaning. Curiouser still, that reader invokes a purely vernacular standard of intelligibility—Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary* (1755)—and then accuses the author of pedantry. This mock-dialogue can beneficially complicate a familiar understanding of Coleridge’s relationship to the reading public and the challenges he imagines for philosophical discourse. Subjecting the author to the accusations of an imagined reader, the *Biographia* suggests that pedantry might engender a conscious awareness in its audience that they do not understand in order to shake them from the received opinion of partisan cant. Coleridge’s pedantry makes incomprehension the necessary precondition for communication.

Notwithstanding the lengthy justification for obscure terminology that follows the reader’s objections, “esemplastic” only appears in the *Biographia* three times. The first is the reader’s complaint itself. While it is framed as if it were a response to an earlier use of the term, the reader’s carping has no precedent in the text. The second is the subtitle of chapter thirteen. The third use also occurs in chapter thirteen, in the forged “letter from a judicious friend” that Coleridge uses to justify skipping to the “results” of his transcendental deduction. While the conclusion of chapter thirteen famously distinguishes between the primary and secondary imagination, it nowhere mentions the “esemplastic power.” Excepting the subtitle, Coleridge never uses “esemplastic” *in propria persona*.

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<sup>4</sup> For notable instances see *Conciones ad populum* in *Lectures 1795 On Politics and Religion*, ed. Lewis Patton and Peter Mann (Princeton University Press, 1971) 51; *The Statesman’s Manual in Lay Sermons*, ed. R.J. White (Princeton University Press, 1972) 36-38.

Instead, he repeatedly attributes the phrase to fictional readers. Even the full subtitle of chapter thirteen, “On the Imagination, or Esemplastic Power,” seems to suggest that contrary to Chapter Ten’s declamation, the two terms are synonymous, and consequently the neologism may be needless. But if “esemplastic” is largely dispensable in Coleridge’s account of the imagination, it remains crucial to his rhetorical strategy. “Esemplastic” arrests the *Biographia*’s readers—real and imagined—in a moment of incomprehension. At that moment the author’s address advocates patience, but it also leaves those who coin neologisms remarkably vulnerable to the accusation of pedantry.

Throughout the 1810’s, Coleridge’s prose registers anxiety that the use of pedantry as an epithet in the radical press threatens to undermine the social authority of learned discourse. But the accusations of pedantry leveled by popular periodicals also animate successive attempts in Coleridge’s prose to mediate between readers unprepared for abstract philosophical speculation and texts that insist upon the need for technical obscurity. Coleridge’s anxiety at the prospect of being accused of pedantry does not solely contribute to his well-documented disdain for the reading public. Rather, Coleridge entertains such accusations in the hope that by confessing—or nearly confessing—to pedantry his prose might overcome what he perceives as the prevailing antipathy for obscure writing.

Pedantry first attracts Coleridge attention in his published writing in connection with his own hostile perception of the spread of literacy and the emergence of the mass public. Coleridge’s ill-received periodical *The Friend* identifies “pedantry” as a term of abuse leveled at educated discourse by radicals advocating their right to political



participation. According to the *Friend*, popular contempt for learning confirms the propriety of constitutional exclusions on suffrage and necessitates the selective address of political arguments in print: “it is the duty of the enlightened Philanthropist to plead *for* the poor and ignorant, not *to* them.”<sup>5</sup> In this context the accusation of pedantry directed against learned political commentary is merely a hurdle to be surmounted and left behind. And yet, despite the *Friend*’s seemingly casual dispatch, Coleridge would prove unable to escape either the uneducated reader or the charge of pedantry.

Instead, between 1809 and 1818, pedantry gradually assumes significance as a tactic in Coleridge’s struggle to construct his audience. This process begins in the *Friend* with a harangue intended to dissuade parliamentary reformers from addressing arguments for electoral reform to popular audiences, it finds elaboration in the third of the *Essays on Genial Criticism*, and it culminates in *Biographia Literaria* with the author and his unsympathetic reader. In each instance, Coleridge asserts that his (frequently imagined) antagonists misapprehend what constitutes pedantry, and defines the concept in terms seemingly intended to clear his own writing of the charge. Characteristically, in each attempt to reckon the meaning of pedantry, Coleridge reproduces passages of his previous discussions of the subject. Far from bare repetition, however, these borrowings evidence the radical transformation of pedantry as a feature of Coleridge’s thinking about his relationship to the reading public. In the course of a decade terms and phrases that Coleridge had first used in the *Friend* to characterize the sort of readers an author ought to avoid became integral to his depiction of an imagined reader of the *Biographia*.

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<sup>5</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Friend*, ed. Barbara E. Rooke (Princeton University Press, 1969), II, 137. Hereafter abbreviated *F* and cited parenthetically.

By subjecting the *Biographia* to this accusation, Coleridge imagines pedantry as a rhetorical posture from which to address readers whose intellectual curiosity and patience for difficulty he doubts. As a means of engaging a popular audience this facet of the *Biographia* arises from the response Coleridge had developed in the *Friend* to a strain of popular polemic that had attacked classical learning as needless obscurantism. Asserting that only pedants defend the value of learned languages, this radical discourse elicits a highly charged, but insistently obscure rejoinder from Coleridge. In the next section of the essay, I argue that the terms Coleridge develops to discount anti-intellectualism in the *Friend* shape his understanding of the reading public's receptiveness to technical philosophy. Anticipating objections to his use of neologisms, the third *Essay on Genial Criticism* begins with a definition: "Pedantry consists in the use of words that are unsuitable to the time, place, and company."<sup>6</sup> The *Biographia* appropriates this definition within the confrontation between imagined reader and author. In the first paragraph of Chapter Ten, Coleridge defines pedantry as diction unsuitable to the rhetorical occasion—ostensibly in order to anticipate and mollify complaints that he has needlessly obscured the *Biographia*'s meaning by coining the term "esemplastic." But if the dialogue with a frustrated reader functions as a means of pacifying an audience that objects to obscure neologisms, it also stands out among other instances in which Coleridge apologizes for his use of difficult terms. The dialogue exemplifies a tactic Coleridge pursues throughout his chapter of anecdotes and digressions. It is a gesture that simultaneously proclaims philosophic ambition and ironizes that ambition as unintelligible and impractical. I argue

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<sup>6</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria by S.T. Coleridge with his Aesthetical Essays*, ed. John Shawcross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), II, 228.

that this gesture reveals Coleridge's attempt to make challenging philosophical content approachable for a broader range of readers than his critics have sometimes granted.

## I. Words Unsuitable to the Time, Place, and Company

The premise that Coleridge imagined pedantry as a means of broadening the audience for otherwise inaccessible content might seem improbable. Indeed, the critical commentary that more or less directly addresses the set of issues this essay examines has convincingly described the divisive and exclusionary use of pedantry in nineteenth-century Britain. Olivia Smith notes for instance that shortly before Gilbert Wakefield was convicted of sedition for his *Reply to the Bishop of Llandaff* (1798), he attempted to exonerate himself by urging that he had employed “a scholastic mode of composition, interlarded after a pedantic fashion with quotations from the Greek and Roman authors; calculated rather for the entertainment of liberal and well-educated readers than for a seditious incitement of the *rabble rout*, and the *swinish multitude*[...].”<sup>7</sup> Wakefield's remarks illustrate that even an author who had earlier aligned himself publicly with the “swinish multitude” in a pamphlet adamantly opposed to war against France could nonetheless invoke pedantry as evidence that he pleads on behalf of the poor and uneducated, not to them. Smith suggests that in the tumult of the 1790's an author's confession of pedantry was an unambiguous gesture intended to dispel any impression that he had purposefully addressed political content to a vulgar audience. Rather than

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<sup>7</sup> Gilbert Wakefield, *A Reply to some parts of the Bishop of Llandaff's Address to the People of Great Britain* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: 1798), vii, Web. Eighteenth Century Collections Online, quoted in Olivia Smith, *The Politics of Language, 1791-1819* (Oxford University Press, 1984), 205.

indicating that an author has failed to take the measure of the time, place, and company, Wakefield proposes that pedantry evidences his sense of decorum and of the necessity to make his writing inaccessible to the masses.

Like Wakefield's attempt to sever his affiliation with the "swinish multitude," Smith characterizes Chapter Ten of the *Biographia* as an extended effort to disown prior political commitment. By representing the events of the 1790's in a series of digressions and anecdotes, Smith argues, Chapter Ten trivializes political life as "an insignificant matter of time, places and circumstance that is distinct from intellectual life" (221). To be sure, the *Biographia* obfuscates Coleridge's intellectual debts to John Horne Tooke and John Thelwall. Nonetheless, by defining pedantry as the use of words unsuitable to the time, place, and company, Coleridge transforms these seemingly insignificant matters into constitutive dimensions of intellectual life.

By arguing that Coleridge's pedantry constitutes an attempt to envision a heterogeneous intellectual community created in the act of communication, this essay attempts to contribute to the analysis of the reading public by scholars of the romantic period. In recent decades, critics have demonstrated the complex interplay between Coleridge's thinking on politics, philosophy, and the circulation of ideas in print. Jon Klancher compellingly argues that the *Friend* anticipates Coleridge's later theory of a national clerisy by imagining its readers as a "culturally *reproductive body*" with the capacity to disseminate interpretive practice through a hierarchy of audiences.<sup>8</sup>

Embracing Klancher's analysis of a hierarchal organization of audiences in Coleridge's

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<sup>8</sup> Jon P. Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790-1832* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 152.

prose, Kevin Gilmartin observes that the *Friend* is only the first in a series of counterrevolutionary texts that promote the division of readers, a series that includes the two lay sermons—*The Statesman's Manual* (1816) and *A Lay Sermon* (1817)—as well as *On the Constitution of the Church and State* (1830). Gilmartin argues that in this series of texts Coleridge gradually eschewed the *Friend's* binary opposition between discourse directed to the poor and discourse directed to elites, and developed a mediated address with which he sought to influence the reading public, “without actually descending to address it.”<sup>9</sup>

Though Coleridge refused to accommodate the reading public as a collective, he was begrudgingly willing to oblige specific classes of readers. As Klancher suggests, *Church and State* finds Coleridge caught between accommodating the reading habits he despises and preparing the conditions for the clerisy to supplant present institutions of circulation. In Coleridge's 1829 notebooks Klancher finds an uncharacteristically explicit distinction between the middle-class and the projected clerisy. There Coleridge writes that *Church and State* “must state such positions only and urge such arguments as the Reader (or Hearer) will immediately see the full force of, and recognize as a previous Judgement of his own.” Attempting to secure the ground upon which he would erect the clerisy with right but inadequate arguments, Coleridge despaired, “I dare not pretend to inform, instruct, or guide.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Kevin Gilmartin, *Writing Against Revolution: Literary Conservatism in Britain, 1790-1832* (Cambridge, 2007), 217.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn and Anthony John Harding (Princeton University Press, 2002) Vol. 5, Pt. 1, 5961, 38.34, MS quoted in Klancher, *Making English Reading Audiences*, 164.

Like that notebook entry, Coleridge's correspondence records his intention that the *Biographia* should appeal to "the general reader."<sup>11</sup> I propose that Coleridge does not envision the general reader of the *Biographia* in the same restricted sense as the "influencive" middle-class audience for *Church and State*.<sup>12</sup> Rather than solely addressing readers with the ability to disseminate subject matter through subordinate social strata, Chapter Ten places the *Biographia* in direct dialogue with the kind of audience for whom Coleridge was unable or unwilling to complete the advertised third lay sermon addressed to "the Lower and Labouring Classes."<sup>13</sup> Beginning with the reader who demands a strictly vernacular discourse, Chapter Ten depicts a series of less educated interlocutors who fail to comprehend Coleridge immediately or fully.

In Chapter Ten incomprehension creates opportunities for communication. The first such opportunity arises at the moment the reader exclaims "*this is pedantry!*" Depicting himself in an exchange with the reader, Coleridge defers the theory of the imagination in order to promote patience for difficult writing. Of course, the didactic value of delay is a widely acknowledged feature of Coleridgean prose. As Jerome Christensen influentially argues, the *Friend* incessantly defers meaning, and so trains the reader to ultimately look inward in search of moral truth.<sup>14</sup> According to Christensen, Coleridge's flight from the resolutely perspicuous Jacobin rhetoric of the French leads to

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<sup>11</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959) IV, 586. Hereafter abbreviated *CL* and cited parenthetically.

<sup>12</sup> "influencive" is Coleridge's coinage (see *CL* VI, 824), but Gilmartin highlights the term in his account of the hierarchy of audience in *Writing Against Revolution*, 217.

<sup>13</sup> On the uncompleted third Lay Sermon see Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lay Sermons*, ed. R.J. White (Princeton, 1972) xxx-xxxii.

<sup>14</sup> Jerome Christensen, *Coleridge's Blessed Machine of Language* (Cornell University Press, 1984) 215-216.

an obscurity that itself threatens to substitute mere semblance for the profound moral truth that the *Friend* would hold in reserve. On the one hand, the *Friend* proposes that truth demands to be communicated in order to achieve moral relevance. On the other, any vehicle of communication results in moral compromise. I think we might profitably consider Chapter Ten of the *Biographia* as an extension of this dilemma. But where the *Friend* had embraced method as a tentative if ultimately unsatisfying solution to the moral paradox of communication, I argue that in the *Biographia*, Coleridge's chapter of digressions and anecdotes adopts pedantry as a socially situated alternative to the obscure style.

## II. Learned Languages

The *Friend*'s initial reception illuminates the increasing significance pedantry would assume in Coleridge's prose between 1810 and 1817. As Barbara Rooke has documented, Coleridge's friends and associates frequently criticized the *Friend* for its "dryness and abstruseness," its "words of learned length and thundering sound," and most of all its "obscurity" (I. lxi, n. 5). After months of urging from correspondents to make the *Friend* less pedantic, Coleridge wrote to Thomas Poole complaining that the work had been doomed not by style or content, but rather by the spirit in which readers had approached it. "One half [...] of my Subscribers," Coleridge assured Poole, "said Yes! Merely to avoid the greater unpleasantness of saying No!" (CL III, 271). Coleridge felt sorely ill served by a coterie of readers who had subscribed to his philosophically dense

periodical merely out of a sense of social obligation. While this was not the first instance in which Coleridge had been damned for obscurity, the criticisms of anonymous reviewers concerning his early poetry elicited a different response than the exhortations of friends to adopt a style closer to that of the *Spectator*. The uncomprehending response of readers including Daniel Stuart, Robert Southey, Dorothy Wordsworth, and even Tom Poole impelled Coleridge to despair of promoting the *Friend* beyond the narrowly constituted public to which it had circulated by 1810. Even if the journal were better known, he informed Poole, the *Friend* seemed unlikely to strike a chord with readers. “I have received from some half dozen, the warmest acknowledgements and assurance that if THE FRIEND were more generally known, its circulation would become considerable. If these good and amicable Folks knew half as much of the present *Public* as even I do, they would think very differently” (CL III 272, original emphasis).

It seems Coleridge derived a considerable amount of what he “knew” about the reading public’s tastes and attitudes from William Cobbett’s wildly successful *Political Register* (1802-1835). In the months prior to publishing the *Friend* and again after its tepid reception, Coleridge’s thoughts often turned to Cobbett in correspondence with friends and supporters. Writing to Daniel Stuart, Coleridge remarks on the many respects in which he wishes to distinguish the *Friend* from the *Political Register*, stating bluntly, “I do not write for the *Multitude*.” (CL, III, 143). But if Coleridge imagined the *Friend* as the polar opposite of the *Political Register* in certain respects, he also recognized Cobbett’s success and emulated his methods. In a series of letters that address printing



and distribution Coleridge describes *The Political Register* as a model.<sup>15</sup> In early January 1810, after twenty issues of the *Friend*, Coleridge wrote to Poole and then to Lady Beaumont with barely concealed jealousy for Cobbett. He complained to each that the *Political Register* was ephemeral and partisan, padded with content reprinted from other journals and the correspondence of ill-informed readers. Meanwhile, he insists, despite the *Friend's* wholly original content, its unflinching commitment to address durable truths and morally sound principles, readers admonish him that the work is “*dear, tho’* at the same price as Cobbett’s” (CL, III 272, original emphasis). The *Political Register* was both the antithesis of Coleridge’s ambitions for the *Friend* and the standard to which he repeatedly compared his methods and success as a periodical essayist.

Shortly before Coleridge embarked on his program of cultivated obscurity in the *Friend*, the *Political Register* launched a long and pointed attack on the classical languages as pedantic. Writing on parliamentary debate in January 1807, Cobbett proposes that Latin needlessly obscure legislative matters. Cobbett’s topic is debate over the “*Uti Possidetis*,” the legal instrument that would establish territorial ownership as a precondition for negotiations with France. According to Cobbett, Latin phrases like *uti possidetis* shroud parliamentary business in language inaccessible to the nation. He demands that, “what they call the LEARNED LANGUAGES are improperly so called; and that, as a part of general education, they are worse than useless.”<sup>16</sup> As Leonora Natrass suggests, Cobbett’s assault on the classics exemplifies the struggles of radical writers to overturn an opposition between vulgar and refined language promoted by

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<sup>15</sup> See CL, III, 191; 197; 232

<sup>16</sup> William Cobbett, *Cobbett’s Political Register* (London, 1807) Vol. 11, 36.

universal grammars.<sup>17</sup> Eager for a confrontation, Cobbett invites classically educated readers to dispute his claim, promising to print their refutations for the next two months. Imagining the defensive responses of the learned, Cobbett remarks derisively, “I already hear some pedagogue, or pedant, exclaim: ‘this is precisely the reasoning of the Fox without a tail.’”<sup>18</sup> Here Cobbett alludes to one of Aesop’s fables, which describes a fox who loses his tail in a trap. Stripped of his principle ornament, the fox tries to persuade his fellow foxes that their tails are a useless burden. Cobbett treats the fable as eminently familiar. It reflects his adversaries’ predictability. The only defenders of the learned languages, Cobbett suggests, are pedants who traffic in clichés.

For some readers of the *Political Register*—and I will argue for Coleridge too—the fox without a tail proved far less familiar than Cobbett had imagined. In all, Cobbett printed thirty-seven responses to his initial challenge. Instead of two months, the debate continued for six. Four letters mention the fox without a tail, and they reflect the main lines of argument invoked in the debate. Two of these respondents virtually confirm Cobbett’s prediction, upbraiding him in the very terms he had anticipated. A third questions the applicability of the fable. He suggests that, whereas Aesop’s fox had lost something, Cobbett betrays contempt for what he never possessed. Perhaps most strikingly, however, a fourth reader, sympathetic to Cobbett’s position, adopts the figure as a pseudonym. Signing his letter, “A FOX WITHOUT A LATIN TAIL,” this self-educated reader proposes that learned discourse is mere frippery, a tool with which the political

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<sup>17</sup> Nattrass borrows the opposition between “vulgar” and “refined” from Olivia Smith, while complicating the account of Cobbett’s place in that dichotomy. See Nattrass, 15-19.

<sup>18</sup> *Cobbett’s Political Register*, Vol. 11, 36.

and cultural elites exclude the masses from political participation. He stakes his claim to participate in public debate by characterizing the relationship between the classical languages and English as an opposition between the arcane and the useful. By studying dead languages, the “FOX” argues, scholars render themselves incapable of intelligently participating in conversations “on the subject of practical improvements in the arts of life, or general œconomy.”<sup>19</sup> Here we can see the intersection between popular radical politics, a resolutely utilitarian attitude toward education, and a confident disdain for the study of classical languages. For Cobbett’s “FOX WITHOUT A LATIN TAIL” and his fellow vernacular radicals, classical learning is the instrument of an archaic tyranny that oppresses productive contributors to the British nation, while securing the privileges of useless pedants ensconced in the universities.

Anti-classical polemics like those by Cobbett and his correspondents illuminate the terms of Coleridge’s engagement with pedantry in the *Friend*. Unlike Coleridge’s correspondence, the *Friend* refuses to name Cobbett. Instead, Coleridge attacks obliquely. The tenth issue, “On the Errors of Party Spirit, or Extremes Meet,” (19 October 1809) assails Major John Cartwright’s *The People’s Barrier Against Undue Influence and Corruption* (1780). The *Friend* unsparingly criticizes Cartwright’s arguments for universal suffrage. But it also presents *The People’s Barrier* as “one good man’s writings,” distinguishing Cartwright’s pamphlet from similar arguments “seasoned and served up for the unreasoning multitude, as it has been by men whose names I would not honour by writing them in the same sentence as Major Cartwright’s” (*F* II, 138).

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<sup>19</sup> Cobbett’s *Pol. Reg.*, Vol. 11, 1069.

According to the *Friend*, these unnamed writers address an audience contemptuous of what they lack. Coleridge caustically remarks that they are “a numerous host of shallow heads and restless tempers, men who without learning [...] reconcile themselves to the *sans-culotterie* of their Ignorance, by scoffing at the useless fox-brush of Pedantry”(F II, 138-9). Without naming Cobbett or his periodical, the *Friend* attributes the accusation of pedantry to a radical discourse that bears obvious similarities to the attacks on classical learning carried out in the *Political Register*.

The *Friend* attacks popular anti-classicism with familiar, even clichéd language. Both Aesop’s fox without a tail and the *sans-culottes* had figured prominently in recent political discourse. As we have seen, the fox could be embraced on both sides of the debate over learned languages in the *Political Register*. Meanwhile, by 1809 the *sans-culottes* were a hackneyed epithet in the lexicon of conservative reactionaries. Coleridge’s use of “*sans-culotterie*” betrays the extent of his anxiety. The *Friend* ends “On the Errors of Party Spirit” with a long selection from “Once a Jacobin, Always a Jacobin” (1802). In that essay, Coleridge had famously characterized “Jacobin” as “a mere term of abuse” exploited by “different sects of anti-jacobins.”<sup>20</sup> Where Coleridge had formerly applied scrupulous attention to conservative reactionaries’ imprecise use of “Jacobin” to demean and vilify their political opponents, the *Friend* casually likens the readers of popular journals to a faction of famously violent, iconoclastic French revolutionaries. On the face of things, Coleridge’s remarks might look like a simple

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<sup>20</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Essays of His Times*, ed. David V. Erdman (Princeton University Press, 1978), I, 368; I, 367.

instance of that “screaming shadow of abuse” that accompanied the emergence of radical political discourse (Smith, 251).

Despite the reactionary tenor of the *Friend*'s polemic, I propose that the “fox brush of pedantry” combines the obscure and the familiar in ways that anticipate a broadening in Coleridge's address of recondite subject matter in the *Biographia*. The *Friend* defends what popular audiences deride as pedantry by naming it a “fox-brush,” but withholds any final judgment of the meaning or value that might inhere in ostentatious erudition. Like the fox's tail, pedantry is not merely ornament. But Coleridge makes the figure even more obscure. When the *Friend* describes a popular readership that scoffs at pedantry as a fox-brush, it treats the allusion as if it required an elaborate gloss. Whereas Cobbett's readers had responded to a casual reference to the fable, the *Friend* supplies a lengthy footnote that quotes David Lloyd's *State-worthies* (1670), a collection of biographical sketches of prominent Tudor and Jacobean political figures. The quotation applies the fable to Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, who “knowing that learning hath no Enemy but Ignorance, did always suspect the want of it in those Men who derided the habit in others: like the Fox in the Fable who being without a Tail would persuade others to cut off theirs as a burthen”(F II, 139 n.). The footnote makes Coleridge's allusion more explicit, but it also invites the reader to pause and consider the relationship between the fable's respective uses in *State-worthies* and in the *Friend*. Coleridge's fox-brush thus alludes not only to Aesop but also to seventeenth century political history. But instead of clarifying the meaning of pedantry, the quotation from *State-worthies* promotes a sense of learnedness for its own sake.

The *Friend* further obscures the meaning of the fox-brush by associating it with the *sans-culottes*. Clichéd though “sans-culotterie” may be, Coleridge uses the figure to describe partisan affiliation as the direct consequence of anti-intellectual rhetoric. By scoffing at pedantry, popular radicals find common cause in ignorance as if it were a political principle. The causal relationship the *Friend* describes hinges on the contradictory impressions created by these figures. On the one hand, the *Friend* creates a jarring sense of disparity between the dire connotations of the *sans-culottes* and the absurdity of Aesop’s fox without a tail. Comparing the audience of periodicals like the *Political Register* with the *sans-culottes*, Coleridge characterizes the anti-intellectualism of the masses as an ominous, violent party spirit. At the same time, by suggesting that they describe pedantry as a “fox-brush,” Coleridge characterizes the same radical discourse as a self-serving sham as transparent as that depicted in Aesop’s fable. In this sense, the figures are profoundly at odds. While “the *sans-culotterie* of ignorance” associates popular radicals with the Terror, the “fox-brush of pedantry” discounts their discourse as a laughably unpersuasive attempt at guile. On the other hand, each metaphor denotes a defining absence or lack. Like the revolutionaries identified by their want of knee breeches, the fox’s missing tail is his identifying mark. Privation is the basis not only of the readers’ scornful dispositions toward pedantry, but also of the consensus by which those readers constitute a public.

Coleridge repeated his curious pairing of the terrible and the fabulous in the *Essays on Genial Criticism* and again in Chapter Ten of the *Biographia*. For nearly a decade he employed these incongruent, yet linked metaphors to challenge a radical anti-

intellectualism. Strikingly, in the time between the *Friend* and the *Biographia*, the *sans-culotterie* of ignorance and fox-brush of pedantry were transformed. Where the *Friend* had employed these figures to lambast the readers of popular periodicals and justify excluding such readers from political participation, the *Biographia* uses the terms in an attempt to persuade a reader to countenance its coining of *esemplastic*. In the intervening decade, Coleridge's prose became more heterogeneous, combining the obscure and the familiar in the hope of creating a future audience unwilling to resign itself to the *sans-culotterie* of its ignorance by scoffing at the fox-brush of pedantry.

### III. "The word is not in Johnson"

The mixture of obscurity and familiarity Coleridge produced in the *Friend* with the fox-brush of pedantry and the *sans-culotterie* of ignorance features prominently throughout Chapter Ten of the *Biographia*. Just as Coleridge begins to define "esemplastic," the chapter hurries on to other digressions and anecdotes, delaying the promised transcendental deduction. In addition to the discussion of pedantry, the chapter offers anecdotes of Coleridge's struggles to gain subscribers for the *Watchman*, of his trip to Germany and studies there, and of his political and religious views. The chapter includes some of Coleridge's best-known anecdotes, including the story of "Spy Nozy."

The confrontation between author and reader imagined in Chapter Ten might be dismissed as a false start, an amusing but ultimately trifling distraction from the finally incomplete work of defining the *esemplastic* power. Chapter Nine concludes by

predicting a “scanty audience for abstrusest themes, and truths that can neither be communicated or received without effort of thought, as well as patience of attention” (*BL* I, 167). Chapter Ten has been read as both a concession to a larger audience of readers uninterested in German idealism and as an attempt to substitute anecdotes for the hard work of philosophy. James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate, for instance, characterize the chapter as “an attempt to entertain, yet possibly underlying it was the need to defer facing the challenge of Chapters 12 and 13” (*BL* I, lvi).

This attempt to entertain deserves more serious consideration. Rather than a series of mere distractions from the chapter’s ostensible aim, Coleridge’s anecdotes focus keenly on the difficulties that surround communicating the interest and value of philosophical content. Beginning with the dialogue about the propriety of coining “*esemplastic*,” Coleridge represents himself as learned, but incomprehensible. The dialogue models an encounter between a reader who lacks the classical education that would prepare him to understand Coleridge and a text that insists on the necessity of recondite terminology. Chapter Ten thus stages a contest between competing standards of intelligible prose, and directly engages the arguments of vernacular radicals against the obscurity of learned discourse.

When the reader of the *Biographia* exclaims that *esemplastic* “is not in Johnson,” he ratifies a vernacular standard of linguistic authority invoked in radical discourse. The *Political Register* evidences Johnson’s utility to popular anti-classicism with a letter from a reader who supports Cobbett’s attack on the learned languages. Lest he be overwhelmed by what he does not understand, the reader demands that, “as I shall use only such words



as are to be met with in the Dictionary of our old friend Dr. Johnson, I expect to be dealt with in a like, liberal, civil, and gentlemanly manner.”<sup>21</sup> Despite Johnson’s profound Latinity, by 1807 a self-educated reader such as this one could invoke the learned Doctor not merely as a standard of intelligible English usage, but in support of Cobbett’s contention that the classical languages are worse than useless. Like the self-described “John Bull, ignorant of all outlandish tongues” who demands a strictly vernacular debate in the *Political Register*, Coleridge’s fictitious reader invokes Johnson’s *Dictionary* in an attempt to ward off what he cannot immediately understand. The *Biographia* thus internalizes an element of popular radical discourse in what seems like an attempt to forestall objections to a neologism.

But as I noted in my introduction, Coleridge uses “esemplastic” with curious infrequency, attributing the term to fictitious readers who object to the obscurity of the *Biographia*. In this regard, “esemplastic” may not warrant the long digression it creates. But the incomprehension it elicits from the reader is instrumental. Because the reader reacts to a use of *esemplastic* that exists only as a backward projection, his complaint invites us to turn to the preceding pages in search of some previous use of the term that we may have missed, and his eruption focuses our reading of the author’s response. Coleridge uses the dialogue with the reader to imagine an encounter with a popular audience that generates not misunderstanding and contempt, but a long chapter of anecdotes and digressions. Chapter Ten thus begins with jarringly unfamiliar terminology that spurs an engagement between the author and his imagined audience. Rather than

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<sup>21</sup> Cobbett’s *Pol. Reg.*, Vol. 11, 220.

elucidating the esemplastic power, though, the *Biographia* withholds the meaning of the term.

In this sense, I argue that Chapter Ten trains the reader in a manner analogous to the studied deferral that Jerome Christensen has described at work in the *Friend*. According to Christensen, the *Friend* habituates readers to a tenuous grasp of elusive moral truth. Coleridge's obscure style in the *Friend* mirrors obscure content. Chapter Ten also cultivates readers' patience in the face of incomprehension. But, instead of insisting upon a disciplined reading that methodically postpones the satisfaction of understanding, the *Biographia* repeatedly defers understanding by exchanging clarity for anecdotes, puns, and witticisms. Beginning with the exchange between author and reader, Chapter Ten trains its audience to expect imperfect comprehension by repeatedly depicting its author misunderstood by readers, potential patrons, neighbors, and, of course, nosey spies.

In part, Coleridge's anecdotes promote such patience by suggesting the dangers that intellectually narrow, partisan attitudes toward language pose across the political spectrum and throughout the social hierarchy. While Chapter Ten begins with a reader whose complaints recall popular radical discourse, the "Spy Nozy" anecdote targets the equally partisan anti-intellectualism of a reactionary bureaucrat. According to the anecdote, the long walks Wordsworth and Coleridge took among the Quantock hills discussing poetry and philosophy in 1796 attracted the attention of the British government's counter-intelligence network. Anxiously attempting to prepare for a rumored landing by French forces, the Home Office sent an agent to observe the poets.

Coleridge claims that, upon overhearing a discussion of the Dutch pantheist Baruch Spinoza during one of these walks, the spy imagined he had been discovered. Possessed of a large nose, the spy misapprehends Spinoza's name and assumes that the discussion refers to him.

Arguably, this fanciful anecdote with its bad pun persists in criticism and the classroom, not only because it entertains, but also because it so artfully combines the familiar and the obscure to celebrate the life of the mind at the expense of an anti-intellectual party spirit. Frustrated by the abstruse character of the *Friend*, Coleridge's supporters had urged him to adopt a style more akin to the Spectator than to the seventeenth century English philosophers. Those expostulations find a mixed reply in anecdotes like the "Spy Nozy" episode. On the one hand the anecdote is an exercise in Coleridgean self-promotion. It makes a show of Coleridge's familiarity with Spinoza—a difficult philosopher little read among the British—by refusing to make the pun explicit. The joke is only available to the reader who has either been paying enough attention to recall who Spinoza is from a previous chapter, or who comes to the Biographia with this bit of cultural capital in hand. On the other hand, the passage condemns conservative reactionaries of an anti-intellectual solipsism. Coleridge answers a humorless and repressive political establishment with a joke. For E.P. Thompson, "Spy Nozy" belongs to a long, concerted effort by Coleridge to depoliticize his life during the 1790's in order to befog his youthful radicalism.<sup>22</sup> The passage unquestionably obscures Coleridge's former political sentiments in a joke. But it also caricatures the paranoia, ignorance, and

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<sup>22</sup> See E.P. Thompson "Disenchantment or Default? A Lay Sermon" in *Power and Consciousness*, ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien and William Dean Vanech (University of London, 1964), 149-81. Notably Thompson insists that Coleridge's intended companion is John Thelwall.

incompetence Coleridge presents as characteristic of the faithful servant of the government during the 1790's.

Spy Nozy is representative of the many anecdotes in Chapter ten in which Coleridge demonstrates immense learning and meets with the incomprehension or indifference of audiences whom, with surprising frequency, he seems not to have even intended to address. Whether he is conversing with a Birmingham tallow chandler in order to sell a subscription to *The Watchman*, overheard by a "titled Dogberry," or gossiped about by his landlord, Coleridge presents himself as unintelligible or misunderstood. His auditors come from diverse social, political, and economic backgrounds. Without exception, however, they are unexposed to letters and philosophy, and their experience of incomprehension is defined by self-interest rather than curiosity or an eagerness to understand. Thus, Spy Nozy dismisses Coleridge as harmless, but he acquires only the most rudimentary idea what "Spinoza" means. The agent, Coleridge provides, "was speedily convinced that it was the name of a man who had made a book and lived long ago." Similarly, the tallow chandler refuses a subscription. "Sir Dogberry" accuses him of printing seditious handbills and "haranguing the people." Meanwhile, his landlord posits that, if Coleridge had harangued anyone "they would not have understood him," marveling that he had spoken "real Hebrew Greek for an hour after dinner" with the Vicar at a gathering of local worthies (*BL* I, 195). Tellingly, Coleridge does not perform a self-portrait in the voice of an interlocutor like the Vicar or Wordsworth. Between the lengthy acknowledgement of his debts to Kant, Fichte, Schelling and a host of other esoteric thinkers in Chapter Nine and the eventually aborted attempt at deducing

the esemplastic power, Coleridge depicts his literary life by focusing on those who do not understand what he says or writes.

At the beginning of Chapter Ten, Coleridge denies that such unintelligibility amounts to pedantry. He urges his fictional reader to instead regard pedantry as a breach of decorum that is not exclusive to the learned. Reproducing a passage of the *Essay on Genial Criticism*, Coleridge addresses the position maintained by Cobbett, “John Bull,” and the “Fox without a Latin Tail,” urging that “the language of the market would be in the schools as *pedantic*, though it might not be reprobated by that name, as the language of the schools in the market.” Coleridge further proposes that the “man of the world” who insists that only everyday language should be employed in a scholarly context is, as much a pedant whose thoughts and language remain in his laboratory after he leaves that environment, “even though the latter pedant instead of desiring his wife to *make the tea*, should bid her add to the quant. suff. of thea Sinensis the oxyd of hydrogen saturated with caloric”(BL I, 170). Coleridge’s portrait of the chemist at the hearth softens the features of pedantry and suggests the humor of using words unsuitable to the time, place, and company.

Rather than assiduously defending the propriety of “esemplastic” as appropriate in the context of the *Biographia*, Coleridge asserts that scholarly pedantry is less offensive than other pedantries. If any professional is liable to carry the language of the workplace into other circumstances, he argues that the scholar offends less than others, because “if the pedant of the cloister and the pedant of the lobby, both *smell equally of the shop*, yet the odour from the Russian binding of good old *authentic-looking* folios and quartos is

less annoying than the steams from the tavern or bagnio.” In addition to this appeal to the “smell” of scholarly pedantry, the *Biographia* also returns to the metaphors from fable and recent political history Coleridge had used to address the question of pedantry in the *Friend* and the *Essay on Genial Criticism*. Coleridge assures the complaining reader that, “although the pedantry of the scholar should betray a little ostentation, yet a well-conditioned mind would more easily, methinks, tolerate the *fox-brush* of learned vanity, than the *sans-culotterie* of a contemptuous ignorance, that assumes a merit from mutilation in the self-consoling sneer at the pompous incumberance of tails” (*BL*, I, 171). Whereas these figures had previously targeted the readers of popular arguments for universal suffrage, here the *sans-culotterie* of ignorance and the fox brush of pedantry serve as part of Coleridge’s rejoinder to the hostile reader. The *Biographia* asks the hostile reader which position seems more tolerable and implicitly flatters him with the praise of possessing a well-conditioned mind if he casts his lot with the scholar.

At the same time, Coleridge’s use of these figures has become more obscure, even self-referential. In both the *Friend* and the *Essay on Genial Criticism*, Coleridge glosses the fox-brush with the lengthy, footnoted quotation from Lloyd’s *State-worthies*. In the *Essay*, the parenthetical comment, “the fable is somewhat musty,” emphasizes the allusion.<sup>23</sup> In the *Biographia*, however, the metaphor’s basis remains implicit. The fox-brush of pedantry and the *sans-culotterie* of ignorance that had figured so prominently in Coleridge’s diatribe against directly addressing the masses have become a means of

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<sup>23</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* by S.T. Coleridge with his *Aesthetical Essays*, ed. John Shawcross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907) II, 229.

reaching beyond the fit but few readers prepared to understand Coleridge. They promote obscurity to a reader who takes Johnson as the only measure of good usage.

#### IV. *Non omnia possumus omnes*

The forged letter from a judicious friend that concludes Chapter Thirteen famously presents incomprehension as the final effect of the first volume of the *Biographia*. When the fictitious reader exclaims “But this is pedantry!” in Chapter Ten, the author provides a remarkably qualified response: “Not necessarily so, I hope”(BL I, 169). As I suggest above, the passage goes on to reiterate the claims of the *Essay on Genial Criticism* that pedantry is the use of language unfit for the time, place, and company. Coleridge’s imagined reader and the cast of uncomprehending characters who populate the chapter’s subsequent anecdotes attest to the impossibility of controlling one’s company, of controlling the constitution and learnedness of one’s audience. I have been arguing that in response to this perceived difficulty, Chapter Ten of the *Biographia* extends and amplifies a line of thinking that begins in the *Friend*, and imagines the benefits of addressing some audiences pedantically. The letter in Chapter Thirteen reinforces an impression of the *Biographia* as the work of an occasionally pedantic writer, but it deploys this impression to strikingly different effect. In the letter, pedantry becomes the implicit rationale for an act of self-censorship that curtails Coleridge’s philosophical aspirations for the *Biographia*.

According to the letter, the fragmentary Chapter Thirteen, part of which appears in the text and part of which has been “reserved” for future publication, meets each of the criteria Chapter Ten had used to define pedantry. The letter proposes that, first, this is not the time for a deduction of the esemplastic power. That work belongs properly in a future treatise “on the Logos or communicative intellect in man and Deity.” Second, the present context has “obliged [Coleridge] to omit so many links, from the necessity of compression, that what remains, looks [...] like the fragments of the winding steps of an old ruined tower”(BL, I, 301). The *Biographia* is not the place for this argument. Third, Chapter Thirteen imposes upon readers who purchased a work with a title page that reads, “My Literary Life and Opinions” and find instead “a long treatise on ideal Realism, which holds the same relation in abstruseness to Plotinus, as Plotinus does to Plato.” To these “*unprepared* minds your speculations on the esemplastic power would be utterly unintelligible” (303 original emphasis). According to the letter, Coleridge’s theory of the imagination is unsuited to the time, the place, and the company.

Of course Coleridge never wrote this supposedly pedantic material reserved for future publication. Like the complaints of the indignant reader of Chapter Ten, the letter depicts the incomprehension that a fictional text creates for a fictional reader. But instead of imagining the potential of unintelligibility to shake readers from a comfortable half-sleep of entrenched reading habits, the letter posits an impasse. Here incomprehension represents a point at which the author’s erudition and the abstruseness of his subject matter preclude making himself remotely intelligible to the general reader.



Coleridge uses his correspondent's frustration to disarticulate preparation and ability. The letter advocates on behalf of a reader "who, like myself, is neither prepared nor perhaps calculated for the study of so abstruse a subject so abstrusely treated." Shortly before the insertion of the letter, the *Biographia* quotes a line of the eighth *Eclogue*—*non omnia possumus omnes*<sup>24</sup>—in order to lend an air of classical authority to the contention that a transcendental deduction of the imagination requires a philosophic genius that differs "from the highest perfection of talent, not by degree but by kind" (*BL* I, 299-300). In his own voice, in an untranslated line of Augustan verse, and in the voice of his judicious friend, Coleridge insists upon the distinction between study and innate capacity. On the one hand, the *Biographia* renders differences among its readers intrinsic—no amount of preparation will enable those who lack philosophic genius to deduce the imagination. On the other hand, Coleridge's fictional correspondent definitively states that while he lacks preparation, he is nonetheless willing to test his capacities in the future context of Logosophia. Coleridge makes education a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for transcendental deduction.

At times Coleridge dismissed the reading public as a pernicious side effect of the growing audience for literary productions—proof that we are not all capable of all things. But Coleridge's pedantry demonstrates a willingness to engage the varied capacities and incapacities of his audience. Adopting the posture of the pedant, Coleridge invites readers to censure him when they do not understand. This moment of conscious incomprehension transforms reading from a passive process of recognizing in what one reads what one

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<sup>24</sup>"We cannot all do all things." Vergil, *Ecloga* 8.64.

already knows to a shared process of working toward comprehension. Coleridge's pedantry, however, does not level the playing field. Rather it draws attention to the disparate preparation and abilities readers possess. Censuring himself in the persona of a concerned friend, Coleridge concludes the first volume of the *Biographia* by admitting that he has failed to make himself clear. Implicitly accepting the charge of pedantry, he signals the incomplete, but nonetheless mutual, activity of communication between author and reader, and hopes for a future moment of genuine understanding.

## Chapter Three

### Soldado, Sassenach, and Seanchaí

#### Walter Scott's Martial Pedant

##### I. A Less Pedantic Scott

In 1826, Walter Scott found himself answerable for debts totaling £121,000. From that date until well after his death in 1832, the proceeds from the sale of his works would be directed to creditors. Laboring to clear himself from debt, Scott finished five novels, a collection of short fiction, his nine-volume *Life of Buonaparte*, a series of tales from Scottish and French history, and his *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*. Perhaps most significantly, however, he produced the 48 volume Magnum Opus edition of the Waverley novels. Scott made this moderately priced edition desirable to longtime readers and the uninitiated alike by contributing new introductions, copious notes, and appendices. Until quite recently, subsequent editions of Scott's novels were uniformly based upon this last edition published in the author's lifetime. Further, the modern critical tradition that begins with George Lukács's *The Historical Novel* (1937) has treated the scholarly apparatus of the Magnum Opus as an intrinsic feature of Scott's authority. Still, the cliché that Scott wrote himself out of debt and into the grave has cast a shadow of opportunism and expediency over the Magnum Opus, engendering the suspicion that Scott's additions constitute a needless supplement rather than a meaningful revision.

The contested status of the Magnum Opus makes visible a tension between two traditions in Scott scholarship. On the one hand, a tradition of critique takes the Waverley novels' pseudo-scholarly apparatus as an object to be demystified in order to lay bare their ideology. On the other hand, editorial scholarship has sought to resuscitate Scott for modern readers by freeing his central narratives from constraints foisted on the novels by an author desperate to escape his debt.

Discontented with the Scott they know, modern editors have repeatedly imagined how the Waverley novels might be made less pedantic. In the past 30 years, notable scholarly editions have rejected the Magnum Opus in favor of Scott's first editions, beginning with Claire Lamont's *Waverley* (1981) and culminating in the complete Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley novels (1993-2009). In the General Introduction to the Edinburgh Edition, David Hewitt proposes that since 1832 Scott's genius has appeared "cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd" by a "daunting clutter of introductions, prefaces, notes, and appendices, containing a miscellaneous assemblage of historical illustration and personal anecdote."<sup>1</sup> In Hewitt's estimate, returning to Scott's first editions, manuscripts, and proofs promises to introduce readers to "fresher, less formal and *less pedantic novels* than we have known"(ix, my emphasis). Hewitt's commentary highlights a view rarely explicit in attempts by modern editors to eschew or reframe the Waverley novels' paratexts—a somewhat embarrassed admission that Scott's pedantry has driven readers away. By jettisoning the pseudo-antiquarianism, editorial intrusions, and anecdotal gossip that lards the Magnum Opus, the Edinburgh Edition proposes that

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Scott, *The Black Dwarf*, ed. Peter Garside (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), ix.

contemporary audiences might read Scott as he originally intended rather than as he was forced to present his works in the wake of financial catastrophe.<sup>2</sup>

The editorial work of Angus Calder, Janet Stevenson, and Peter Davidson suggests, however, that a return to Scott's first editions may not sufficiently enliven the novels for many modern readers. Like Hewitt, Stevenson and Davidson explicitly wish to give audiences a sense of what reading Scott might have been like in the nineteen-teens and twenties. The introduction to their 1993 edition of *Old Mortality* (1816) exhorts uninitiated readers to skip Scott's 1830 introduction in order "to recreate the spirit in which the novel might have been read on its first appearance."<sup>3</sup> To achieve this effect, however, they also urge readers to ignore the framing devices that accompanied the novel in 1816, when it was first published as the second volume of *Tales of My Landlord*. From the beginning, Scott presented the *Tales* as documents published and introduced by Jedediah Cleishbotham, parish clerk and schoolmaster of the fictional town of Gandercleugh. For his part, Cleishbotham attributes the *Tales*' composition to his deceased colleague, Peter Pattieson. Pattieson's commentary in turn identifies the origins of the *Tales* in the anecdotes and reminiscences of residents of Gandercleugh and travelers he encounters at the town inn. Stevenson and Davidson propose that if we hope to recover *Old Mortality* from relative neglect, it will be necessary first to ignore the garrulous Cleishbotham, Pattieson, and the series of narrative frames.

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<sup>2</sup> Since 1999, volumes in the Edinburgh Edition have included a completely revised general introduction significantly less critical of the Magnum Opus.

<sup>3</sup> Scott, *Old Mortality*, eds. Jane Stevenson and Peter Davidson, (Oxford UP, 1993) xxxix.

I sympathize with Jerome McGann's impassioned defense of these framing devices as important statements of Scott's narrative terms.<sup>4</sup> But, if recent editors have occasionally trivialized the Waverley novels' paratexts, their willingness to skip or even dispose of this content highlights the persistent ability of Scott's frames to frustrate readers—including his admirers. On the face of things, when Hewitt suggests that readers' enjoyment of the Waverley novels has been unequivocally diminished since 1830, he appears to set himself forcefully at odds with the *Edinburgh Review's* 1832 estimate of the Magnum Opus. Surveying the series, the *Review* praises the "many prefaces and notes of real value and interest," and judges the work an "excellent new edition[.]" But the *Review* also manifests an impatience common among Scott's readers. Deriding Cleishbotham and Captain Cuthbert Clutterbuck as "cumbrous, unamusing, and improbable," the *Review* laments that the Magnum Opus preserves the original frames, deriding them as "useless machinery[.]" The introductions and notes to the Magnum Opus, the reviewer proposes, might have freed Scott's novels from the schoolmasters, ushers, antiquarians, and idle pensioners who frame the *Tales of My Landlord* and late novels like *The Monastery*, *Peperil of the Peak*, and *The Fortunes of Nigel*. The *Review* thus promotes Scott's fiction with an act of selective appreciation, setting what it deems lively and interesting in opposition to what it judges dull, irrelevant, and dispensable. Like recent editors, the *Edinburgh Review* imagines eliminating the personae who frame so much of Scott's fiction in order to create "less pedantic novels than we have known." Doubtless, the challenges of Scott's fiction have been amplified by time, but the *Review's*

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<sup>4</sup> Jerome McGann, "Walter Scott's Romantic postmodernity," in Leith Davis, Ian Duncan, and Janet Sorensen, *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 119.

disappointment that the Magnum Opus preserves the “useless machinery” of Jedediah Cleishbotham and Peter Pattieson testifies that the struggle of recent editors to imagine a less pedantic Scott is not unique to our own historical moment.<sup>5</sup> Nor is this struggle solely of interest to the textual editor or undergraduate lecturer.

To the contrary, the impulse to render the Waverley novels less pedantic presents a compelling provocation to the extensive critical commentary that privileges Scott’s coherence and control. For many modern critics, Scott’s fictions master cultural, political, and religious difference in order to authoritatively render internecine conflict an object of historical curiosity and aesthetic contemplation.<sup>6</sup> Extending this view to the paratext, Katie Trumpener argues that Scott’s framework of notes and commentaries reconcile competing accounts of historical change into a coherent narrative that begins with internal unevenness and ends with official nationalism. For Trumpener, this act of historical synthesis “privileges the perspective of antiquarian narrators over that of historical participants, for the intellectual complexity of the act of historiographic

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<sup>5</sup> Ian Duncan observes that among post-Victorian readers, Scott’s style has fared poorly in comparison to that of Jane Austen. As I hope to show, the issue of “difficult” style in fact represents a corollary to the alienating effects of Scott’s narrators and personae.

<sup>6</sup> Georg Lukács inaugurates this line of criticism in *The Historical Novel* (1937), arguing that Scott brings “extreme, opposing social forces...into human relationship with one another” through the operation of its picaresque plot and mediocre heroes (36). Thus, in *Waverley*, Scott arranges encounters between competing cultures and ideologies—English and Scottish, Whig and Tory, Jacobite and Hanoverian, Lowlander and Highlander—through the meandering adventures of the otherwise unremarkable Edward Waverley. Elaborating the intimate relation between literary form and politics observed by Lukács, Ian Duncan’s *Modern Romance and Transformations of the Novel* (1992) posits that Waverley subjects an outmoded romance idealism to empiricist critique, thus creating a dialectical complicity between romance and history and a “privatizing aesthetic of conservative skepticism” (8). Concomitantly, a distinctly modern, British national subjectivity supplants allegiance to clan or to fief. Similarly, Ina Ferris’s *Achievement of Literary Authority* (1991) proposes that *Waverley*’s “Postscript which should have been a preface” synthesizes competing modes of history—official forms as practiced by Home and Selkirk and unofficial forms of personal anecdote—in order to create a discursive authority that surpasses either model. According to this critical tradition Scott arranges an encounter between competing ideologies, literary genres, and forms of discursive authority that generates a distinctly modern, national subjectivity manifest in the mediocre heroes of the Waverley novels, the distinctness of the historical novel as a genre, and in his primary authorial guise, “the Author of Waverley.”

assembly potentially exceeds the psychological complexity of historical experience itself.”<sup>7</sup> By contrast, Calder, Stevenson, Peterson, and Hewitt and other “modernizing” editors paradoxically revive a more uneven picture of the “Author of *Waverley*.” They shift our attention from the claim to authority over a coherent historical narrative to the alienating frames, digressive narrators, unassimilable fragments of historical minutiae, and exceptionally local detail that crowd the *Waverley* novels. In fact, these editors contribute to our understanding of the multiplicity, contingency, and possibility of Scott’s fictions. Hoping to discover a less pedantic Scott, that is, their scholarship unexpectedly demonstrates the irreducibly pedantic nature of his fictions.

Critics have perhaps been most attentive to Scott’s incoherence and fragmentation in readings of *The Antiquary* (1815), a novel that prominently thematizes the unreliability of narratives cobbled together from old documents, oral traditions, and physical evidence. They have characterized *The Antiquary*’s cultivated heterogeneity as mocking cohesion, irritating and agitating the reader against notions of stasis, and “critiquing the unifying narrative of Britishness.”<sup>8</sup> The novel’s incoherence is most visible in Jonathan Oldbuck, the eponymous antiquary. Situating Oldbuck within the discourses of sympathy and sensibility, recent scholarship demonstrates how Scott simultaneously critiques and indulges antiquarianism. Ina Ferris draws on Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1751) in order to argue that Oldbuck’s recondite enthusiasms set him outside the bounds

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<sup>7</sup> Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 151.

<sup>8</sup> See Robert C. Gordon, *Under Which King? A Study of the Scottish Waverley Novels*. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1969, 42; Robin Mayhead, “The Problem of Coherence in *The Antiquary*,” *Scott Bicentenary Essays: Selected papers read at the Sir Walter Scott Bicentenary Conference*, Ed. Alan Bell, New York: Barnes and Noble, 1973, 134-46; Caroline McCracken Flesher, *Possible Scotlands*, (Oxford University Press, 1999),



of professional history and hinder social sympathy.<sup>9</sup> Linking Oldbuck to popular caricatures of antiquaries, Mike Goode suggests that Scott's novel associates the "dryness" of such study with both an unmanly sensibility and political irresponsibility.<sup>10</sup> But, as Ferris and Goode each observe, Scott also frequently collapses the distance between Jonathan Oldbuck and the Author of *Waverley*, and thus suggests that - like the antiquarian - the historical novelist risks being dismissed as a pedant.

In fact, the *Waverley* novels became more pedantic at every stage of Scott's career, and their paratexts elaborate a contest between authorial intentions—particularly concerning plot—and pedantic passions, a contest in which the Author of *Waverley* repeatedly announces his failure to control the fictions he creates. The envoy to *A Legend of Montrose* (1819), understands the Author's incomplete command over his fictions with an analogy to Shakespeare's *Tempest*. Intended as the last installment of the *Tales of My Landlord*, the final pages of the *Legend* attribute the series to the Author of *Waverley* and part with Jedediah Cleishbotham as fictitious editor. To put the matter more accurately, these pages record Cleishbotham's premature evanescence; he disappears before the author has finished with him. The passage finds the Author's intentions scuttled by his fiction: "READER! THE TALES OF MY LANDLORD are now finally closed, and *it was my purpose* to have addressed thee in the vein of Jedediah Cleishbotham, but like Horam the son of Asmar, Jedediah has melted into thin air. Mr. Cleishbotham bore the same resemblance to Ariel, as he at whose voice he rose doth to the sage Prospero [...]."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ina Ferris, "Pedantry and the Question of Enlightenment History: The Figure of the Antiquary in Scott," *European Romantic Review*, Vol. 13, 273-283, 281.

<sup>10</sup> Goode, 90.

<sup>11</sup> Scott, *A legend of Montrose*. ed. J.H. Alexander (Edinburgh UP, 1995). My emphasis.

James Chandler observes that, by 1819, Scott was self-consciously playing up the parallels between his novels and Shakespeare's plays, and here those comparisons are made fully explicit.<sup>12</sup> Casting Cleishbotham as Ariel and the Author as Prospero, Scott reproduces Shakespeare's use of the enchanter as a mask. The parallel, however, goes further. Describing the Author's relationship with Jedediah as akin to that between Prospero and Ariel, Scott endows the schoolmaster-cum-editor with feelings and aspirations distinct from those of the Author. Further, the Author suggests that his fiction exceeds Shakespeare's in volition. Prospero releases Ariel, but Cleishbotham escapes the Author.

The Author couples his lack of absolute control with feelings disproportionate to their object, evoking the challenge of social sympathy Smith had imagined in his *Theory*. That is, Cleishbotham's disappearance not only frustrates authorial intention, it also highlights the Author's sentimental attachment to the persona. The Author confesses, "so fond are we of the fictions of our own fancy, that I part with him, and all his imaginary localities, with idle reluctance." Scott was well aware of Cleishbotham's tepid reception among critics and readers. Indeed, his own 1816 anonymous review of the first series of *Tales of My Landlord* for the *Quarterly* disparages Cleishbotham as a transparent fiction. In the envoy, Scott records the gulf between the impatience of readers and critics and the Author's sentimental attachment, acknowledging that this reluctance "is a feeling in which the reader will little sympathize." Scott thus compounds the limits of the novelist's authority, circumscribing his agency as a creator in relation to the demands of a public.

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<sup>12</sup> Chandler, *England in 1819*, 311 n. 12.

Closing the *Tales of My Landlord*, the Author of *Waverley* registers a tension between his desire to continue in the voice of Cleishbotham, and his sympathy for readers tired of the *Tales* and their garrulous editor. “I am sensible,” the Author assures his public, “that to persist would be useless and tedious.” In the *Legend*, the Author retires from the field, buffeted by feelings that characterize historical fiction as a sentimental enterprise in which authorship may not constitute authority.

Scott reproduces and amplifies this coupling of unsympathetic sentiments and the author’s lack of control in the “Introductory Epistle” to *The Fortunes of Nigel* (1822). There he stages a dialogue between Captain Clutterbuck—a retired soldier and antiquarian, whom Scott had previously used to frame the *Monastery*—and the Author of *Waverley*. Reporting the complaints of the public and critics, Clutterbuck urges the Author to make his novels more regular. Like the envoy to the *Legend*, the Author’s response to Clutterbuck attributes the incoherent shape of his narratives to feeling:

Alas, my dear sir, you do not know the force of paternal affection. —When I light on such a character as Baillie Jarvie, or Dalgetty, my imagination brightens, and my conception becomes clearer at every step which I make in his company, although it leads me many a weary mile away from the regular road, and forces me to leap hedge and ditch to get back into the route again (xxviii).

The Author fails to execute his novels according to plan because his paternal affection transforms the work of writing into a picaresque adventure that follows the digressive rambles undertaken by middle-aged adventurers like Nicol Jarvie and Dugald Dalgetty. Once again, Scott depicts the Author moved by feelings with which his interlocutor, and by extension his readers, cannot sympathize. Indulging these feelings prevents the act of writing from becoming “prosy, flat and dull” for the Author. But in doing so, he also

relinquishes control, and thereby frustrates his readers' desire for a well-managed plot. Like the antiquarian Oldbuck, the Author indulges sentiments that limit his access to sympathy. "Unable to regulate the articulation of his antiquarian passion through a sense of the other," Ferris observes that an antiquarian like Oldbuck "fails to bring his texts and conversations closer to the interests and capacities of his listeners/readers, and thus forfeits their sympathy in turn. He cannot find a public." To be sure, the Author of *Waverley* found a public. But at the margins of his fiction, Scott repeatedly depicts the Author as a pedant whose passionate attachment to his creations overwhelms his sense of propriety and order, leading him to indulge feelings in which his readers cannot sympathize.

Long before the financial exigency that brought the Magnum Opus to fruition, Scott repeatedly tested his readers' patience with exercises like the dialogue between the Author of *Waverley* and Captain Clutterbuck in *The Fortunes of Nigel*. As Scott made his novels more pedantic, he continually underscored the attendant risk of alienating readers in these paratexts, while studiously denying his ability to write otherwise. The divergence between recent editorial scholarship that reads these paratexts as trivial and historicist critiques that construe the same material as central to Scott's authority suggests the divisive effect of the *Waverley* novels' pedantries and the difficulty of arriving at a less pedantic Scott.

This chapter attempts to complicate our sense of Scott's organizing fiction - the Author of *Waverley* - by considering his narration as a corollary to the wandering bodies and minds of the Baron of Bradwardine and Dugald Dalgetty. In doing so, my argument

confronts the tendency of much scholarship to equate the historical narration of *Waverley* with Scott's "Postscript which should have been a preface." Ian Duncan observes that criticism has, at times, erroneously treated *Waverley* as if it were representative of all Scott's fiction. Duncan's readings of *Rob Roy* and *Redgauntlet* recover a Scott more alive to contemporary difference and whose fiction contributes to the range of political and aesthetic possibilities in the romantic era novel. Yet Duncan also ratifies the critical consensus according to which Scott's first novel uses enlightenment political economy to produce a historical survey whose transcendental authority represents cultural difference only to eradicate it.<sup>13</sup> In this respect, Duncan's reading of *Waverley* rests on the "Postscript." There, to be sure, the Author of *Waverley* adopts the discourse of uneven development to narrate the economic and social transformation of Scotland since the '45. But much as Duncan proposes that *Waverley* has been misconstrued as representative of Scott's novels as a whole, this chapter argues that the emphasis placed on the "Postscript" has distorted *Waverley* itself.

In fact, long before arriving at the "Postscript," *Waverley* strongly suggests that the relation between the Author's historical knowledge and his writing constitutes a comic mixture of caprice and ostentation. Digressing from the central narrative to consider the shape of the novel's twenty-fourth chapter, Scott proposes an intimate relation between style and the shape of historical narration. After a long examination of the texts that might be used to represent a highland hunt with historical accuracy, the Author promises to continue "without further tyranny over [his] readers, or display of the

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<sup>13</sup> Ian Duncan, *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 110.

extent of [his] own reading.” As in the paratexts that will accompany later novels, Scott depicts the Author torn between his own tyrannical desires and the need to accommodate an audience. “I shall,” the Author promises, “proceed in my story with all the brevity that my natural style of composition, partaking of what scholars call the periphrastic and ambagitory, and the vulgar the circumbendibus, will permit.” Collapsing substance into style, Scott renders the excessive subordination, prolixity, and synonymy of the Author’s clauses as the fundamental conditions of his narration. What the author’s style permits is precisely what his digression manifests, a narrative whose form bends back upon itself rather than moving smoothly forward.

Digression, motivated by pedantic attachments and the display of personal investments, becomes the structure of thought according to which *Waverley* interprets the records of declining cultural traditions, registering the hereditary resemblance of the Author and his intellectual forebear, the Baron of Bradwardine. Scott affiliates the Author with the Baron as he would later affiliate him with Nicol Jarvie and Dugald Dalgetty through a digressive prose style that reproduces the picaresque wanderings of these characters, an errancy predicated upon their professional, intellectual, and cultural attachments. In the course of his career, Scott would layer his novels in increasingly pedantic frames, and the character of “The Author of *Waverley*” would emerge alongside a host of narrative personae and characters who constantly risk alienating readers with passions that the average reader is likely to find “tedious and useless.”

From the first, Scott envisioned the Author of *Waverley* as a pedant. Through readings of Dugald Dalgetty in *A Legend of Montrose* (1819) and the Baron of

Bradwardine in *Waverley*, this chapter argues that Scott conceives of pedantry as a hermeneutic position with the potential to unsettle the supposed coherency of partisan labels. Eschewing disinterested objectivity, Dalgetty and the Baron indulge personal passions that allow them to achieve a vivid—if partial—perspective as interpreters of political slogans, heraldry, and historical narrative. For Scott, pedants like Dalgetty and the Baron occupy a paradoxical cultural position. They are both cosmopolitans, shaped by years spent on the continent as soldiers employed in foreign wars, and representatives of a putatively authentic Scottish narrative perspective. In the *Legend*, Ranald MacEagh registers this paradox when he addresses Dalgetty as “Sassenach” and then reprimands the loquacious mercenary for wasting his breath on “tales of Seanachies. McEagh’s commentary gestures toward the tangled relation between the pedant’s status as outsider – one capable of achieving an interpretive vantage on things that go unremarked by virtue of social convention – and his status as a story-teller. In Dalgetty and the Baron, I argue, Scott explores pedantry as a habit of mind and a mode of expression marked by its own uneven development—an individual, internal corollary for Scotland’s place in stadial history that embodies the contradictions that define historical fiction.

## II. Watchwords

In the previous chapter I argued that Coleridge seizes on pedantry as a means to overcome the conditioned responses that partisan language cultivates among the reading public. Scott’s *A Legend of Montrose* also examines political slogans, and, like the

*Biographia*, suggests that pedantry affords a critical perspective on partisan language. But where the *Biographia* employs pedantry as a rhetoric, the *Legend* depicts pedantry as an interpretive standpoint. Specifically, the novel subjects mid-seventeenth-century political mottoes to the scrutiny of Dugald Dalgetty, a mercenary in search of employment.

In Dalgetty, Scott unites the forward-looking, peripatetic heroism characteristic of his typically young protagonists and the verbose, digressive humor he more often allots to marginal, middle-aged characters. Scott first hints at Dalgetty's pedantry in the extraordinarily complicated response he provides to a seemingly simple question: "For whom are you?" Dalgetty replies with evasions, qualifications, and, eventually, a lengthy survey of political catchphrases. His remarks suggest, on the one hand, that one partisan slogan is as good as another. They are, he observes, "[g]ood watchwords all"(22). On the other hand, his commentary demonstrates that the rallying cries of any specific adherent to a cause arise from irreducibly particular self-interests. Rather than identifying opposed parties, political labels become an object for analysis. Dalgetty thus transforms passwords into puzzles.

Dalgetty's status as a mercenary has led some readers to discount his perspective on the basis that he simply aligns himself with the highest bidder; his skepticism and reserve have no significance beyond self-interest. David Simpson deems the old soldado the embodiment of mercenary immorality.<sup>14</sup> On his reading, Scott attributes loftier motives to the eponymous mercenary-hero of *Quentin Durward* (1822), while Dalgetty constitutes a scoundrel concerned only with profit. Scott's account of Dalgetty and of

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<sup>14</sup> Erik Simpson, "'A Good One Though Rather for the Foreign Market': Mercenary Writing and Scott's *Quentin Durward*," *Studies in Romanticism*, 48.4 (2009) 671 n. 22.



mercenary feeling is more conflicted and complex than Simpson acknowledges. In the *Legend*, as in his poetry, mercenaries manifest a passionate attachment to professional activity – an almost erotic love of their employment that resonates with romantic accounts of the pedant.

Describing literature as “my staff, but not my crutch,” he regarded the life of a professional author as beneath a gentleman, and often insisted that his literary income was incidental and unnecessary.<sup>15</sup> As Simpson observes, Scott’s sense of himself as a gentleman amateur rather than a mercenary writer suffered a serious blow following the release of *Marmion* in 1808. Reviews implied that Scott wrote his blockbuster solely to generate income. Byron surpassed the reviews when he lambasted Scott for writing *Marmion* “for hire” in his verse satire, *English Bards and Scots Reviewers*. Still unsettled by the accusation two years later, Scott wrote to the young poet in order to clear himself “from any tinge of mercenary feeling in the eyes of a contemporary of genius.”<sup>16</sup> Scott’s letter highlights not only his sensitivity to an aristocrat’s accusation that he writes for pay, but also an emerging tendency to link the figure of the mercenary to that of the professional writer. Following the thrashing *Marmion* received, Scott often deprecated “mercenary” motives when he wrote about professional authorship. So, for instance, in *The Fortunes of Nigel*, “The Author of Waverley” seeks to “exculpate [himself] from the charge of being either of a greedy or mercenary disposition,” assuring Captain Clutterbuck, that, “no work of imagination proceeding from the mere consideration of a

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<sup>15</sup> Scott, *Poetical Works*, (Oxford University Press, 1971), ed. J Logie Robertson, 51.

<sup>16</sup> Scott, *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. H. J. C. Grierson, 12 vols. (London: Constable, 1932–37).V. 138. Quoted in Simpson, 669.

certain sum of copy-money, ever did or ever will succeed.”<sup>17</sup> Speaking in the guise of “the Author,” Scott disavows mercenary feeling as an impoverished source of motivation, insufficient to the labors of the historical novelist.

Despite repeated disavowals of this nature, the mercenary remained a powerful figure for Scott’s ambivalence concerning his own status as a best-selling author. Whereas the Author of *Waverley* as depicted in the *Fortunes of Nigel* restricts the motives available in mercenary feeling to the consideration of a copy-sum, elsewhere Scott envisions mercenaries moved by passionate absorption in their professional activity. Only months after Byron’s *English Bards and Scots Reviewers* had appeared in print, Scott was again before the public with *The Lady of the Lake*, depicting an imaginary seventeenth century conflict between the King of Scotland and a rebellious highland clan. In the final canto, Scott depicts a group of English and continental mercenaries in service to James V:

These drew not for their fields the sword,  
Like tenants of a feudal lord,  
Nor owned the patriarchal claim  
Of chieftain in their leader's name;  
Adventurers they, from far who roved,  
To live by battle which they loved.<sup>18</sup>

Explicitly denying the soldiers’ obeisance to the supposedly durable commitments of feudal or patriarchal authority – authorities undermined throughout the poem by Clan McAlpine’s insurrection – Scott’s narrator characterizes the mercenaries’ motives not as mere cupidity, but rather as lusty wandering, freedom, and a roving whose meanings are compounded by rhyme and association.

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<sup>17</sup> Scott, *The Fortunes of Nigel* (Edinburgh University Press: 1995) 14.

<sup>18</sup> Scott, *The Lady of the Lake*, Canto Sixth, III, 1-6, in *Poetical Works*, 262.

Scott's lines recall the refrain to "The Jolly Beggar," a ballad that depicts a vagabond who secures lodging with a farmer, deflowers the farmer's daughter, and – depending on the version – reveals his nobility or simply absconds. In all of its versions the song strongly associates "roving," libidinous desire, and infidelity, particularly in those versions which include the refrain:

And we'll gang nae mair a roving  
                   Sae late into the night,  
 And we'll gang nae mair a roving,  
                   Let the moon shine ne'er sae bright!<sup>19</sup>

Byron would famously draw on these lines for "So we'll go no more a roving" in 1817. Scott anticipates Byron not only in evoking the "Jolly Beggar's" content, but also in developing a rhyme absent from the ballad. Scott's "roved/loved" and Byron's "roving/loving" each connect physical errancy with powerful affect.

Unlike Byron's lyric, however, Scott's lines also draw on the complicated, speculative critical history of "The Jolly Beggar" in order to thicken the portrayal of his mercenaries. Although David Herd published a version of the ballad as early as 1776 in his *Ancient Scottish Songs*, Scott and other early ballad collectors, including Thomas Percy, deemed the work "too licentious" for print. Rather than merely ignore the song, however, Percy instead gave it special notice. In the headnote to the similarly themed "Gabberlunzie Man," he notes that, "[t]radition assures us" that the author of both ballads "was K. James V. of Scotland. This prince [...] was noted for strolling about his

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<sup>19</sup> *Select Scottish Songs, Ancient and Modern; with Critical Observations and Biographical Notices by Robert Burns*, edited by R.H. Cromek, (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1810), Vol. I, 53. Googlebooks. Web.

dominions in disguise, and for his frequent gallantries with country girls.”<sup>20</sup> For his part, Scott made clear the connection between *The Lady of the Lake* and “The Jolly Beggar.” In his 1830 introduction Scott recounts his dismay at a listener’s premature realization that the poem’s protagonist, the wandering knight Fitz-James is the disguised James V. “He was probably thinking,” Scott observes, “of the lively, but somewhat licentious old ballad.” Thanks to “The Jolly Beggar,” Scott’s listener recognizes the disguised James in *The Lady of the Lake*. Scott’s evocation of the “Jolly Beggar” when he describes the mercenaries in the final canto, then, forges a subtle connection between the spirit in which they engage in warfare and King James’s reported gallantries. As the extension of roving, fighting and loving become analogous activities - activities that forgo fidelity to a single commitment in favor of the ability to pursue one’s passion in various contexts. *The Lady of the Lake* suffuses mercenary feeling with poetic resonance and subversive danger.

Like the *Lady of the Lake*, *A Legend of Montrose* begins in a time of civil war with a disguised noble. Set during the early, victorious campaigns that the royalist Earl of Montrose waged against the covenanting Duke of Argyll in the Highlands between 1644 and 1645, the *Legend’s* central narrative depicts a love triangle between the Earl of Menteith, his childhood friend Allan M’Aulay, and the object of their mutual affection, Annot Lyle. The M’Aulays have raised Annot as an adopted child since rescuing her from the MacEaghs, a primitive clan of Highlanders known as “the Children of the mist” against whom the M’Aulays wage a longstanding blood feud. Shortly after the climactic

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<sup>20</sup> Thomas Percy, *Reliques of ancient English poetry: consisting of old heroic ballads, songs, and other pieces of our earlier poets, (chiefly of the lyric kind.) Together with some few of later date.* Vol. 2. Second edition. London, MDCCLXVII. [1767]. Web. Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

royalist victory at Tippermuir, Annot's nobility is discovered, and Menteith immediately weds her. In a jealous rage Allan M'Aulay stabs Menteith, flees the Royalist camp, and - according to rumor - perishes at the hands of the MacEaghs. For most of *A Legend of Montrose*, however, Scott subordinates this romance plot to Dalgetty's quasi-picaresque adventures.

By and large, Scott's contemporaries dismissed *A Legend of Montrose* as a lackluster entry among the Waverley novels. But they also took note of Dalgetty. In an early review, Francis Jeffrey complains that the novel is "of the nature of a sketch or fragment," but he also extols Scott's affinity with Shakespeare and compares Dalgetty to Falstaff.<sup>21</sup> Later, Coleridge concurred with Jeffrey in his marginalia, opining that "[i]f Sir Walter Scott could on any fair ground be compared with Shakespeare, I should select the character of Dalgetty as best supporting the claim." In an omnibus review of the Waverley novels for the *Quarterly Review*, Nassau Senior emphasized Dalgetty's paradoxical appeal. On the one hand, the mercenary conforms to a familiar type within Scott's fiction, what Senior terms "the Bore." On the other hand, Dalgetty is "perhaps the best drawn character" in *A Legend of Montrose*:

The whole length portrait of a *mere mercenary*, whom constant exposure to the violence of his enemies, and the selfishness of his friends, had covered with a callous integument, equally proof against fear, generosity, and delicacy, would have been tiresome, *but for the ludicrous tinge of a pedantry*, partly scholastic, partly military, and partly national;—and the wild figures among whom he is placed show off well his regulated vices and his mechanical virtues.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Francis Jeffrey, *Contributions to The Edinburgh Review*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1846) III, 77. Web. Googlebooks.

<sup>22</sup> Nassau Senior, unsigned review in *The Quarterly Review* (October 1821) xxvi, 109-148, Reprinted in *Walter Scott: The Critical Heritage*, ed. John O. Hayden, (New York: Routledge, 1995) 234.

For Senior, Scott's accomplishment in Dalgetty resides in the seemingly incongruous pairing of the mercenary with a familiar satiric type – the pedant. In his reading, indecorous displays of professional passions and preoccupations, the very excesses that make a pedant a tiresome conversationalist, elevate Dalgetty as a fiction. Indeed, Dalgetty's defining trait is his garrulous manner of speech, and it's this characteristic that invites Jeffrey, Coleridge, and numerous other commentators to ratify Scott's Shakespearean pretensions. The only resemblance between Falstaff and Dalgetty is a disposition to say too much.

Scott establishes Dalgetty's status as a pedant with the first dialogue exchanged in the novel. After a characteristically elaborate framing, the main narrative begins in earnest on a narrow mountain pass somewhere between the lowlands of Perthshire and the Highlands. Ascending the pass, Menteith and the disguised Earl of Montrose encounter the heavily armed Dalgetty. Approaching the unaccompanied mercenary, Menteith calls out: "For whom are you?" Dalgetty frustrates Menteith by insisting that the larger party should identify themselves first. Their repartee recalls the similar exchange between Francisco and Barnardo, the sentries in *Hamlet* act I, scene 1. In his 1818 lecture on Hamlet, Coleridge had argued that Barnardo's opening line - "Who's there?" – derives much of its power from Francisco's fearful rejoinder – "Nay, *answer me*: stand and unfold yourself." Barnardo's response – "Long live the King" – highlights the earliest and most literal sense of a "watchword," a short utterance employed as a password when a sentinel keeps watch. When Dalgetty refuses to answer, Menteith identifies his party with just such a watchword. "We," Menteith announces, "are for God

and King Charles.” To be sure, Menteith and Dalgetty fear what they see more than any ghostly presence. Yet the verbal and dramatic echoes between Shakespeare’s play and Scott’s novel create a sense of uncanny anachronism. The three kingdoms are not yet so rotten as Hamlet’s Denmark, but this terse exchange between a Cavalier and a mercenary conjures the specter of impending regicide, slaughter, and ruin that await England, Scotland, and Ireland in the 1650’s.

In what follows, Scott uses these interlocutors to explore the relationship between warfare, partisan feeling, and abstract moral values, most notably in Dalgetty’s examination of “watchwords.” But the sharp, concise language with which the dialogue begins quickly proves unnatural to Dalgetty. He refuses to return Menteith’s watchword or provide his own. His evasions become lengthier and lengthier. Finally he confesses he is a mercenary without an employer. This lack of allegiance puzzles and fascinates Menteith, and he invites Dalgetty to join the Royalists at a nearby house where they plan to spend the night. As they ride to their lodging, Dalgetty narrates his adventures in the Thirty Years War. He details his service first to the protestant hero Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden, then to Adolphus’s catholic rival Wallenstein, next to the Spanish, and finally to the Dutch. He has served on opposing sides of the same conflict twice. Dalgetty’s speech and his curriculum vitae are each in that style that, according to the Author of *Waverley*, “scholars call the periphrastic and ambagitory, and the vulgar the circumbendibus” – his narration reproduces his roving through the Continent (*Waverley* 116).

Scott uses Dalgetty’s circumlocution as a foil for Menteith’s partisan rhetoric. Committed to the royalist cause and its discourse, the Cavalier is either unwilling or

incapable of fully grasping the contradiction and infidelity Dalgetty's narrative manifests. He interprets the mercenary according to his own partisan assumptions, ignoring Dalgetty's willingness to fight for Protestants and Catholics alike, for monarchs and the petite bourgeoisie. Instead, he emphasizes Dalgetty's fond recollections of Gustavus Adolphus and his unfavorable impression of the Dutch military, and thus speculates that "a cavalier of your honourable marks would embrace King Charles, in preference to round-headed, canting knaves in rebellion" (30-31). Here Menteith slyly exploits the ambiguity of "cavalier," implicitly labeling Dalgetty not only as a cavalryman but also an adherent of the royalist party. Dalgetty acknowledges the appeal of Menteith's proposals, but, he dryly notes "fine words butter no parsnips." Dalgetty's maxim suggests that crass self-interest may serve a productive end after all.

Scott credits Dalgetty with the capacity and the motivation to carefully consider the partisanship that divides mid-seventeenth-century Britain precisely because the mercenary lacks a meaningful commitment to kirk or to kingdom. Lodged at a highland manor where the Earl of Montrose will shortly rally a force of Highlanders, Irishmen, and English Cavaliers, Dalgetty explains to Menteith that since returning to the British Isles, he has been inundated with partisan slogans. "Loyalty is your pass-word, my lord—Liberty, roars another from the other side of the strath—The King, shouts one war-cry—the Parliament, roars another." For Dalgetty, this language is instrumental, a means of recruitment and nothing more. Further, his survey notes the underlying matrix of social, regional, and professional investments that conditions political speech. "Montrose forever, cries Donald waving his bonnet—Argyle and Leven, cries a south-country



Saunders, vapouring with his hat and feather. Fight for the bishop says a priest, with his gown and rochet—Stand stout for the Kirk, cries a minister in a Geneva cap and band.” Recalling Burke’s discussion of “habit” in the *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Dalgetty correlates language, region, dress, occupation, and political sentiment. But unlike Burke, Dalgetty countenances the validity of both sides of the conflict. These are, “Good watchwords all—excellent watchwords. Whilk cause is the best I cannot say. But sure am I, that I have fought knee-deep in blood many a day for one that was ten degrees worse than the worst of them all”(22). In Dalgetty’s analysis, the oppositions between Highlands and Lowlands, between Catholicism and Presbyterianism, between Parliament and Crown become functions of mere custom and historical accident rather than meaningful political distinctions. As with the allusion to Hamlet in the novel’s first dialogue, Dalgetty’s analysis of the civil war and its discourse anachronistically gestures toward the looming events of the early 1650’s, including the unification of the Covenanters and Royalists behind Charles II after the treaty of Breda, and Cromwell’s subsequent invasion and conquest of Scotland.

Scott exploits the tension between Dalgetty’s pedantic attachments and the inconstancy that defines his mercenary feeling in order to endow the character with an anachronistic prescience. In his survey of political sloganeering during the Wars of the Three Kingdoms, the mercenary looks beyond the apparent durability of the religious and political alliance between Kirk and Parliament to implicitly anticipate its dissolution and reversal. Having repeatedly switched sides in the Thirty-Years War, Dalgetty is prepared for the eventual reversal of fortune that will see him abandon the royalist cause and take

up with the Covenanters before the conflict, and the novel reach their end. Having once more changed sides, Dalgetty nullifies his professions of fidelity to the royalist cause, but he also ensures the restitution of his family estate, Drumthwacket, through marriage to the widow of a Covenanter. In this respect, Dalgetty's mercenary action makes possible the postscript to the novel's events, narrated in its final sentence: "Sir Dugald is supposed to have survived the Revolution, as traditions of no very distant date represent him as cruising about in that country, very old, very deaf, and very full of interminable stories about the immortal Gustavus Adolphus, the Lion of the North, and bulwark of the Protestant faith" (331). Adopting Dalgetty's customary phrase for the Swedish King and acknowledging his advancement from commoner to knight, Scott collapses the distance between himself as narrator and his mercenary. Unlike Edward Waverley's shifting allegiances to opposed political and ethical outcomes—a wavering that ultimately resolves into loyalty to the Hanoverian state—Dalgetty retains his mercenary feeling as he roves the countryside eager to tell his tales. Divorced from the social and political ramifications that attend social life and the judgments of aristocratic geniuses like Byron, the *Legend* entertains the literary as a space in which pedantic, mercenary feeling may constitute the very grounds of historical narrative, an animating passion that drives Dalgetty and his author between competing political, religious, and otherwise sectarian camps without resolving into doctrine and stasis.

### III. Unfaithful Anecdotes

The parting description of the aged Dalgetty consummates Scott's image of the storyteller as pedant. Dalgetty's deafness finally becomes literal, while his mercenary roving is refigured as the wandering of a garrulous old man in search of an audience. At the novel's conclusion as elsewhere, Dalgetty's endless, pedantic anecdotes suggest his status as surrogate and forebear for the historical novelist. James Chandler has argued that circa 1819 the anecdote (as well as the specimen and the case) assumed unprecedented significance in British literary culture, and for Scott in particular. Chandler's understanding of the anecdote in Scott draws heavily on Kenneth Burke's account of "representative anecdote" in *A Grammar of Motives* (1941). According to Burke, such anecdotes develop selections of reality in order to produce "vocabularies that will be faithful *reflections* of reality."<sup>23</sup> For Chandler, Burke's concept of the representative anecdote exemplifies a mediating form that applies circumstance to rule and vice versa, a dialectic form that gave rise to a distinctly reflexive romantic historicism. Scott's earliest readers were quick to observe the central role of anecdote to the historical imaginings of the Waverley novels. But the same readers also remark that the novels frequently reflect the historical materials that furnished their basis in terms that are emphatically unfaithful, particularly when depicting the eccentricities of characters who share the Author's enthusiasms for the past.

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<sup>23</sup> Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: Univ of California Press, 1941) 59, original emphasis.

Virtually from the moment it appeared in print, contemporaries remarked that *Waverley* afforded instruction and delight by virtue of its “accurate” anecdotes. The *British Critic* of August 1814 recommends Scott’s first novel to English readers “as containing a treasure of anecdote...which few but the author of the present tale could so accurately present or so artfully embody.” For the unsigned reviewer, *Waverley* is at its best in short episodes that realistically and entertainingly execute historical portraits of Scottish characters and locales. The *British Critic*’s emphasis on anecdote as a mode of historical representation anticipates collections like *Illustrations of the Author of Waverley* (1825) and the *Waverley Anecdotes* (1833). Frequently reprinted throughout the nineteenth century, such collections formally align Scott’s historicism with anecdote by documenting the veracity of characters and customs depicted in the fiction. Burke’s account of representative anecdotes aptly describes the relationship between the specimens Scott provides his readers of Scottish life and manners that, for early readers at least, seem to faithfully reflect the whole of which they constitute parts

But the *Waverley* novels yielded more than one variety of anecdote in the eyes of early readers. In fact, thinking about and categorizing Scott’s anecdotes served as a means of negotiating the problematic relationship between the parts and wholes of the *Waverley* novels, a means of separating the representative from the peculiar, the delightful and instructive from the pedantic. From the first, readers objected that Scott’s fiction depicted historical subject matter in a patently unfaithful manner. Although the *British Critic* celebrates *Waverley* as a repository of accurate, representative Scottish anecdote, the review also repeatedly qualifies its appreciation of the novel with

complaints concerning the Baron of Bradwardine, finally dismissing the character as evidence of Scott's attachment to the "peculiarities of his country," one of the "trifling inaccuracies" that readers must set aside to enjoy *Waverley*.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, in a letter to R.P. Gillies, William Wordsworth praises the "great spirit" of Scott's pictures of highland manners and characters, and then objects that the Baron of Bradwardine "and all the circumstances in which he is exhibited, are too peculiar and *outré*."<sup>25</sup> The Baron, these critics and readers object, is not a faithful representation.

Such criticisms reproduce the terms in which *Waverley* itself highlights the Baron's peculiarity. Shortly after entertaining Edward with performances of Celtic song and poetry, Flora attempts to parse the Baron's character for her guest. Initially Flora's account of the Baron resonates with Burke's description of the representative anecdote. She explains that Bradwardine is "the very model of the old Scotch cavalier," and thus representative of "a character...which is fast disappearing," a vanishing class of historical agents. His faithful adherence to the Stuart cause mirrors his faithful reflection of the Jacobite aristocracy. But as she elaborates, Flora rejects the Baron as a representative of the lowland aristocracy, insisting that his "peculiarities," constitute "habits inconsistent with [his] birth and breeding." The Baron frustrates Flora's desire to faithfully represent historical culture because, as she understands it, his pedantry manifests his errancy from the model of the old Scottish cavalier. Implicitly advocating the Jacobite rebellion, Flora exhorts Edward to "hope a brighter day is approaching when a Scottish country-

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<sup>24</sup> Unsigned Review, *British Critic*, August 1814, ns ii, 189-211, reprinted in *Walter Scott: The Critical Heritage*, ed. John O. Hayden, (New York: Routledge, 1995), 67-74, 73.

<sup>25</sup> *Letters of Dorothy and William Wordsworth: The Middle Years*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt, Oxford UP 1937), reprinted in *Walter Scott: The Critical Heritage*, ed. John O. Hayden, (New York: Routledge, 1995), 86-87, original emphasis.

gentleman may be a scholar without the pedantry of our friend the Baron.” Envisioning a less pedantic Scotland, Flora’s proscriptive hope treats the peculiarity of the Baron as extraneous detail, an inconsistency that the Jacobite restoration will eradicate. When the *British Critic* and Wordsworth object to the Baron’s peculiarity, they reproduce Flora’s desire to separate a pedant’s rambling from the vanishing cultural traditions she meticulously displays for Waverley in her bower.

For Flora the value of these traditions inheres in their usefulness, their ability to advance the Jacobite restoration. Notwithstanding his political principles, the Baron stands in marked contrast to Flora in this respect. Early in *Waverley* the Author closely associates the Baron’s pedantry with his fondness for useless anecdote. Following a morning spent hunting deer, Bradwardine escorts Waverley back to Tully-Veolan, informing his guest of local history as they travel a “pleasant and circuitous route” that mirrors his narration. Passing neighboring villages and houses, the Baron attaches “to each...some anecdote of history or genealogy, told in language whimsical from prejudice and pedantry, but often respectable for the good sense and honourable feeling which his narratives displayed, and almost always curious if not valuable for the information they contained”(56). The narrator carefully separates pleasure from usefulness in order to qualify the interest of Bradwardine’s anecdotes. Crucially, the Baron’s literary sensibilities dictate that the nature of this pleasure is historical rather than poetic. Indifferent to most English poetry, the narrator proposes that the Baron prefers the “cold, dry, outlines which history delineates.” As the Baron and Waverley chart their circuitous

return to Tully-Veolan following the hunt, Bradwardine relates not a coherent history of the neighborhood, but a series of curious, whimsical, and pedantic anecdotes.

These “minute narratives” become the basis for the budding relationship between the Baron and Waverley, and his tales model the transmission of historical knowledge that the Author of *Waverley* identifies as one source of his narrative in the Postscript. It might seem, then, that the Author suggests an implicit analogy that likens the Author to Edward and the Author’s sources to the Baron. But the Author describes Waverley’s relationship to the Baron in terms that anticipate the early critical tradition that treats Scott’s fictions as stores of anecdote. According to the Author, Waverley returns to Tully-Veolan from the hunt “desirous of studying more attentively what he considered as a singular and interesting character gifted with a memory containing a curious register of ancient and modern anecdotes” (57). Waverley here treats the Baron as a repository of curious anecdote available for study.

In their divergent attitudes toward the Baron, Flora and Waverley highlight the highly subjective line that separates the Baron’s peculiarity into the tedious and useless on the one hand and the curious and entertaining on the other. This divided understanding of the Waverley novels extends far beyond the Baron of Bradwardine. In *Diamonds from the Waverley Mine* (1871), Joseph Cauvin treats the Waverley novels as a mass of worthless materials concealing gems. Cauvin transforms his own experience reading the novels and extracting their sententiae into a commodity that promises readers all of the moral instruction of the novels without their considerable distractions. In his 1881 biography, Robert Holt Hutton remarks that Scott’s attempts to amuse frequently

miss the mark, boring readers to an extent that is “beyond endurance.” “Dalgetty,” Hutton insists, “bores you almost as much as he would do in real life,— which is a great fault in art. Bradwardine becomes a nuisance.” The problem with such characters and, at least according to Cauvin, the problem with the Waverley novels in general is that they ask readers to *endure* pedants who reproduce the same failure as the anecdotes they tell. Focusing on trivia and eccentricity, the Baron, Dalgetty and a host of similar figures convey an “*outré*” representation of national characters that bores audiences and that may even do harm.

Pedantry has most often been discussed in the case of Scott as an inability to reasonably manage the relationship between particulars and abstractions, between practice and theory. This is unquestionably true. But the most threatening risks of pedantry sometimes seem to arise from a slightly different issue. Focused on process (whether theoretical abstractions or concrete particulars), the pedant risks losing sight of outcomes. The pedant, we might say, seems unconcerned with teleology. Dalgetty’s adventures as an emissary to the Covenanters exemplify this issue. Arriving at Ardenvohr, the enemy stronghold in Argyll, he blithely criticizes the castle’s defenses, while its owner, Sir Duncan Campbell, escorts him through the fortress. Insensible to Sir Duncan’s attempts to silence his observations, Dalgetty exhorts the Highlander to erect earthen battlements on a nearby hill, digressing into an anecdote concerning “the custom of the valorous Gustavus Adolphus to fight as much by the spade and shovel, as by sword, pike, and musquet”(81) When Sir Duncan unceremoniously walks out of the apartment in the middle of the mercenary’s suggestions for the arrangement of palisades,



Dalgetty indignantly declares Campbell an “old Highland brute,” admonishing that “here he has missed an opportunity of making his house as pretty an irregular fortification as an invading army ever broke their teeth upon.”<sup>26</sup> Oblivious or indifferent to the likelihood that he would number among those breaking their teeth upon the defenses he recommends, Dalgetty fails both to judge the effect of his speech on his audience and to consider the full implications of his proposals for himself and his comrades in arms. Besotted by his fascinations with the theory of warfare, Dalgetty is blind to the social discomfort he creates and to the harm he may do himself.

In his Introduction to the Magnum Opus edition of the *Legend*, Scott himself verges on suggesting that Dalgetty interferes with the novel’s ability to reach its ends, that he is too peculiar an anecdote to serve the novel’s telos. Chuffed by Jeffrey’s comments on the “Old Soldado,” Scott quotes a long selection of the *Edinburgh Review* praising the likeness between Dalgetty and Falstaff. But before quoting Jeffrey at length, Scott labors to justify the mercenary’s inclusion in the *Legend*, characterizing him as a means of enlivening the novel with “a personage proper to the time and country.” What Dalgetty enlivens, however, is a historical episode that Scott himself terms a “tragedy.” If Dalgetty is proper to the time and place of mid-seventeenth century Britain, he also appears distinctly ill-suited to the occasion. “*The Legend of Montrose* was written,” Scott asserts in the Introduction, “chiefly with a view to put before the reader the melancholy fate of John Kilpont, eldest son of William Earl of Airth and Mentieth, and the singular circumstances attending the birth of James Stewart of Ardvoirlich, by whose hand he

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

fell.”<sup>27</sup> In the frame of *The Fortunes of Nigel*, Scott had already cited Dalgetty as one of the characters in whose company the Author of *Waverley* finds his intentions diverted. Writing in 1830, Scott again suggests that, tracing Dalgetty’s adventures, the *Legend* wanders “many a weary mile from the regular road” that would lead to John Kilpont’s melancholy fate (*Fortunes* xxviii). The *Legend* eventually wends its way back to its protagonists and their tragic interaction, but in the process Scott’s specimen of a Scottish mercenary very nearly displaces the principal historical anecdote that, at least according to the Introduction, the novel was intended to place before its readers. Occupying more of the novel’s narrative space than Menteith and Allan combined, Dalgetty is not simply a minor character who enlivens Scott’s representation of betrayal in time of civil war.

The retrospective attempt to justify Dalgetty is even more curious, however, viewed against the nearly complete transformation of the anecdote Scott identifies as the basis of the *Legend*. As the 1830 Introduction explains, the assassination of John Kilpont by James Stewart is “considerably altered in the fictitious narrative” of the *Legend* (142). In fact, Kilpont died, and Stewart’s personal disloyalty was compounded by his defection to Argyll’s forces. Fighting for the Covenanters, Stewart advanced to the rank of Major and found rich reward. Scott’s admittedly considerable alterations of these events include the love triangle between Menteith, M’Aulay, and Annot that motivates the attempted murder; M’Aulay’s prophetic anticipation that he will stab Menteith; Menteith’s complete recovery; and M’Aulay’s death. In the context of these additions and changes, we might ask, what had Scott refrained from enlivening in the *Legend*? Elsewhere in the *Tales of*

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<sup>27</sup> Walter Scott, *Legend of Montrose*, xi.

*My Landlord*, Scott had altered historical anecdotes with a considerably lighter touch, preserving the outcomes of the tales on which they were founded. *The Heart of Midlothian* adds considerably to the tale of Helen Walker, yoking her actions to the Porteous Rebellion, but the anecdote at the center of the novel is essentially unchanged. So too, the *Legend*'s companion piece, *The Bride of Lammermoor*, preserves the essential outline of Janet Dalrymple's "melancholy fate." The *Legend* departs from the practice of those works and supplants the melancholy fate of Kilpont with the domestic bliss of Menteith and Annot Lyle.

It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that Scott's alterations accomplish nothing more than a happy ending. To the contrary, *A Legend of Montrose* disarticulates the personal and the political meanings of James Stewart's betrayal in order to imagine an ethically defensible infidelity. The most salient revision of the Kilpont anecdote is the disparity between James Stewart's disloyalty and that of Allan M'Aulay. Allan's fictional transgression is unpremeditated, a crime of passion carried out by a madman that leads to his own death. The *Legend* thus mitigates the murder of Kilpont by his intimate friend, while displacing the turncoat Stewart's political infidelity from Allan onto Dalgetty. Just as Stewart had, Dalgetty shifts his allegiance from the Royalists cause to the Covenanters. And like Stewart he profits handsomely. But by allotting these parts of Stewart's experience to a mercenary, the *Legend* also confounds fiction and reality. Dalgetty changes sides, but he does so without the taint of betrayal. Imprisoned first at Inverlochy and again much later in the conflict, Dalgetty twice refuses to betray his commitment to the Crown in order to secure his own release. Dalgetty very nearly

becomes “a martyr, not to this or that political principle, but merely to his own strict ideas of a military enlistment.” He risks his own life in order to remain loyal for the final two weeks he had committed himself only after his contractual obligation has been fulfilled does he change his allegiance.

The *Legend* countenances the manifold infidelities of James Stewart with its own unfaithful anecdotes. The novel separates political and personal internecine betrayal, reconstituting faithlessness as madness and pedantry. The 1830 Introduction may retrospectively clarify the relationship between reality and fiction, but it cannot undo their confounding in the novel’s characters and plot. To be sure, the Introduction identifies a source for the novel’s representation by making explicit the Stewart-Kilpont anecdote. But in doing so the *Magnum Opus* raises more questions than it answers: about the considerable alteration of the tale, about the insertion of Dalgetty, and about the nature of infidelity. Throughout the *Legend* Scott had thematized infidelity, especially in Dalgetty’s exchanges with Montrose and Argyll. In the Introduction, Scott confesses that he himself has faithlessly wandered from the task he had set himself. Neglecting its stated aim, the *Legend* discovers Scott’s most celebrated pedant.

#### IV. The Noble, Honourable, and Useful Science of Heraldry

Scott’s compulsion to wander from the regular road, to ramble out of the straight line that would arrive at his intended historical telos, might seem diametrically opposed to the narrative work of heraldry. With fixed lines and distinct colors, the herald produces

an emblem for historical events that identify the bearer. In his account of clerical liberalism, and Scott himself as herald, Jerome Christensen suggests that, “[t]he crest gives to events their ordonnance. The adept herald need only distribute the variables of devices and blazons, of ruling line and color, in a certain proportion to convince.”<sup>28</sup> Christensen’s canny reading of *Waverley* demonstrates how Scott’s characters may cross the heraldic “bar” and thus produce a virtual ekphrasis of an always, as yet unrealized world picture. This sense of heraldic mechanics seems most apparent in Christensen’s reading of Edward on glimpsing Sir Everhard’s carriage and the crest it bears. On glimpsing the carriage Edward immediately recognizes the crest as his own and wishes to claim the carriage as his own. “That recognition,” Christensen argues, “is not (or at least is no longer) something that fathers can or need teach—Richard Waverley is out of the picture—for the crest is the pattern of paternity itself, which transcends biological connection and preempts the arbitrary intervention of pedagogues.” Here, Edward recognizes his own crest with a native genius, but elsewhere Scott unsettles the “pattern of paternity,” allowing the herald’s lines and devices to bend, bleed, and fade. By glossing an arcane symbolic language intelligible only to the initiated, students of heraldry gains access to visual narratives that (sometimes) represent historical events, which coats-of-arms assign transhistorically to their bearers. But when the Baron of Bradwardine offers an exegesis of his crest, Scott suggests that heraldry may be vertiginously difficult to interpret. The Bradwardine Bear constitutes neither an unambiguous instance of the heraldic device as verbal/visual pun nor an uncontested

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<sup>28</sup>Jerome Christensen, *Romanticism at the End of History*, (Johns Hopkins, 1999), 164.

ordering of historical events. Instead, examining the Bear, the Baron and Edward wander among a series of competing referents and associations.

Heraldry is most obviously a subject of fascination for Scott's aristocrats and antiquarians, patriarchs who include the Baron, Sir Arthur Wardour, Jonathan Oldbuck, and Sir Hildebrand Osbaldistone. But it also figures importantly in the education of both Rose Bradwardine and Die Vernon, whose course of reading includes the study of massive tomes on the subject. Both the specific texts that Scott represents in the libraries at Tully-Veolan and Osbaldistone Hall and the manner in which the residents of these manors engage them convey heraldry's declining prestige in the eighteenth century. At Tully-Veolan, the Baron has imposed a course of reading for Rose that includes several unnamed folios of history and high-church polemic. "In heraldry," the Author dryly observes, "he was fortunately contented to give her only such a slight tincture as might be acquired by a perusal of the two folio volumes of Nisbett."<sup>29</sup> To be sure, Scott is satirizing the Baron of Bradwardine's relative sense of what would constitute a slight tincture of heraldic study here. Each volume of Alexander Nisbet's 1722, *A System of Heraldry Speculative and Practical* is over five hundred pages long, and contains detailed discussions of the meaning of heraldic devices, their arrangement, their origins, and their status as a form of history, accompanied by lavish illustrations. Apart from gently ridiculing the education that Bradwardine has provided his daughter, however, by placing Nisbet in Rose's hands, Scott subtly suggests an engagement with heraldry

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<sup>29</sup> Sir Walter Scott, *Waverley; or 'Tis Sixty Years Since*, ed. Claire Lamont (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 64.

conditioned by an awareness of its susceptibility to critique as a pedantic field of study, a costly and useless distraction.

Indeed, the introduction of Nisbet's *System* attempts to hold at bay a series of familiar accusations leveled by the emergent regimes of professional scholarship. Nisbet anticipates three objections to his study of heraldry: first, that the work lavishes particular attention on inconsiderable families while treating more prominent ones superficially; second, that owing to the number of armorial bearings and family histories included in the work, his accounts may include some errors; third, that a complete account of Scottish heraldry constitutes "an endless work," and consequently his system is incomplete.<sup>30</sup> In addition to these potential complaints, Nisbet predicts, "ignorant or capricious People may censure this Undertaking as idle or useless[.]"<sup>31</sup> Nisbet's introduction thus brings the cultural capital of heraldry in the early eighteenth century into sharp focus. Promoting his 1722 treatise as the first thoroughly systematic analysis of heraldry, Nisbet also circumscribes his scholarship with contradictory anxieties that readers will find the text excessive, inaccurate, incomplete, and useless.

Nisbet's apprehensions mark a departure from the pretensions that had typically attended a thousand page folio study of heraldry. The most comparable predecessor to Nisbet's *System* that Scott places in the hands of his characters is John Guillim's *A Display of Heraldry* (1610). When Die Vernon berates Frank Osbaldistone for his ignorance of blazonry she observes that, despite Sir Hildebrand's complete indifference

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<sup>30</sup> Alexander Nisbet, *A System of Heraldry Speculative and Practical...* (Edinburgh, 1722), iv, Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, ii.

and neglect for the library at Osbaldistone hall, *even he* spends winter evenings reading Guillim.<sup>32</sup> A work of considerable size and cost, the *Display* was nonetheless frequently reprinted both in folio, in its entirety and in reduced, excerpted forms.<sup>33</sup> Whereas Nisbet takes pains to justify the intellectual and material expense of his undertaking, Guillim assumes the intrinsic interest of his subject matter and his audience's enthusiasm for a treatise that promises to "give unto this erst unshapely and disproportionable Profession of Heraldry, a true Symmetria and proportionable Correspondence of each part to the other."<sup>34</sup> Although British readers continued to consume works on heraldry in considerable numbers well into the nineteenth century, Nisbet's introduction demonstrates that by 1722 it had become difficult for writers to so easily subscribe to Guillim's confident assumptions about the self-evident worthiness of heraldic study.

While the characters in *Rob Roy* read Guillim, the usefulness of heraldry is far from assured. Educated according to the artisocratic, Catholic, and Jacobite principles of her uncle and father, Die Vernon cannot believe that Frank's father has neglected his education of this subject, and demands "of what could [he] be thinking?" Frank's response suggests one source of heraldry's diminished cultural prestige: "Of the figures of arithmetic...the most insignificant unit of which he holds more highly than all the blazonry of chivalry."<sup>35</sup> A caricature of a prosaic and industrious emergent bourgeoisie,

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<sup>32</sup> Walter Scott, *Rob Roy*, ed. Ian Duncan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 156. Duncan points out that Scott owned a copy of the sixth edition of the *Display* (1724), 481 n.

<sup>33</sup> The British Library's holdings include eight editions of the *Display* between 1610 and 1724 and an additional two octavo editions of excerpts titled *The Banner Displayed* from 1726 and 1755. The BL lists just one 1804 reprinting of Nisbet's *System*.

<sup>34</sup> John Guillim, *A display of heraldry*..., Sixth Edition. (London, 1724), i, Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

<sup>35</sup> Walter Scott, *Rob Roy*, 156.



Frank's father prizes a "perspicuity and distinctness of expression" decidedly at odds with the arcane semiotics of blazonry. But Scott does not solely attribute the accusation that heraldry constitutes unproductive labor to Frank's father. In an illustration for Caddell's 1842 edition of *Rob Roy*, John Gilbert suggests another source of heraldry's perceived loss of cultural capital (Figure 3.1).



**Figure 3.1** John Gilbert, "Sir Hildebrand Studying Heraldry"

Gilbert depicts the baronet dozing in his armchair, his riding gloves and spurs at his feet, his periwig slightly askew, and the *Display* resting upon a reading desk. Whereas Nisbet seeks to dispel the accusation that his *System* might amount to nothing more than a useless distraction, Scott's prose and Gilbert's engraving alike suggest the fruitlessness of Sir Hildebrand's attachment to heraldry, a fruitlessness reduplicated in the death of his

boorish sons during the 1715 uprising and the passage of his property to his nephew Frank.

Bradwardine embraces heraldry in a more scholarly and disputatious spirit than Sir Hildebrand, placing paramount importance on its role as a form of historical representation. Recounting for Edward a quarrel with his cousin Sir Hew Halbert over the nature of his name and coat-of-arms, Bradwardine's reflections highlight the problematic nature of heraldry as a species of anecdote that communicates historical actions and transhistorical qualities assigned to the family bearing the device. Halbert suggests that the Baron's name is "*quasi Bear-warden*," and offends the Baron on two levels. First, this interpretation attributes the Bradwardine name and its heraldic device to menial labor. Second, it categorizes the Bradwardine Bear as an instance of canting heraldry, a mere visual pun. The Baron regards this sort of bearing as beneath "the noble, honourable, and useful science of heraldry, which assign armorial bearings as the reward of noble and generous actions, and not to tickle the ear." Here Bradwardine lays special emphasis on the anecdotal nature of heraldry, its ability to succinctly represent chivalric accomplishment visually. Abandoning the historical purpose of arms as a means of identifying the bearer, the Baron insists that the very legibility of canting heraldry renders it plebian, "befitting canters, gaberlunzies, and such like mendicants." On this view, heraldry only constitutes an honourable, noble, and useful science when it remains unintelligible to the causal observer. For the Baron, heraldry generates representative anecdotes only when it demands explication.

While the Baron staunchly defends heraldry as a meaningful genre of historical representation, his account of his own family crest appears to undermine his claims for its status as a “science.” During the banquet at Tully-Veolan in Chapter XI, the Baron reveals that the crest did not originally belong to the Bradwardines. Rather it previously belonged to “a gigantic Dane, whom [Godmund Bradwardine] slew in the lists in the Holy Land on a quarrel touching the chastity of the emperor’s spouse or daughter, tradition saith not precisely which.” The selectivity of the anecdote underscores the narrow specificity of its representativeness; the gigantic Dane goes unnamed, and it remains unclear whose honor Godmund preserved. At the same time the anecdote reveals the figure of the bear as a device only indirectly representative of the Bradwardines’ “honourable actions *in war*.” In a sense, Godmund’s quarrel is a violent digression from his ostensible purpose in the Holy Land. While the Baron’s anecdote associates the coat-of-arms with actions that certainly demonstrate chivalric notions of honour, the tale also suggests that the bear has another, unspecified meaning as the Dane’s coat of arms. It also might be worth asking in what sense the German Emperor Fredrick practices a “science” when he grants the Dane’s coat-of-arms to Sir Godmund after the duel.

The Baron further muddles the meaning of the Bradwardine Bear by attempting to sum up his anecdote with an allusion to the *Aeneid*. Flourishing his classical education, he declares “and thus as Virgilius hath it—*Mutemus Clypeos, Danaumque insignia nobis / Aptemus*”(45)<sup>36</sup>. Divorced from context, Choroebus’s command to his fellow Trojans--“Let us change shields and bear Greek insignia”--lends an air of classical

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<sup>36</sup> “Then change we Shields, and their Devices bear,”(Dryden, *Aeneis* II.526).

authority to Bradwardine's anecdote. But Vergil hardly condones this deceit. After a brief series of successful attacks on the Greeks, the gambit proves disastrous when Trojan forces defending the temple of Minerva hurl stones on their disguised comrades and the Greeks slaughter them. Thanks to the Baron's commentary, the bear's meaning seems perhaps even less clear at the end of his harangue than at the beginning.

Nonetheless, the symbol serves as a representative link between Tully-Veolan and the Bradwardines. At the outset of the novel, the bear also becomes indirectly representative of "the feudal service by which [the Baron] held the barony of Bradwardine"(64). Through the destruction of the bears adorning the buildings and grounds of Tully-Veolan and their subsequent restoration through the activities of Edward and Talbot, Scott foregrounds the representational transformation of the bear. Where the icon had previously represented an arcane act of feudal loyalty and the gratitude of the lord to whom that act was addressed, the bear has, at the novel's conclusion, been subsumed into a markedly different economy of meaning. As Saree Makdisi suggests, "[Tully-Veolan's] precise restoration, down to the last of its minutest details, suggests not so much that it had ever actually been changed, but rather that its space had been symbolically and politically cleansed."<sup>37</sup> On this argument the bear has been rendered solely an aesthetic object divorced from the feudal acts of violence it once represented. And yet, at the moment he realizes the restoration of his property, the Baron instructs the Baillie that the Bradwardine estate devolve upon Edward and Rose's "heirs-male;—but preferring the second son, if God shall bless them with two, *who is to carry the name and*

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<sup>37</sup> Walter Scott, *Waverley Novels: Rob Roy. The heart of Mid-Lothian* (Edinburgh: R. Cadell, 1843), 107.

*arms of Bradwardine of that ilk, without any other name or armorial bearings whatsoever*”(337, my emphasis). In spite of the transformation of its ownership that has been effected by its purchase and exchange, the Baron’s instructions ensure the continued relationship between his arms, his name, and his property. As Christensen demonstrates, Edward’s childhood recognition of his family crest on Sir Everhard’s carriage attests to the herald’s ability to produce a “pattern of paternity” that trumps biological connection and preempts the interventions of pedagogues. Although the Baron imagines a future in which Edward’s son takes the Bradwardine name and arms in a manner that transcends biologically defined inheritance, he also defines that inheritance precisely through an “arbitrary intervention.” Transforming his future grandson into a Bradwardine, the Baron participates in the shift Christensen and others have described from the regime of authoritarian patriarchy to the “bourgeois milieu of contracts and conversation.” But the stipulations of the will also suggest a medieval residue within the emergent world of contractual obligation. The Baron disposes of his property, his crest, and his name in a manner that is every bit as unilateral, authoritarian, and remote from the “noble, honourable, and useful science of heraldry,” as the Emperor Frederick’s bestowal of a Danish crest on a Scottish crusader. Edward’s son will, like his Bradwardine ancestor, change his shield and bear another’s device thanks to the intercession of a masculine authority.

Rather than a pattern of paternity carried at the head of a march into homogenous, empty time, the Bradwardine Bear faces backward, available to a multiplicity of origins and meanings. Its various interpretations and deployments by the Baron and his Author

model a punctuated, discontinuous temporality. While Tully-Veolan has undergone, “the commodification of its space and the objectification of its value,” that space still echoes with the call to violence in the service of a feudal lord. Makdisi observes that the Baron has “been reduced to the status of *Mr Bradwardine*.” Yet the Author of *Waverley* persists in referring to him throughout the novel’s conclusion as the Baron, and the majority of his servants retain their former stations. Further, in spite of the divorce of feudal icons from their referents, the newly bourgeois country manor makes good antecedent feudal relationships. The poverty of Edward’s first visit and the ruin that defined his second have been displaced by the feast that concludes the main narrative. Unlike the earlier banquets that mark Edward’s arrival at Tully-Veolan and Glennaquoich, the Author’s description of this meal lays its main stress on the reconstitution of the Baron’s domestic life, including the return of Saunderson and all the former domestics “excepting one or two, that had not been heard of since the affair at Culloden.” Although the Author is concise in his account of the meal itself, stating merely that “[t]he dinner was excellent,” he provides an elaborate account of the libations enjoyed by his characters. “The cellars were stocked with wine which was pronounced to be superb, and it had been contrived that the Bear of the Fountain, in the court-yard, should (for that night only) play excellent brandy punch for the benefit of the lower orders”(338). Here drink brings together not only those occupying the interior domestic space of the banquet hall, but also the “lower orders” in the courtyard. Vaguely identifying the party gathered at the threshold of Tully-Veolan, the clause suggests a gathering not only of the domestic servants, but of the entire community that stands in dependence on the Baron. Crucially, the Author’s description of

this bacchanalian scene carefully limits the indulgence to one night. Throughout *Waverley* immoderate drinking gives rise to temperamental quarrels and violence. Here, the Author's anxious parenthetical insertion suggests that the mechanisms by which rural laborers became ad hoc soldiers during the '45 remain in place, requiring little more than overindulgence in brandy punch. In its guises as the Bear of the fountain and as the cup of St. Duthac, the Bradwardine Bear remains a vehicle for draughts that threaten to overwhelm reason and unleash violent energies.

#### V. Confounding Fiction and Reality

*Waverley* ends with "right gude-willie-waught." Perhaps an attempt to evoke the concluding hope of "Auld Lang Syne," the final act within the main narrative and the final speech uttered by a character is the Baron's toast to the union between Edward and Rose. Framed as a moment of sentimental community, in which the Baron's tears of gratitude mix with his wine, the toast very nearly reproduces the pledge he had raised on Edward's first arrival at Tully-Veolan, in which he had devoted his "draught to the health and prosperity of the ancient and highly-to-be-honoured house of Waverley." Of course, that seemingly innocent toast lead to a nightly ramble, further drinking, French and Scottish song, ill-considered political discussion, blows between the Baron and Balmawhapple, and nearly ended with a fatal duel between Edward and Balmawhapple. Notwithstanding its apparent purification through the register of the sentimental, at the end of the novel the Blessed Bear retains an aura of political uncertainty and violent

possibility, not only for the Baron of Bradwardine - whose Jacobite principles and feudal sensibilities may not be quite so safely consigned to the past as has sometimes been imagined – but also for the Author of *Waverley*. As so many critics have noted, the Author of *Waverley* adopts the language of Enlightenment political economy in the “Postscript, which should have been a Preface” as he narrates the historical transformation of Scotland since 1745. Rather than merely documenting the triumph of smooth historical progress and readers’ inevitable arrival at the telos of a stable United Kingdom, the end of *Waverley* provocatively sets a particularly boozy, rambling, heraldic historicism alongside the sober view of the Postscript in a toast to union:

A tear mingled with the wine which the Baron filled, as he proposed a cup of gratitude to Colonel Talbot, and “The Prosperity of the united houses of Waverley Honour and Bradwardine!”———

It only remains for me to say, that as no wish was utter with more affectionate sincerity, there are few which, allowing for the necessary mutability of human events, have been, upon the whole, more happily fulfilled. (339)

During its fractious appearance earlier in the novel, the Author observes that the Blessed Bear holds roughly an English pint. Here, he notes that the Baron fills the goblet, and proposes a cup, the full measure of the vessel, and in the space of the dash the Baron drains the Blessed Bear of its contents. In a novel full of wishes uttered with affectionate sincerity that go unfulfilled, the Baron’s wish is granted a special status by the Author. As Edward realizes much to his chagrin during the festivities that had first welcomed him to Tully-Veolan, the sincerity of a toast, and the affection with which it is returned, is measured not solely by the utterance, but by the drink that follows. Implicitly at least, the sincerity that the author attributes to the Baron’s toast necessarily derives from the



quantity of wine that he, Edward, and Colonel Talbot consume. The Blessed Bear thus remains a source of potential discord, unreasonable emotion, and regrettable expression. As a mode of heraldic ceremony, the Blessed Bear and its corollary for the lower orders, the Bear of the Fountain, signal a source of potent, disconnected engagement with the meaning of the past that stands in sharp contrast with the clear-eyed, progressive perspective of the Postscript.

In fact, the Postscript represents a sudden and unprecedented shift from the Author's commitment in much of *Waverley* to the discontinuities and shifting denotation of heraldic temporality. In Chapter I, the Author invokes the language of heraldry in order to characterize the nature of his historical project. Identifying his principal object in the narrative that will follow as "those passions common to men in all stages in society," he draws on heraldry in order to characterize the historical change he wishes to represent as a difference of degree rather than of kind. The historical particularity of the "state of manners and laws casts a necessary colouring; but the bearings, to use the language of heraldry, remain the same, though the tincture may not only be different, but opposed in strong contradistinction." The Author disarticulates the individual aspects of the arms, in order to accommodate change while nonetheless asserting transhistorical claims. As such the historian versed in this composite symbolic language will read through apparent difference, recognizing that "the proud peer, who can now only ruin his neighbor according to law by protracted suits, is the genuine descendant of the baron who wrapped the castle of his competitor in flames, and knocked him on the head as he endeavoured to escape from the conflagration" (5). The Author's use of heraldry in the metaphor is thus

at once keenly aware of the symbol's potential to misattribute a characteristic across time in a degree that no longer accurately represents the character of its bearer, but nonetheless posits a genealogy of character that locates motivation in an affective inheritance.

Invoking heraldry to describe sentiment and then characterizing our ancestors' wrath as "*gules*" and our own as "*sable*," rather than simply red and black, the Author frames his understanding of historical change in the introductory chapter according to an outmoded semiotic system that we will soon see championed by the Baron. While the Baron might object that using *gules* to represent wrath comes too close to canting, Scott's light ridicule of the Author's pretentious appeal to heraldry aligns the narrator with Bradwardine within the first few pages.

The long, digressive commentary that introduces the Stag-hunt provides a particularly playful, self-ironizing caricature of the kind of study involved in crafting historical fiction. Prompted by the pseudo-editorial concern that "the annals and documents in my hands say but little of this Highland chase," the Author insists on his capacity to provide details for the hunt from sources elsewhere. The author, that is, answers a historicist anxiety about the veracity of an event at a particular time by turning to remote, disconnected events that his narrative connects indirectly to the 1745 rebellion. Towards that end he offers a lengthy extract describing a Highland hunt that took place in 1531 in Pittscottie's *History of Scotland from 1436 to 1565* and a selection of lines from John Taylor's 1630 poem, *The Pennilesse Pilgrimage*. The introduction of the *History* as a source for description seems amusingly suggestive of less than rigorous historiographic practices. "There is old Lindsay of Pittscottie ready at my elbow," the Author declares,

dismissing the concern he has raised a moment earlier. Pittscottie's applicability is determined by his convenience. The Author himself underscores the pedantic nature of introducing these sources in framing his return to the narrative: "But without further tyranny over my readers, or display of the extent of my own reading, I will content myself with borrowing a single incident from the memorable hunting at Lude, commemorated in the ingenious Mr Gunn's Essay on the Caledonian Harp" (115). Limiting himself to the use of Gunn, the Author implicitly acknowledges the irrelevance of the material from Pittscottie and Taylor to the details of the narrative that follows. The anecdotes that these texts introduce are thus rendered unrepresentative of the hunt that he describes. Recalling the circuitous route the Baron leads Waverley on their return to Tully-Veolan a few chapters earlier, the Author's professed use of "what scholars call the periphrastic and ambagitory, and the vulgar the circumbendibus" aligns the happenstance of his scholarship – the book is at his elbow – and the form of his narration. He wears his pedantry on his sleeve (116).

Scott returned to the stag hunt to add a footnote for the Magnum Opus in further defense of its verisimilitude. The Author, addressing critics who have accused him of "confounding fiction with reality," allows that "the circumstances of the hunting described in the text as preparatory to the insurrection of 1745, is, so far as he knows entirely imaginary." He hastens to add, however, that "it is well known" a hunt similar to the one he describes took place prior to the 1715 rebellion. Whereas the editorial digression within the text proper asserts that the "annals and documents," though "they say but little" nonetheless record the hunt, the footnote by contrast denies historical

authenticity in order to reinscribe the hunt as an imaginary event situated within the realm of the historically possible. The note attempts to dispel the charge of confounding fiction with reality by presenting the hunt at Brae-Mar forest in 1715 as demonstrating the historical representativeness of the imagined hunt. In doing so the Author confirms the charge of confounding fiction with reality, and further suggests the unrepresentative nature of the Author's original editorial commentary.

To be sure, Scott's notes and introductions for the *Magnum Opus* differ profoundly from those of his first editions. Indeed, the *Edinburgh Review's* judgment that they "real interest" in comparison with frames in the voice of Cleishbotham and Clutterbuck attests to the gap between the fictional and the autobiographical. Nonetheless, the paratexts superadded from 1825 onward manifest Scott's commitment to thinking about his fiction as the product of a whimsical, pedantic attachment to objects that foster idiosyncratic connections between disparate moments in time. Recalling Lukács's argument that Scott's protagonists represent social trends and historical forces divorced from the individual and the present, and as such constitute the antithesis of "proper" Romanticism, we can find a sense of the incommensurability of those protagonists with the authorial persona Scott generates in the *Magnum Opus* footnotes. The bulk of the footnotes attempt to establish discursive authority through an appeal either to official history, or to folk tradition. By contrast, a select number of the footnotes construct a privileged interpretive position for the author that derives from a unique psychological connection with the scenes the gloss. The footnote to the scene which introduces the Castle of Doune, for example, begins by foregrounding the Author's

personal, emotional connection to the location: “This noble ruin is dear to my recollection, from associations which have been long and painfully broken.” The remainder of the note makes no attempt to explicate the associations nor their breakage. The scene is presented as representative of an affective state available exclusively to the Author. While literary conventions make conjecture available, the anecdote seems most powerful in its ability to set the Author apart from the narrative he relays, while intimately binding him to the space in which it unfolds. Here we find Scott producing through the Author a form of romantic pedantry, which selects as its representative anecdote the self, but renders the self unintelligible in relationship to the terms it seems meant to calculate. In this case the Author’s associations represent an affective truth about the Castle, but that truth remains unavailable to the reader. The Author’s connection with the Castle therefore remains, like the Baron’s excursions, “curious, if not valuable”(56).

Scott’s footnoted commentary on the Laird of Balmawhapple’s death takes an even more circuitous route through successive denials and affirmations of historical veracity, arriving at a representation of the author as a child that bears more than a passing resemblance to a Wordsworthian spot of time. Balmawhapple’s foolhardy pursuit of the Dragoons and his death at their hands seems mostly like the set-up for the joke the Author makes at the character’s expense: “cleaving his skull with their broad-swords, [the Hanoverian soldiers] satisfied the world that the unfortunate gentleman had actually brains, the end of his life thus giving proof of a fact greatly doubted during its progress”(226-7). Perhaps recognizing the contrivance of Balmawhapple’s demise, Scott

concedes in a footnote, “It is scarcely necessary to say that the character of this brutal young Laird is entirely imaginary”(403, n. 77). Scott thus insists on a reading of the anecdote of the brazen charge, and Balmawhapple’s behavior heretofore, as unrepresentative of the Scottish cavaliers. He then turns back on this suggestion, however, by insisting that a Jacobite in fact died in this very manner: “A female of the family then residing at Saint Clement’s Wells used to tell me the tragedy of which she had been an eye-witness, and showed me in evidence one of the silver clasps of the unfortunate gentleman.” Justification for an overt literary contrivance thus gives way to an attempt to validate the historicity of the event through an appeal to an oral tradition. Within the footnote Scott lays claim to credibility by representing the anecdote’s transmission through the first-hand witness, who presents the purported material evidence of her presence at the scene, represented by the clasp. In the very process of producing historical authority for oral tradition, however, the Author romanticizes both the scene that ties him to the narrative and in turn the anecdote to the scene: “I remember, when a child, sitting on his grave, where the grass long grew rank and green distinguishing it from the rest of the field”(404, n.77). The note moves at once toward representativeness and historical authority on the one hand and toward the realm of the vaguely supernatural, the unrepresentative, the exceptional, and the imaginary on the other.

In footnotes like these, Scott depicts his retrospective labors as editor and commentator on his fiction as entailing the same digressive rambling from his stated aim that he had used to characterize his authorship. Caught up in the process of hinting at the Castle of Doune’s private associations or the uncanny appearance of the grass that grows

from a Jacobite's grave, Scott's pedantry interferes with telling the stories behind the stories. Rather than demystifying the origins of the Waverley novels, such anecdotes emphasize the idiosyncratic lines that connect past, present, and future in the thoughts and expressions of the historical novelist.

Whereas the Postscript of *Waverley* suggests a vision of incremental progress, a predictable future for other places and peoples, elsewhere Scott's fictions depict intimations of violent, unpredictable digressions from the slow march forward. For Scott, one way of finding a way in such a world is as a pedant. It's in this sense that Dugald Dalgetty's blindness to outcomes – his willingness to fight for both sides of any conflict – constitutes a form of the second sight in modern guise. Allan M'Aulay's vision of the bloody hand with which he will stab his friend cannot prevent that outcome, and once the deed has been performed all expressions of loyalty and camaraderie have been dashed.<sup>38</sup> Allan's second sight is tantamount to his lack of a future. Indifferent to political and religious principle, however, Dalgetty's pedantic expostulations never change. He continues to speak reverently of Gustavus Adolphus throughout the novel, and into the Postscript. Likewise, he recommences his suggestions for erecting defensive earthworks at Ardevohr almost as soon as Annot Lyle is discovered as Sir Duncan's daughter and Menteith weds her. Dalgetty's survival, like that of his creator, hinges on a blindness to outcomes that paradoxically prepares him for the future.

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. Scott's "The Two Drovers" in *Chronicles of the Canongate*, for a similar use of prophecy.

## Chapter Four

### Collecting Retirement

#### Immersion, Effusion, and Pedantic Transcendence

#### in Grose, Burns, and Wordsworth

- I.      A chiel's amang you takin' notes,  
            An' faith, he'll prent it.

—Robert Burns, “On the Peregrinations of Captain Grose”

Insofar as Scott's final image of Dugald Dalgetty consummates the portrait of the storyteller as pedant in *A Legend of Montrose*, it does so by trading on a commonplace in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century British representations of former soldiers and sailors who retire to the countryside and become garrulous fixtures within their communities. Dalgetty is the literary descendent of figures like Toby Shandy and Lieutenant Lismahago. He's also the next of kin to Scott's own Captain Clutterbuck, whose antiquarian disquisitions to travelers represent a corollary to Dalgetty's endless stories about the immortal Gustavus Adolphus. In *A Legend of Montrose*, at what he meant to serve as the final entry in the *Tales of My Landlord*, Scott concludes his exhibition of Scottish characters with a portrait of Dalgetty as a discharged soldier whose pedantic passions and professional investments place him at a considerable remove from



the community where he enjoys his bucolic retirement, even as he becomes a figure for the preservation and transmission of cultural memory.

In fact, Scott signals the phenomenon of the retired soldier as cultural agent throughout the *Tales* with a highly suggestive title page that links Jedediah Cleishbotham to the eminent English antiquarian and caricaturist, Francis Grose. Every volume in the first three series bears the same title page, varying only insofar as it designates the series, the number of volumes, the volume, and the edition. Each states that the *Tales* have been “collected and arranged” by Cleishbotham, and then quotes the first stanza of Robert Burns’s “On the Late Captain Grose’s Peregrinations thro’ Scotland, collecting the Antiquities of that Kingdom.”(Figure 4.1). Scott’s title pages associates Cleishbotham’s fictional editing and publication of the *Tales* with Grose’s research for the *Antiquities of Scotland* (1791). In the lines Scott quotes as his epigraph, Burns registers the status of the antiquarian as a foreigner roving the countryside and writing down his observations with the intention to publish them for southern readers. According to the poem’s speaker, antiquarians collect and make public not only arcane objects and lore, but also the conditions of the culture as it exists at present. Grose’s objects are not solely moldering kirks and religious relics, but the shabby dress of impoverished Scots. Consequently, the speaker exhorts his countrymen to mend their coats, lest their material poverty become an object of amusement and condescension for polite English readers. Notwithstanding Cleishbotham’s status as a native of Gandercleugh (the imaginary navel of Scotland) and a schoolmaster, the epigraph places Scott’s fictional editor in league with Grose, the

# TALES OF MY LANDLORD,

## Third Series.

COLLECTED AND ARRANGED

BY

JEDEDIAH CLEISHBOTHAM,

SCHOOLMASTER AND PARISH-CLERK OF GANDERCLEUGH.

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Hear, Land o' Cakes and brither Scots,  
 Frae Maidenkirk to Jonny Groats',  
 If there's a hole in a' your coats,  
     I rede ye tent it,  
 A chiel's amang you takin' notes,  
     An' faith he'll prent it.  
BURNS.

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IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. IV.

SECOND EDITION.

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EDINBURGH:

PRINTED FOR ARCHIBALD CONSTABLE AND CO. EDINBURGH;

LONGMAN, HURST, REES, ORME, AND BROWN, PATERNOSTER-ROW;  
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1819.

**Figure 4.1** Title Page, *Tales of My Landlord, Third Series, Volume IV (A Legend of Montrose)*, Web, Google Books.

embodiment of the former soldier and peripatetic antiquarian whose exhibition of national character is predicated upon his own displacement.

This chapter examines how the leisure of retirement gives shape to a prominent image of the pedant as an old man, a modern reconception of *senex* Tityrus. Professional life may foster narrow concerns and passionate interests in trivial matters, but retirement eliminates any possibility for the useful application of such knowledge and

simultaneously cuts the pedant off from the community of professionals who understand him. Displaced from the context of work, the retirees examined here form alternative communities. Discovering new objects for their customary pedantic attachments they exchange works of antiquarian scholarship, ribald verses, and superstitious tales. Whereas Tityrus's *otium* places him "recubans sub tegmine fagi" [lying beneath the spreading beech tree], the retirees and their cronies of romantic-era writing engage in post-professional rambling.<sup>1</sup> This chapter follows the retiree's course from immersion in the public houses and drawing rooms frequented by Grose and his fellow antiquarian collectors, across the landscape of Ayreshire where Burns stages a dialectic between collecting and making, between immersion in culture and poetical effusion, to a seat in a Yew-tree by lake Esthwaite, where Wordsworth asks his reader to make much of little.

Representations of Grose and his antiquarianism, including the Captain's own satirical self-portraits, contribute to this modern version of pastoral retirement through an emphasis on collecting and sharing historical narrative and cultural relics. Grose's peregrinations, his boozy sociability, and his eclectic publications give formal expression to a non-narrative record of British cultural artifacts that begins with immersion in cultural context, gathering incongruous detail. In his etchings of British antiquities, his idiomatic dictionaries, and his compilations of superstition and folk belief, Grose produces a variegated, discontinuous history of local detail *without a point*. Meanwhile, the frequent satires of Grose deploy the comedy of antiquarian collecting in order to register the complex social condition of the pedant. Read against Grose's commentary on

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<sup>1</sup> *Ecloga*, I, 1.

comic painting, incongruity becomes legible in these satires as a means of conferring interest on curious figures without reconciling them as objects within an orderly system.

Grose's wandering method anticipates what Alan Liu has described as the "romanticism of detail" in postmodern cultural criticism. Liu describes such criticism as guided by "an aesthetics...[whose] related, leading concepts [are] particularism, localism, regionalism, relative autonomism, incommensurablism, accidentalism, anecdotalism, historicism." This preoccupation with detail reveals the centrality of wandering to the practices of postmodern cultural critics whose anti-foundationalism constitutes a rhetoric "whose distinctive method is its tendency to lose its way at decisive moments, to pose a logic of detail only then to thwart itself (in the essential de Manian reading) by interposing incommensurable logics."<sup>2</sup> Like works of late twentieth century cultural anthropology, philosophy, history and literary criticism, Grose's scholarship records the cultural field in exacting detail. Like the scholars working in those fields, Grose presents himself as an outsider who faithfully compiles cultural artifacts while eschewing the prevailing concerns with fixing provenance and purifying those artifacts common among so many of his contemporaries. Indeed, Grose places little emphasis on ordering the past systematically and he abandoned genealogy when he resigned his position as Richmond herald after only a few years in the position. What his writing produces is rather, quoting Liu again, a "form suited to displaying detailism: the array or matrix," or, to privilege a term that would have been more intelligible to Grose and his contemporaries: the collection.

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<sup>2</sup> Alan Liu, "Local Transcendence: Cultural Criticism, Postmodernism, and the Romanticism of Detail," *Representations*, 32 (1990), 75-113, 81, my emphasis.

While Grose shares the postmodern cultural critics' preoccupation with context, he is not one of Liu's ironists, whose "cool dialogics" finally render culture a "detachable façade" (98). Rather, Grose immerses himself in the the various contexts he studies, viewing culture under the influence of a convivial inebriation.<sup>3</sup> Representations of Grose stress his frequent drunkenness, suggesting that drink undermines everyday standards of decorum and levels distinctions of rank and class. The ribald verses that Burns wrote as tribute to the Captain following their meeting at Robert Riddell's estate, Friars Carse, are representative of the way that drink simultaneously immerses antiquarians in the context of the culture they seek to study and in a discursive community organized around those objects. Poems such as the "Peregrinations" assert Burns's intimacy with Grose by mocking him and his fellow antiquarians as old men who lust after historical and religious relics, objects arrayed in lists that bespeak perverse, often blasphemous desires. Keenly aware of the social distance between himself and gentlemen of leisure like Grose and Riddell, Burns presents drunken pedantry as a social modality that improbably connects the peregrinating Captain with the rustic Scots amongst whom he travels thanks to the "meikle glee and fun" they enjoy over a bottle of port.

In addition to impairing restraint and leveling social boundaries, drunkenness itself becomes a form of retirement from labor and a condition of belief in Burns's poetry. Through his dialogue with Grose, Burns fashions a dialectic between immersive collecting and effusive making, a *poetics* of the list. Adopting the excited persona of the

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<sup>3</sup> Conducting research for his vernacular dictionaries, Grose spent long nights socializing in public houses in St. Giles, the same area of London where Hogarth sets "The First Stage of Cruelty" in his *Four Times a Day* series as well as "Gin Lane." See Marilyn Butler, "Edgeworth, the United Irishmen, and 'More Intelligent Treason,'" in *An Uncomfortable Authority*, (Newark, DE: U of Delaware P, 2004) 38-40.

pedantic retiree, Burns envisions a form of transcendence in poems where intoxicating context resists sober demystification. So, this chapter argues, drink animates “Tam o’ Shanter’s” immersion in context, its incongruous accumulation of cultural and literary traditions surrounding Tam’s ride from an Ayr tavern to the Brig o’ Doon. The narrator’s copious, diverse lists exhibit a variety of cultural artifacts and practices that include superstitious features of the landscape, diabolic objects, and Augustan English literary tropes. Throughout the poem Burns yokes the narrative elements of ballad and mock-heroic verse to the miscellaneous assemblage of the collection.

In Burns’s collections the dialectic between immersion and effusion, between drinking the culture up and pouring it forth in song, creates radical, transcendent prospects. Even more than Grose’s demotic studies of British culture, Burns’s collections create indecorous connections between seemingly unrelated groups. Songs such as “For a’ that and a’ that” record the distinctions of wealth and poverty, privilege and destitution in order to unsettle these divisions and to foster a new set of social and cultural connections, a future in which “Man to Man, the world o’er, / Shall brothers be for a’ that.” While Burns’s collecting projects a future of universal rights that overturns inequality in a song like “A Man’s a Man,” his verse more often celebrates the temporary transcendence of invidious distinctions under the influence of sex and drink. Near the end of “Local Transcendence,” Liu describes the functional equivalence between the cultural critics’ contextual detailism and moments of High Romantic transcendence: “Once we insulated ourselves from reality in universals and totalisms. Now we wrap ourselves in detailed layers of context as thick and multiform as cotton or [William] Gibson’s

temperfoam” (98-99). To be sure, Liu’s parallel construction is a heuristic, but Burns’s engagements with the collection, with the rhetoric of detail, and with the poetics of the list highlight the inadequacy of such a neat chronology. At the forefront of romanticism, Burns uses intoxicating context to dampen reality and obscure standards of judgment so that readers might achieve a momentary glimpse of universal brotherhood.

Perhaps no poet has more often been described as insulating readers from the world with universals and totalisms than Wordsworth. Observing that both Wordsworthian transcendence and historicist critiques of that transcendence chart a progress from “dizzy raptures” to “sober pleasure,” Orrin Wang describes sobriety as the narrative trope that structures high romanticism.<sup>4</sup> This trope structures not only the personal development charted in explicitly biographical works like “Tintern Abbey” and “Once a Jacobin, Always a Jacobin,” but also the social development of a reading public who outgrows their “thirst for outrageous stimulation” in preference for the pleasures that the Lyrical Ballads administer in carefully measured verses. For Wordsworth, Burns’s celebration of low and rustic life in “ordinary” language represents a crucial, but insufficeint step in thus altering the public taste for the better. Although he wouldn’t publicly comment on the wide-spread accusations that Burns’s life ended in drunken dissipation until the 1816 “Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns,” only shortly after the publication of Lyrical Ballads Wordsworth wrote passionately to Coleridge in praise of the Scottish bard, urging that his achievement lay in writing in his own voice. “I question,” Wordsworth writes, “whether there is any individual character in all Burns’

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<sup>4</sup> Orrin Wang, *Romantic Sobriety* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2012)

writings except his own. But everywhere you have the presence of human life.”<sup>5</sup> As he would sixteen years later in the “Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns,” Wordsworth here approaches Burns's poetry as authentically autobiographical, leveling all distinction between his various personae and the author. Charmed by “Tam,” moved to “the deepest agitation” by the despondency ode, but also fully persuaded by the misrepresentation of Burns as a drunken sot in Currie’s *Life*, Wordsworth adopts voices that are emphatically not his own in an attempt to emulate what his correspondence with Coleridge interprets as Burns’s naively expressive lyrics. In a number of his contributions to the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth dries out Burns's retiree speakers, personifying “excitement without the application of gross and violent stimulants” in the figure of the pedant. These storytellers’ immersion in local context motivates effusive attempts to communicate tales of little evident interest, tales that project improbably transcendent prospects traced from the multiple concurrent possibilities inherent in closely observed detail.<sup>6</sup>

## II. Captain Grose and the Antiquarian’s Humor

Before he was elected to the Society of Antiquaries in 1757, Grose served in the army at home and abroad between 1747 and 1751, and subsequently in the Surrey militia. While Grose was inept at his job as adjutant (he became heavily indebted to fellow officers by mismanaging the militia’s finances) he took advantage of the flexibility

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<sup>5</sup> William Wordsworth, *Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, Vol I. The Early Years*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, 2nd ed, rev. C.L. Shaver (Oxford UP, 1967) 255-6.

<sup>6</sup> William Wordsworth, *Lyrical ballads, and other poems, 1797-1800*, ed. James Butler and Karen Green, in *The Cornell Wordsworth*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993) 746.



afforded by his appointment, traveling widely throughout Britain, sketching ruins, studying variations in colloquial English, and publishing widely. Foremost among his early publications was *The Antiquities of England and Wales* (1772 - 1777). Rather than a work of specialized scholarship, the volumes of the *Antiquities* offered travelers engravings of notable ruins accompanied by brief descriptions, historical notes, and folklore associated with each site. Grose collected much of these materials from previously published works, fellow antiquaries, and acquaintances. Before turning his attention north for a Scottish sequel to the *Antiquities*, Grose also published a history of arms and heraldry, a series of idiomatic dictionaries, an essay on the art of caricature, and a periodical, *The Grumbler*.

Among late eighteenth-century antiquaries, Captain Grose imbued his pursuits with an unusually self-lacerating humor. Rosemary Sweet observes that, if many other members of the Society of Antiquaries recognized the pedantic tendencies of the organization's Fellows, none were so eager to emphasize those tendencies for comic effect as Grose.<sup>7</sup> Throughout his writings and his prints Grose satirized his fellow antiquaries, his colleagues in the militia, and himself. In *The Grumbler*, Grose includes a "Complaint of a wife at her husband's rage for antiquities." The letter ventriloquizes the "wife of a wealthy citizen" whose husband retired from business with the intention of passing his days as a gentleman, adopted a fashionable lifestyle, and then, after accidentally displaying a pocketful of rare coins in the company of an antiquarian, became swept up in the activities of a society of what she describes as "antic-queer-

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<sup>7</sup> Rosemary Sweet, *Antiquaries*, (New York: Pgrave Macmillan, 2004) 100-101.

ones.” Mike Goode proposes that this malapropism implies that antiquaries’ fascinations constitute “an unmanly, non-reproductive sexuality that carries hints all at once of necrophilia, homosexuality, and autoeroticism.”<sup>8</sup> Goode also remarks, however, that Grose’s own status as an antiquary sets *The Grumbler’s* depiction apart from similar satires, commenting that, “the piece tries to recuperate the stereotype of the antiquary at the wife’s expense”(200, n. 54). Doubtless Grose intends to mock the wife, particularly her desire that her husband take her to fashionable tourist destinations and bring her decorative house ware. But *The Grumbler* mocks all parties with relish. Indeed, the “Complaint” juxtaposes competing modes of consumer desire, embodied by husband’s collection of antiquities and the wife’s preference for china and plate. In a brief preamble, Grose suggests the accuracy of the wife’s portrait of her husband and his associates. There Mr. Grumbler requests that his reader permit him “to trouble you with a recital of mine, which, from as happy a woman as any within the sound of Bow-bell, have made me extremely uncomfortable.”<sup>9</sup> Notwithstanding her malapropisms and cupidity, the wife’s complaint touches Mr. Grumbler to the quick. Rather than unambiguously valorizing the retiree’s current pursuits over his previous regimen of fashionable entertainment, *The Grumbler* invites its readers to laugh at all concerned, Mr. Grumbler included.

Although “The Complaint” implies that antiquaries’ greater fascination with crypts than spas reflects lascivious desires, the homosocial bonds and peculiar appetites

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<sup>8</sup> *Sentimental Masculinity*, 76.

<sup>9</sup> Francis Grose, “Complaint of a Wife at her husband’s rage for antiquities,” in *The Grumbler: Containing sixteen essays, by the late Francis Grose, Esq. F.A.S.* (London, 1791), 49. Web. ECCO.

of scholars appear neither unique nor particularly worrisome elsewhere in *The Grumbler*. In a subsequent installment, “Pedantry not confined to men of letters,” Grose draws the scholarly breaches of decorum into conversation with other professions in order to defend learned discourse. As I noted in chapter one, eighteenth-century periodical essayists frequently urged readers to recognize pedantry as a conversational failing that virtually anyone was liable to commit. As such, Mr. Grumbler misrepresents his predecessors when he complains that the “denomination of pedant has long been improperly confined to men of letters, although in reality it is applicable to men of every description.”<sup>10</sup> Like the *Spectator*, *The Rambler*, and the *Lounger*, the *Grumbler* defines pedantry as the use of a professional idiom outside its professional contexts. Unlike earlier essayists, however, Grose delighted in all manner of dialect, compiling *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (1785) and *A Provincial Glossary, with a Collection of Local Proverbs, and Popular Superstitions* (1787). Nigel Leask observes that Grose’s attitudes concerning lexicography and essay writing represent a direct rejoinder to Samuel Johnson. In the Preface to his *Dictionary* Johnson had dismissed “the fugitive cant” of laborers, tradesmen, and merchants as “unworthy of preservation.”<sup>11</sup> Johnson frames the value of *The Rambler* as a blow to vulgarity. “I have laboured,” he writes in the final number, “to refine our language to grammatical purity, and to clear it from colloquial barbarisms, liscentious idioms, and irregular combinations.”<sup>12</sup> What Johnson would clear away, Grose collects and exhibits for readers as delightful curiosities. The Captain’s works

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<sup>10</sup> Francis Grose, “Pedantry not confined to men of letters,” in *The OLIO*, (London, 1792), 85. Web. ECCO.

<sup>11</sup> Samuel Johnson, *Major Works*, (Oxford, 1999), 323.

<sup>12</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, Number 208, *Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, Volume V., ed. W.J. Bate and Albrecht B. Straus (Yale, 1969), 318-319.

manifest a wide-ranging fascination with non-standard usage, including regional dialect, the cant used by criminals and gypsies, and professional jargon. Whereas the *Rambler* sequesters the speech professionals use to address one another, the *Grumbler* insists that such attempts are futile. Jargon suffuses common speech. As evidence, Mr. Grumbler provides a survey of the language used by lawyers, clergy, soldiers and sailors, Oxonians and Cantabrigians, gentlemen of pleasure, wits and critics, and lottery men and stock-jobbers.

Grose's ostensible aim is to recuperate the man of letters by demonstrating that other professions obtrude their jargon into common speech. Thus the lawyer invited to propose a toast raises his glass to the Chief Justice. Likewise the clergyman proposes the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Sailor asks his friends to "carry more sail" as they walk down the street. When a friend asks after his health, the stock broker replies that he is "cent per cent better." Pursuing this argument, the *Grumbler* implies that such professional cant enriches the English language. It occasions considerable humor and creates figurative applications for literal, technical expressions. Mr. Grumbler concludes his survey of professional idiom by proposing that, "[i]f pedantry be an improper display of one's professional knowledge, these are all as surely entitled to the denomination of pedants, as the scholar who makes an ostentatious shew of his learning" (*Olio*, 88). As we saw in chapter one, for Addison such a recognition had justified censuring the "mere man of the town" alongside the "mere scholar" as equally insipid conversationalists.<sup>13</sup> With Grose, the implication is quite otherwise. The very context of these pedantries

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<sup>13</sup> See *Spectator*; Number 105

seems to refute their capacity for serious harm. They all take place in a social milieu—in implied taverns, on sidewalks, and in sociable conversation—that suggests each profession is understood well-enough by the world at large that it represents no great burden to polite conversation. Given the tendency to laugh away the pedantries of other professionals, Grose urges his reader to extend the same courtesy to the scholar.

To be sure, Grose satirizes the scholarly pedants he depicts in *The Grumbler* and in his caricatures. The humor of Grose's sketches, however, centers on the incongruous nature of antiquarian social life and its post-professional, aged fellows. In "An Essay on Comic Painting," Grose proposes incongruity as the general principle of works intended to elicit laughter: "let the employments and properties or qualities of all the objects be incompatible; that is, let every person and thing represented, be employed in that office or business, for which by age, size, profession, construction or some other accident they are totally unfit."<sup>14</sup> Grose provides two caveats to this principle. First, only "trifling" breaches of propriety and morality are fit for comic representation. Great crimes, Grose observes, "incite indignation and make us groan rather than laugh." Second, if the artist suggests poetic justice by inflicting some accident on his subject, then, "care should be taken to show that the sufferers are not greatly hurt, otherwise it ceases to become ridiculous"(15). Grose's understanding of comedy here is important for understanding the manner in which he presents intellectuals, particularly antiquarians, as comic subjects.

As Grose portrays them, antiquarians are, collectively and individually, incongruous figures who commit trifling breaches of decorum. The antiquarians depicted

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<sup>14</sup> Francis Grose, *Rules for Drawing Caricaturas with an Essay on Comic Painting*. (London, 1791), 14. Web. ECCO.



**Figure 4.2** Francis Grose, "A Fat & Lean Antiquarian," © Trustees of the British Museum.





**Figure 4.3** Francis Grose, "Antiquarians Peeping into Boadicea's Night Urn," © Trustees of the British Museum

in engravings like “A Fat and Lean Antiquarian” (Figure 4.2), “Antiquaries Peering into Boadicea’s Night Urn” (Figure 4.3), and the *Grumbler’s* “Complaint of a wife” are all middle aged or elderly men. In the engravings they invariably appear either corpulent or skeletal. The figures depicted in the prints wear coats, hairstyles, and wigs whose variety suggests what the *Grumbler’s* correspondent makes explicit: that the Society’s Fellows come from diverse social classes and professions. So, “A Fat and Lean Antiquarian” depicts a haughty, emaciated, aristocrat with his sword, elaborate wig, and muff beside an ebullient, overweight companion whose dress, walking stick, and more modest wig suggest his bourgeois rank. Antiquarianism, it turns out, brings together an incongruous range of individuals united in their intellectual fascinations, men whose professions have shaped their dress, their discourse, and their general habits thrown together in the afterlife of retirement

But the incongruity of antiquarianism extends beyond the juxtaposition of social classes. Stressing the antiquaries’ age, Grose highlights the way that professional identity continues to mark an individual long after his ability to pursue that professional life has come to a close. In this sense, retirees of all descriptions fit the bill for comic depiction since, as he had put it in the “Essay on Comic Painting” their age and size are ill-suited to their profession. “Thus,” Grose elaborates, “a cowardly soldier, a deaf musician, a bandy-legged dancer, a corpulent or gouty running footman, an antiquated fop...are all ludicrous objects” (*Essay on Comic Painting*, 15). Read in this light, Grose’s caricatures convey a sense of absurdity through individual appearance as well as by the company they keep. Even at a remove from his former profession, the retiree nonetheless remains identifiable



Still identifiable by his profession, he is unable to carry on it that capacity and instead directs his energies into the moldering remains of a past that only a handful of like-minded and like-bodied individuals share.

The caricatures of the “Fat Antiquarian” and the figure at bottom right in “Antiquaries Peering” each suggest Grose’s willingness to find himself ludicrous. The first installment of *The Grumbler* registers a similar humor when Grose introduces his essayist persona. Throughout the sketch, Grose caricatures Mr. Grumbler’s physical features, economic position, and social class in terms that associates would have recognized as an exaggerated, comic self-portrait. Mr. Grumbler begins by noting his age, his ailments, and his declining sexual appeal, but the portrait reaches a comic apogee in its description of Mr. Grumbler’s corpulent body:

The make of my person is not a little calculated to produce discontent; for though my body contains as many cubic inches of flesh as would form a personable man, these are so partially distributed; that my circumference is nearly double my height; added to this, I have that appendage to my back, which is by the vulgar naturalis held as a mark of nobility, entitling the bearer to the appellation of—*My Lord*. The frequent recapitulation of this title makes me dislike to stir abroad on foot; I cannot ride on horse back, and have no sufficient income to afford a carriage, except on extraordinary occasions (2).

Grose could in fact ride on horseback and he stirred abroad frequently, not only socializing with fellow antiquaries and other associates of the better sort, but also visiting the cellars and stews of St. Giles accompanied by a manservant.<sup>15</sup> Notwithstanding the differences of degree between Mr. Grumbler and his author, Grose presents his aging, obese body as an object of mirth and amusement for his readers.

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<sup>15</sup> Butler, “Edgeworth, the United Irishmen, and ‘More Intelligent Treason,’” in *An Uncomfortable Authority*, 38-40.

Grose was far from alone in so presenting himself. Before his death he furnished the subject for numerous comic sketches, epigrams, and caricatures. These uniformly make much of his enormity. The best-known image of Grose was probably the engraved reproduction of Nathaniel Dance's portrait (Figure 4.4). Frequently printed in the front matter of Grose's publications, the portrait made the antiquarian's jovial, rotund figure synonymous with his scholarship. Bearing an unmistakable resemblance to the Fat Antiquarian, the image refines and dignifies Grose's self-caricature even as it preserves the mirth and corpulence of the earlier image.



**Figure 4.4** Francesco Bartolozzi, after Nathaniel Dance, "Francis Grose," National Portrait Gallery, London.

The similarities between Grose's caricature and Dance's painting may help explain John Nichols report that a similarly satirical print offended Grose.<sup>16</sup> This 1785 etching, attributed to James Douglas (Figure 4.5), bears an inscription "to those Members of the Antiquarian Society who adjourn to the Somerset, by one of their devoted Brethren."



**Figure 4.5** James Douglas, "Francis Grose," National Portrait Gallery, (1785).

<sup>16</sup> John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1812) Volume III, 659, n. Web. Google Books.

The print depicts an almost gelatinous Grose dozing in a chair with an accompanying sestet that glosses the image in iambic tetrameter:

Now Grose, like bright Phoebus, has sunk into rest,  
Society droops for the loss of his jest;  
Antiquarian debates, unseason'd with mirth,  
To Genius and Learning will never give birth.  
Then wake, Brother Member, our friend from his sleep,  
Lest Apollo should frown, and Bacchus should weep.

Though the reasons for his reported displeasure are left implicit in Nichols's anecdote, the accusation of sleepiness seems the probable offense. Grose was perfectly happy to be described as fat and drunk. In addition to his own self-caricatures and Dance's portrait, Burns would depict him in just this manner in a series of verses. Douglas's print must have offended Grose, then, because it implies that the Captain's obesity makes him sleepy, dull, and unfit for antiquarian debate.

During the second of three summers that Grose spent traveling through Scotland, sketching ruins and collecting folklore, he met and befriended Burns at the estate of another retired army captain and antiquary, Robert Riddell. Their friendship lead most famously to the composition of "Tam o' Shanter" to accompany Grose's engraving of Alloway Kirk in the *Antiquities of Scotland*, but Burns also composed a number of witty poems about the obese antiquarian. As a group, these poems suggest Burns's engagement in the same spirit of playful satire on the image of Grose manifest in the caricatures produced by the Captain and his fellow antiquaries. Burns's "Epigram on Capt. Francis Grose, The Celebrated Antiquary" imagines the Devil's arrival at Grose's deathbed, where, upon witnessing the Captain's girth, Satan cavils. "Astonished! Confounded! cry'd Satan by God, / I'll want 'im, ere I take such a damnable load." Far from giving

offense, James Kinsely reports that the epigram “was so much relished by Grose, that he made it serve as an excuse for prolonging the convivial occasion that gave birth to it to a very late hour.”<sup>17</sup>

Gilbert Burns reports that by 1790 his brother and the antiquarian were “unco’ pack and thick thegither.” Judging by the verse Burns produced for and about his friend, the nature of their intimacy was defined by the kind of humorous mixture of blasphemy and good natured mockery on display in the epigram. Casually blasphemous humor was common in the verse and correspondence that Burns exchanged with male friends, and it made social inroads for the poet in his relation with figures like Grose. In addition to their social function, these poems make light of religion as part of a masculine performance that registers the complex interplay between antiquarians’ intellectual and material appetites: for conversation, for food and drink, for historical objects, and for sexual satisfaction. For instance, Burns’s lines “Written in a wrapper inclosing a letter to Captn. Grose to be left with Mr. Cardonnel Antiquarian,” elevate a simple note asking after Grose into a sacrilegious revision of an oyster gatherer’s song. The verses conclude by imagining objects of antiquarian curiosity as Cardonnel’s just reward for transmitting Burns’s letter to Grose:

So may ye hae auld Stanes in store,  
Igo and ago—  
The very Stanes that Adam bore;  
Iram coram dago.—

Notwithstanding David Daiches suggestion that “there is no point analyzing a poem of this kind,” these lines attest to Burns’s engagement with the satirical treatment of

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<sup>17</sup> Robert Burns, *Poems and Songs*, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford University Press, 1969), 450.

antiquarians' lust for relics as a morbid, sexual desire.<sup>18</sup> While the refrain is indeed meaningless, its pseudo-Latinity creates an air of feigned antiquity and Catholic superstition that Burns exploits as the aural background for his parodic treatment of antiquarian desire. Refiguring the conventional antiquarian fascination with stone remains of ancient buildings into a desire for Adam's testes, Burns suggests that an interests in ruins reflects diminishing virility and a perverse attempt to regain potency.

As lust for ruins becomes a desire for biblical gonads, so in the final stanza, Burns mockingly conflates antiquarians' enthusiasm for collecting historical currency with superstitious credulity:

So may ye get in glad possession,  
Igo and ago—  
The coins o' Satans Coronation!  
Iram coram dago.—

Like the nonce-Latin of the refrain, the poem holds out the promise of a reward that never was. The pedant, intoxicated with the objects of his fascination, fails to uphold distinctions between historical artifacts and superstitious relics, a jest freighted with the specter of Catholic idolatry. But like the night-urn into which the antiquaries peer while a dog urinates on a stack of weighty tomes in Grose's caricature (figure 4 above), the coronation coin is also humorous because it's anachronistic. Commemorative coins had only been struck to mark the coronation of British monarchs since James I and VI ascended in 1603. Attributing the coins to Satan's rebellion, Burns alludes to the relation between the coronation coin and the medals that Charles I ordered distributed to Royalist veterans in 1643.

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<sup>18</sup> David Daiches, *Robert Burns* (New York, Rinehart, 1950), 295.

In “On Captain Grose’s Peregrinations Through Scotland” Burns links such anachronism with more prosaic morbid objects. The speaker assures his Scottish audience that Grose possesses a variety of banal, comically improbable relics—a cinder from the first fire Eve made, Tubalcain’s fire shovel and fender, “That which distinguished the gender / O’ Balaam’s ass,” and the witch of Endor’s broomstick—and that the antiquarian can, moreover, demonstrate the nature of other items of Biblical origin:

Besides, he’ll cut you aff fu’ gleg  
 The shape of Adam’s philibeg;  
 The knife that nicked Abel’s craig,  
 He’ll prove to you fully  
 If ‘twas a faulding jocetleg,  
 Or lang-kail gully.— (ll. 43-48)

Leask observes that possessing the penis of Balaam’s ass and fastidiously discriminating the kind of knife that Cain used to kill Abel comically underscore “the *morbidity* of Grose’s collecting of mythic body parts” (265, original emphasis). Moreover, as numerous scholars observe, Balaam’s ass was female, and so “nothing” distinguished its gender. To my knowledge, however, no critic has dwelt on the glaring anachronisms evidenced in the objects of Grose’s morbid fascination. Whether “jocetleg” or “lang-kail gully,” Cain’s knife is that of an eighteenth-century Scot. In his “Essay on Comic Paiting” Grose recommends anachronism as producing a humor analogous to that created by physical incongruity. Like the sight of a tall man and a short one walking down the street together, Grose insists that “King Solomon in all his glory, delineated in a tie or bag-wig, laced cravat, long ruffles, and a full-dressed suit, will always cause a smile”(18). Burns’s “Peregrinations” mines the same comic vein when it announces the Captain’s ability to “prove” the nature of these objects, while also playing up an ambiguity concerning that

claim's provenance. The poem never clearly attributes the assertion that Grose possesses this ability, creating disparate implications. Is the claim meant to mock the antiquarian for conflating the Biblical past with the Scottish present? Or is it meant to satirize the naïveté and confusion of the poem's speaker? The ambiguity allows room for both alternatives, and may even anticipate in parodic form the connection drawn between the Hebrew Bible and Scottish bardic tradition later established by scholars like Hugh Blair.<sup>19</sup>

The list of objects Burns enumerates portray antiquarian collecting as incoherent, incongruous, and superfluous. Each of the three stanzas of the litany of artifacts suggests some measure of logic unto itself. Some of the objects can be classified as "auld nick-nackets," others form a series of ordinary objects with dubious Biblical provenance, and finally we have the anachronistic depictions of Adam and Cain's possessions. As a collection, however, these objects evidence no apparent principle of selection apart from reputed antiquity. Rather, in its very "fouth," or abundance, Grose's collection suggests an indiscriminate assemblage of useless materials. The speaker judges not only the extent, but also the worth of the Captain's helmets and armor when he remarks that these objects "Wad had the Lothians three in tackets / A towmont guid" (33-34). Imagining the armor melted down to provide hobnails for shoemakers, the speaker presents their quantity and value as intelligible in practical terms. Assessing the armor this way, the speaker links collecting with uselessness.

The speaker's pragmatic account of the armor evokes the contentious nature of preservation in the period. Rosemary Sweet observes that during the eighteenth century

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<sup>19</sup> On late eighteenth-century scholarly connections between Semitic and Celtic primitivism, see Harold Weinbrot, *Britannia's Issue*, (Cambridge University Press, 1996).



virtually all British monuments and antiquities were private property. The landowner whose estate contained a medieval church, a tumulus, or a former Roman encampment retained the right to do as he wished with those antiquities: “Hoards of coins could be melted down for bullion, standing stones could be burnt for lime, ruined abbeys and castles could be dismantled for building materials”(*Antiquaries*, 279). Throughout the century antiquarians expressed consternation not only at the attitudes of both reformation iconoclasts who had pulled down medieval churches and abbeys but also toward those contemporaries more likely to value the remaining piles as building materials than as ruins in need of preservation. Describing the abundance of armor by imagining how many hobnails it would make, Burns implies that if the antiquarian’s indiscriminate desires produce incoherent archives of morbid, superfluous items, they also prevent those items’ destruction. The “Peregrinations” complicates its own satire of Grose’s seemingly boundless desire for morbid antiquities by suggesting that the comedy of incongruity creates insights into antiquarians’ attachments to old haunted kirks “abandoned by their riggin’” and to incongruous collections of curious relics.

### III. Tam’s Collections

The most famous collection in Burns’s corpus might be the assortment of morbid curiosities that litter the “haly table” in “Tam o’ Shanter.” On the altar of the ruined church, Tam sees a murderer’s bones, the corpses of unchristened children and a thief, tomahawks and “scymitars,” and the implements of domestic violence used to murder an

infant and an elderly father. Leask argues that this hodgepodge of diabolical relics constitute “a paratactic miscellany of random objects representing a kind of Satanic parody of ‘official’ knowledge” (270). The narrator describes Tam as “amazed and curious” at the spectacle, thus anticipating his entranced sight of Nannie’s dancing. Leask’s reading of the Satanic collection highlights this connection, aligning antiquarian desire for curious objects and Tam’s voyeuristic engagement in the spectacle, culminating in his fateful, and nearly fatal, ejaculation: “Weel done, Cutty Sark!” These “unco sights” answer “a libidinous desire to ‘possess’ (or be possessed by)” the objects the narrator places before Tam and the reader, “in contrast to the judicious distance of the enlightenment historian” (Leask, 273). In this sense, pedants’ attachments to objects of intellectual contemplation resemble Tam’s more obviously demotic delight and sexual desire. Crucially, the parodic rejection of enlightenment detachment that Leask locates in “Tam o’ Shanter” finds expression at a witches’ black mass, a gathering that collects and presents not only diabolical curiosities but also women and men engaged in orgiastic dance. As the antiquarian curiosity of corpses and weapons on the altar becomes evident through the narrator’s paratactic display, so Tam’s lust gains meaning in part from the narrator’s emphasis on the Nannies incongruous placement among an assembly of withered beldames.

The act of collecting structures more than the final moments of “Tam o’ Shanter,” however. From beginning to end Burns’s sole attempt at an extended verse narrative brims with lists. Through them Burns stages a contest between a social world that unfolds paratactically in superfluous detail and a narrative that relentlessly gallops headlong

toward the Brig o' Doon and the poem's end. Indeed, it's the tension between the narrator's initial sketch of the witches' Sabbath and the detailed inventory of antiquarian curiosities on the "haly table" that marks the narrator's and Tam's suffusion in context. The contrast between enlightened detachment and antiquarian absorption that Leask finds in those lines only becomes evident in light of the narrator's pedantic digression from the more obviously appealing spectacle of the dance. Within the context of the verse narrative, the collection of diabolical antiquities is foremost a digression. While they may less obviously appear as such, so too are moments like the first verse paragraph and other instances of what Leask celebrates as Burns's "masterful scene painting," the litanies of natural and supernatural dangers, and the narrator's repeated use of epic simile. Arresting narrative progress, Burns uses the list to produce, borrowing Jerome McGann's phrase to describe his own work as a cultural critic, "a picture of great detail."

"Tam o' Shanter's" similes have most often been understood in terms of the poem's mock-heroism, the invocation of Gavin Douglas in the epigraph, and Burns's purportedly anxious debts to John Dryden, Samuel Butler, and Alexander Pope.<sup>20</sup> The most discussed of "Tam's" epic similes are those from lines 59 to 66, where, after depicting the revels Tam enjoys at the tavern, the poem shifts in the next verse paragraph from Scots-accented English dialect to standard English diction:

But pleasures are like poppies spread,  
 You seize the flow'r, its bloom is shed;  
 Or like the snow falls in the river,  
 A moment white – then melts for ever;  
 Or like the Borealis race,

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<sup>20</sup> M.L. McKenzie "A New Dimension for Tam o' Shanter," *Studies in Scottish Literature*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1963, 87-92.

That flit ere you can point their place;  
 Or like the Rainbow's lovely form  
 Evanishing amid the storm. – (ll. 59-66)

For Edwin Muir the shift into sententious, moralizing English evidences the Scottish poet's inability to write seriously in his own language. On this reading, Burns bows before Pope and Dryden as he meditates the fleeting nature of pleasure. More recent commentary tends to downplay Burns's veneration of Augustan literary tradition, emphasizing his contact with folk culture and late eighteenth-century sensibility.<sup>21</sup> In these lines the narrator's use of simile directly undercuts the moral logic he poses. As the narrator insists on forward progress he repeatedly defers it. With each anaphoristic "Or," the narrator interposes another comparison that describes a span of time that is incommensurable with those that preceding it. The rhetoric of the list expands the instant of passing pleasure until we reach the couplet that firmly announces: "Nae Man can tether time or tide; / The hour approaches *Tam* maun ride" (67-68).

Formally, however, the similes remove Tam and the reader from the experience of the pleasures of the tavern long before he mounts Meg and rides out to Alloway. In these lines, earlier in the description of tavern sociability, and later when he describes the rush of the "hellish legion" sallying after Tam, Burns uses the simile to closely describe coincident events, actions and activities occurring simultaneously in different spaces with an uncertain bearing on one another, meanwhile arresting the forward motion of his narrative as the list fills in the details that characterize the moment. In the very act of describing the futility of dwelling in pleasure and avoiding necessary departure, the

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<sup>21</sup> See Daiches, 285-287 and McGuirk, 154-155

narrator himself lingers over the indefinite moment before Tam must leave the tavern, indulging his own repertory of literary devices. From his bag of tricks he pulls the epic simile to illustrate for readers an instance of Augustan pastoral morality.

Not merely an act of obeisance to English neoclassicism or a shift into standard English that bespeaks ineptitude or a desire to parody, these lines resemble the relics on the “haly table.” Just as those manmade objects bespeak horrible crimes whose chaotic display challenges orderly enlightenment historiography, so figurative language here becomes evidence not only of time’s onward march and pleasure’s impermanence, but also of the impossibility of finding a single, standard measure for the duration of feeling. Pleasures are like poppies, snowflakes, the northern lights, rainbows. With each simile the chance of cultivating or predicting the fleeting objects mentioned becomes more and more remote. Rather than a uniform temporality that would allow the poet to compare the duration of Tam’s particular pleasure with those of others, the similes alert readers to manifold schemes of time and cycles that pertain to the curious phenomena detailed in the catalogue. The narrator’s similes are themselves relics of the recent literary past, of an Augustan poetics whose figurative structures expose the limits of homogenous time.

This isn’t to say, however, that Burns aims to assail *The Essay on Man* in “Tam o’ Shanter.” To the contrary the influence of Restoration and early eighteenth century poetics are powerfully and productively evident in Burns’s use of the mock-epic simile, the Hudibrastic couplet, and the picaresque narrative. Yet, “Tam o’ Shanter” lacks Butler’s unrelenting contempt for Puritanism as depicted in *Sir Hudibras* or Dryden’s lacerating derision of Thomas Shadwell’s dullness. David Daiches has argued that

Burns's greatest achievement in "Tam o' Shanter" is in fact a matter of tone. Daiches describes "Tam" as "at once comic and full of suspense, shrewd yet irresponsible, mocking yet sympathetic; there is a fine balance between mere supernatural anecdote and the precisely etched realistic picture, and it is maintained throughout the poem"(292). The comedy here is considerably closer to Cervantes than Pope.<sup>22</sup> Burns likely owned Smollett's translation of *Don Quixote* (1755), and early twentieth century commentators speculated that a translation of Cervantes's "Dialogue between Scipio and Berganasa, two dogs"(1741) might have served as a model for Burns's own "The Twa Dogs."<sup>23</sup> Whatever first-hand experience Burns had with Cervantes, the figure of "The Ingenious Gentleman" was widely diffused, adapted to myriad contexts in English prose, verse, and caricature. On the one hand, Don Quixote had become a touchstone in politically virulent satire.<sup>24</sup> On the other, the figure could still elicit a more nuanced and sympathetic response from readers. Scott seems to have seen a particularly strong connection between Cervantes and Burns. In *Tales of My Landlord*, a quotation from *Don Quixote* appears on the verso side of the title page roughly on a level with the quotation of Burns's "Peregrinations of Captain Grose," so that we read Burns printed, as it were, over top of Cervantes. Arranged this way, the paratext of Scott's *Tales* hints at the way Burns's poetry itself invokes the Cervantean heritage as a *topos* for sympathetic satire, a tradition of gentle ridicule that imbricates the narrator of "Tam o' Shanter" all the more fully in the cultural field of pedantic antiquarians.

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<sup>22</sup> For accounts of the diverse ways Eighteenth-century Britons inflected *Don Quixote* see Ronald Paulson, *Don Quixote in England: The Aesthetics of Laughter*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press),

<sup>23</sup> *Annual Burns Chronicle*, (Kilmarnock, Scotland: The Burns Federation 1902), 125.

<sup>24</sup> See Goode,

In addition to the narrator's more apparent litanies, "Tam o' Shanter" describes the tavern, Tam, and the rural Scottish landscape as filled with Scottish song and superstition, traditions conveyed by a version of the retiree. While Burns never mentions Tam's age or the narrator's, in etchings and paintings as well as critical commentary there seems to be an unanimous agreement that like Grose, Dugald Dalgetty, and Don Quixote himself, both of the poem's male characters are middle-aged. The only strong indirect evidence for the narrator's age might be those lines in which he imagines offering his threadbare pants, "That ance were plush o' guid blue hair," in exchange for a view of dancing girls "plump and strapping in their teens!" (156, 152). Tam and the narrator seem middle-aged in part by virtue of their transgressive, voyeuristic desire for younger women, Tam's marital status, and their mutual ability to spend time "boozing at the nappy." Seated over their ale, the narrator emphasizes that he and his cronies find reprieve from the business of the market and delay the material obstacles and dangers that await them: "We think na on the lang scots miles, / The mosses, waters, slaps, and styles, / That lie between us and our hame," (6-8). Social life in the tavern thus represents a temporary retirement for laboring Scots who might lack any expectation of a time when they could give up work after the fashion of professionals like Grose and Riddell.

Like the contemporary American expression "loaded," the Scots "fou" describes drunkenness as the consequence of being "full of liquor." Tam, of course, leaves the tavern having consumed "sangs and clatter" along with his ale and whisky. His homeward ride and the forward progression of the narrative begin with a series of lines in

which anaphora elaborates simultaneous actions that link the inclement weather, poetry, and superstitious fear:

*Tam* skelpit on through dub and mire,  
 Despising wind and rain and fire;  
 While holding fast his gude blue bonnet;  
 Whiles crooning o'er some auld Scots sonnet;  
 Whiles glowing round with prudent cares,  
 Lest bogles catch him unawares: (81-86)

In these lines Tam himself collects posture, voice, and gaze to embody the ballad tradition that he carries away from the tavern. Tam is “fou” in every sense, and the traditions he contains spill forth onto the landscape he traverses as the narrator describes the physical features of the country by relating each tree and stone to an untimely death. The narrator renders Ayrshire as a topography of accidents, murder, and suicide. It contains places where a peddler was smothered in the snow, where a drunk fell from his horse and broke his neck, where hunters discovered the body of a murdered child, and where a woman committed suicide. Describing these sites with the first names of “drunken *Charlie*” who fell from his horse and “Mungo’s mither” who hanged herself, the narrator suggests his familiarity and participation within the larger community of which he and Tam are a part. Both the verse paragraph that describes Tam’s superstitious crooning and the narrator’s grisly map of Ayrshire end with the increasingly close Kirk Alloway, drawing Tam closer to the witches’ dance he’ll witness there. The reader arrives at the Kirk, then, by first encountering a series of spaces and figures – the tavern, the mounted, crooning Tam, and the Ayrshire countryside – that collect and transmit curious songs and stories freighted with superstition. Commenting on the shift from the jovial tavern to the diabolical storm through which Tam must ride, McGuirk suggests that

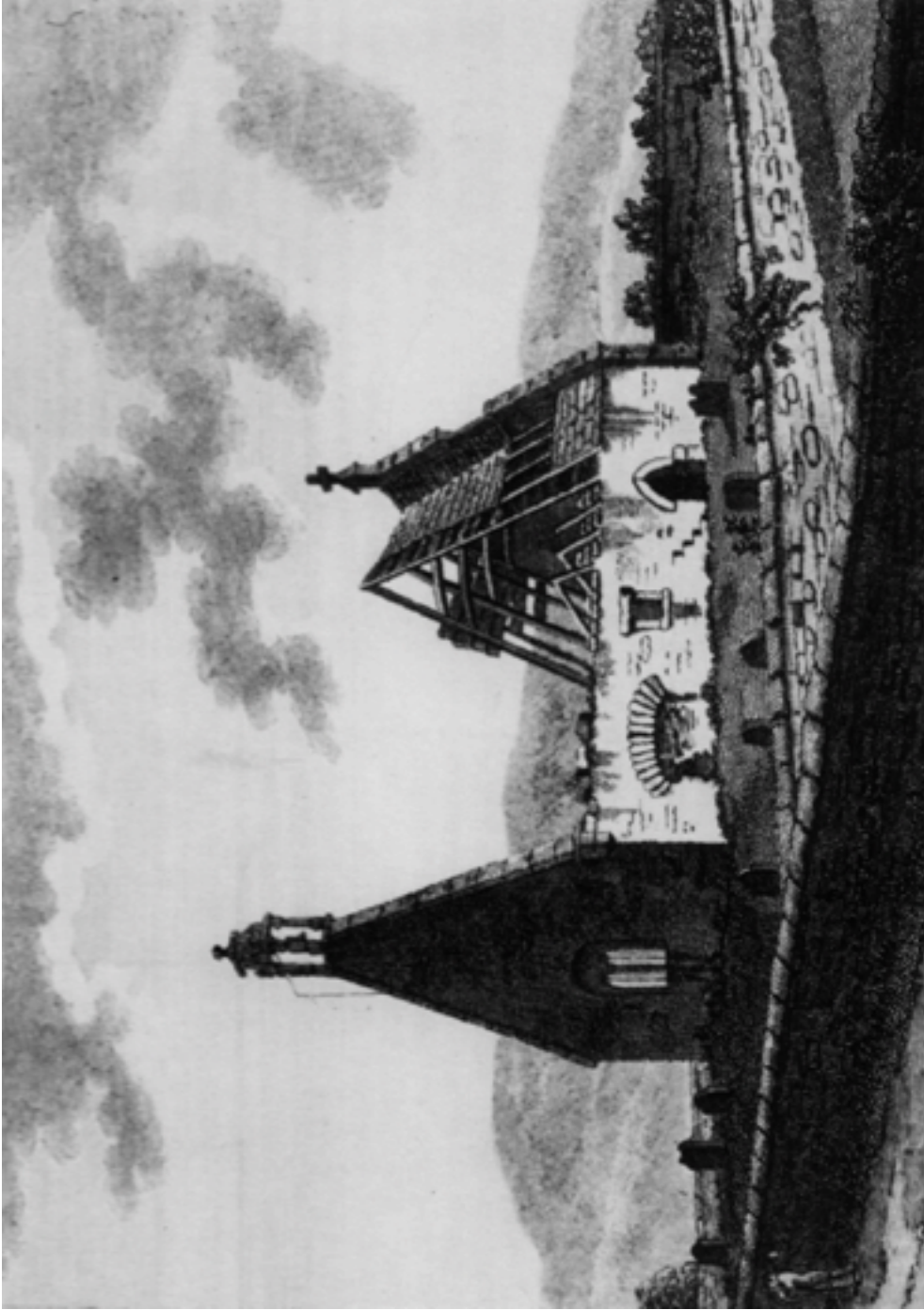


“Burns seems to *remember* he had promised Captain Grose a horror story” (155, my emphasis). Viewed as both an incongruous assembly of curiosities as well as a coherent narrative, the delay between “Tam o’ Shanter’s” extended depiction of tavern sociability and the first hint of supernatural horrors in the landscape of gruesome milestones powerfully conveys the narrator’s pedantic attachment to superfluous detail, his digressive compulsion to give a “fou” account.

But if “Tam o’ Shanter” presents a context brimming with detail, Burn's picture of Scottish superstition is also strikingly vague when it situates Tam within that landscape. As Tam rides home he is never quite in the same place as the various sites the narrator uses to describe his progress and to establish his morbid associations. Rather the narrator specifies a moment and then describes spots that Tam has either passed or that stand in some indeterminate relation to him: "By this time he was cross the ford / ... past the birks and meikle stane / ...through the whins and by the cairn / ...near the thorn, aboon the well"(89 - 95). Each spot is understood to mark the site of a death, but Tam's relation to them is vague at best, lending a sense of rumor and ambiguity to the narrator's map of rural tragedy. Grose had requested a supernatural tale "relating to Alloway kirk" for his *Antiquities*. Burns answers that request with a poem relating every inch of the path from Ayr to the Brig o’ Doon to some dark association or another, without ever placing its hero on the spot.

Alloway kirk might seem to represent a limit case for the claim I’m making about the difficulty of locating Tam in relation to the poem’s supernatural action. After all, we know its location precisely and the fact that Tam stops there. But the narrator locates Tam

no more definitely outside the kirk than during his ride. Many of the poem's first readers had assistance in visualizing Kirk Alloway on the page facing Burns's poem in the second volume of *The Antiquities of Scotland*, and Grose's engraving indicates some of the apertures through which Tam might view the action taking place within (Figure 4.6). Looking at Grose's engraving, we view the ruins from the northeast, as if traveling down the road from Ayr toward the Brig o' Doon with the Carrick hills in the distance. Depicted in broad daylight with a bonneted man strolling beside the churchyard wall, Grose's image reproduces Tam's vantage of the kirk in an altered light. Far from the abstraction and recombination of contemporary works in the picturesque, Grose accurately represents the kirk's architecture. As the image suggests, Tam might glimpse the witches' dance through either the rectangular window on the north facing wall or the pointed arch doorframe toward the west end of the kirk.



**Figure 4.6** “Alloa Church Airshire,” in Francis Grose, *The Antiquities of Scotland* (1791), Volume II, 198. Web. Wikimedia.org

Romantic and Victorian era illustrations of “Tam o’ Shanter” highlight this uncertainty, offering a range of interpretations of Tam’s vantage of the witches Sabbath. For instance, Thomas Landseer places Tam in a high window that vaguely resembles the one in the middle of the north-facing wall of the kirk. From that vantage Tam leans his head in and gazes with wide eyes and open mouth down at Nannie, her companions, and the piping Satan (figure 4.7). In contrast, John Massey Wright places Tam and Maggie beneath the pointed arch of a door similar to that at the west end of the north-facing wall (figure 4.8). Variations in Tam’s placement accompany diverse levels of detail and shifts in focus between illustrations. But nineteenth-century images of the spectacle at Alloway Kirk reflect more than the flexibility with which illustrators interpreted Tam’s location and what he sees. John Faed’s frequently reprinted illustration of the “witches and warlocks in a dance” depicts Tam looking through a lancet window that closely resembles those at the east end of the Kirk, the end of the ruin nearest the road in Grose’s engraving (Figure 4.9).



**Figure 4.7** Thomas Landseer, *Tam o' Shanter and Souter Johnny, A Poem, Illustrated by Thomas Landseer* (London: Marsh and Miller, 1830) plate inserted between 12 & 13. Web. University of Toronto.



**Figure 4.8** John Massey Wright, “The Witches’ Dance in Tam o’ Shanter,” (London: George Virtue, 1839).





**Figure 4.9** John Faed, *Tam o' Shanter*, by Robert Burns, for the members of the Royal Association of the Fine Arts in Scotland. (Edinburgh: 1855). Web. Google Books.

Like Wright's image sixteen years earlier, Faed's illustration highlights the parallel between the gaze of the besotted Tam as he "stood like ane bewitch'd / And thought his very een enrich'd" and the diabolical piper who "glowr'd and fidg'd fu fain / And hotch'd an blew wi' might and main" (lines).<sup>25</sup> Tam and Satan each fix a libidinous gaze on Nannie from their respective corners of the frame, triangulating her spectacular performance. Although the narrator does not specify where Tam stands as he watches Nannie, he clearly specifies that Satan pipes for the crowd from "A winnock-bunker in the east." And indeed, just above the monstrous shape of Satan is the shape of a column dividing the lancet. In Faed's image Tam's placement reproduces not only Satan's gaze, but the architecture that surrounds him, creating a window on the southern wall of the kirk where there ought to be a door. The disparity, uncertainty, and confusion between the various illustrations of the kirk and the witches' dance reveals that Tam's position is not simply vague, but evocative of his prosaic transcendence over Care earlier in the poem. "Kings may be blest," the narrator observes, "but Tam was glorious / o'er all the ills of life victorious." In spite of the frequency with which illustrators depict the scene, Tam cannot be authoritatively pinned down within the picture of great detail presented to us by the poem's narrator. He becomes, as Wordsworth would explain to Coleridge, less a character than a manner.

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<sup>25</sup> Engravings of Faed's illustrations were first printed in a popular edition of the poem in 1855 and appear well into the Edwardian era. They also featured prominently as a projected backdrop for well attended theatrical performances of "Tam o' Shanter" at the Burns Centenary celebrated at the Crystal Palace.



#### IV. Making Much of Little

Wordsworth espouses this view to Coleridge among complaints of loneliness and disappointment during the winter of 1799. Struggling to find partners with whom he and Dorothy might practice conversing in German and frustrated with his slow progress in the study of the language, Wordsworth reports finding himself unmoved by the ballads of Gottfried August Bürger. He and Coleridge had of course read Bürger in translation before the trip to Germany, and Wordsworth drew at least part of his inspiration for contributions to the *Lyrical Ballads* from that reading.<sup>26</sup> But contemplating *Lenore* and *Der Wilde Jäger* in the original German, Wordsworth expresses his preference for Burns and “Tam o’ Shanter:”

I do not so ardently desire character in poems like Burger's, as manners, not transitory manners reflecting the wearisome unintelligible obliquities of city-life, but manners connected with the permanent objects of nature and partaking of the simplicity of those objects. [...] I find no manners in Burger; in Burns you have manners everywhere. Tam Shanter I do not deem a character.

In his letter to Coleridge, Wordsworth creates an opposition between character and manners that highlights the extent to which a seemingly rigid dichotomy between the particular and the abstract could structure his thinking on the ballad. Negating Tam's status as a character, the letter implicitly identifies him with the “manners” Wordsworth finds “everywhere” in Burns's verse. In this way, the letter exploits Tam's demotic transcendence in order to align Burns with a deracinated, universal poetics that anticipates the theory of poetic pleasure Wordsworth would soon advance in his Preface

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<sup>26</sup> On Bürger's influence see Mary Jacobus, *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's 'Lyrical Ballads'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1976) 209-253

to *Lyrical Ballads*. Burns's manners satisfy the single restriction that the Preface imposes on the poet, “namely, that of the necessity of giving immediate pleasure to a human Being possessed of that information which may be expected of him, not as a lawyer, a physician a mariner, an astronomer or a natural philosopher, but as a Man.” The imperative that poetry please readers in their most basic capacity as human beings brings the opposition between Burns and Bürger, between manners and characters into sharper focus as a feature of Wordsworth's concern with poetry's potential to mitigate the increasingly fragmentary experience of modern, professional life.

The Preface in no way qualifies its mandate for poetic pleasure unmediated by professional knowledge, but elsewhere in the revised and expanded *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth presents the faithful rendering of professional character as a valid standard of judgment. His note to “The Ancient Mariner” stands out in this respect for ranking character first among that poem's “great defects,” complaining that “the principle person has no distinct character, either in his profession of Mariner, or as a human being who having been long under the controul of supernatural impressions might be supposed to partake of something supernatural.” The Mariner *should* be a character. Instead, he is merely a man, and as such conveys none of the eccentricities that distinguish sailors and the haunted. Criticizing Coleridge, Wordsworth betrays not only a desire for character in the “Rime,” but also his sense that credible depiction relies on a just representation of professional habit. Notwithstanding the authoritative declarations in his correspondence and documents such as the Preface, Wordsworth evidences a remarkable ambivalence about the merit of manners versus character, of Burns versus Bürger, of abstract human

nature versus the depiction of specific lives shaped by the habits of place and profession.

This ambivalence helps illuminate “The Thorn” as well as Wordsworth's strenuous efforts to defend that poem as spoken by a “character.” On the one hand, “The Thorn” impersonates the excitement of a narrator telling a story of rural superstition, much like Burns's narrator in “Tam o' Shanter.” On the other, Wordsworth's poem forgoes the “gross and violent stimulants” of drink and cutty sarks in favor of another species of excitement that straddles the line between character and manners. Like the Ayreshire that Tam traverses, Wordsworth's narrator describes a landscape where everyday objects communicate dark meaning. Both poems emphasize local detail, but in doing so they strike a different balance between the minute and the general. Whereas Burns's narrator evacuates Tam's physical presence from the clearly established space of Kirk Alloway, “The Thorn” measures the exact dimensions of a spot that could be anywhere in the Quantocks. Inverting the priorities Burns employs in “Tam,” Wordsworth's narrator carefully specifies the placement of an eerie tree and the exact dimensions of what his addressee will find there within an entirely abstract hillside setting:

Not five yards from the mountain-path,  
This thorn you on your left espy;  
And to the left, three yards beyond,  
You see a little muddy pond  
Of water, never dry;  
I've measured it from side to side:  
'Tis three feet long, and two feet wide.

#### IV

And close beside this aged thorn,  
There is a fresh and lovely sight,  
A beauteous heap, a hill of moss,  
Just half a foot in height. (23-37)

Mired in detail, the narrator of "The Thorn" produces an evocative collage of unremarkable natural objects. His increasingly agitated recital poses a question of considerable importance for Wordsworth's experimental poetics: can a man shaped by the specificity of professional life ever hope to communicate, not in his capacity as a former lawyer, an erstwhile physician, a landlocked mariner, an ex-astronomer or a retired natural philosopher, but as a Man? Selecting an abstract version of the retiree as his narrator, Wordsworth negotiates an uncertain balance between irreducible particularity and transcendent generality. The narrator personifies pedantry as a *manner* of story telling that collects seemingly unrelated objects, insists that those objects mean more than it would appear, and refuses to interpret them authoritatively.

Georg Lukács's "Realism in the Balance" (1938) speaks to the interpretive and representational problem at the heart of "The Thorn" in uncannily apposite terms. Among his many objections to the "superficial" practices of Modernism, Lukács attacks Expressionist montage as a form of collection that produces fundamentally disproportionate relations between the parts it tears from context and the reality to which the montage gestures. According to Lukács, Expressionism employs a trivial technique for the serious work of representing reality.

A good photomontage has the same sort of effect as a good joke. However, as soon as this one-dimensional technique – however legitimate and successful it may be in a joke – claims to give shape to reality (even when this reality is viewed as unreal), to a world of relationships (even when these relationships are held to be specious), or of totality (even when this totality is regarded as chaos), then the final effect must be one of profound monotony. The details may be dazzlingly colourful in their diversity, but the whole will never be more than an unrelieved grey on grey. After all, a puddle can never be more than dirty water, even though it may contain rainbow tints.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Georg Lukács, "Realism in the Balance," *Aesthetics and Politics*, (London: Verso, 2007), 43.

The figure with which Lukács dismisses Expressionist art - a puddle where in dazzlingly colorful detail belies the monotony and triviality of the whole - echoes Wordsworth's own muddy pond. The narrator never simply identifies the ponds as the spot where Martha Ray murdered her child. Instead, the final three stanzas merely report what others speculate, while the narrator steadfastly insists that he "cannot tell" (214). Like the images collected in an expressionist montage, the narrator's measurements wrest a seemingly trivial object from context in order to communicate its significance and from 1798 to the present moment readers have debated whether the muddy pond might be more than dirty water.

Like many touchstones of Wordsworth criticism, the scholarly conversation that examines this poem has often centered on a deceptively simple question: what is "The Thorn" about?<sup>28</sup> At roughly the same time that romanticism began to renew its fortunes among Anglo-American scholars, Stephen Parrish proposed that readings of this poem could be divided between those that admire it as a haunting study of social morality and those that complain that Wordsworth ought to have written in his own voice.<sup>29</sup>

Categorizing "The Thorn" as a dramatic monologue, Parrish alleges that both traditions are mistaken because the poem is not really about the tragedy of Martha Ray, but the character of a superstitious old man who excitedly tells her tale. Against this position, Frances Ferguson contends that the narrator "exists less as a character than a

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<sup>28</sup> To name just one additional example, consider the way that readings of the "Simplon Pass" episode of *The Prelude* have variously described the passage as a description of the poet's encounter with a divine presence in nature (Abrams), of the apocalyptic power of the poet's own imagination (Hartman), of an effaced and suppressed history (Liu).

<sup>29</sup> Stephen Maxfield Parrish, " 'The Thorn': Wordsworth's Dramatic Monologue," *ELH*, 24(2), 1957, 153-163.

characteristic way of talking.”<sup>30</sup> The narrator, she argues, is not a fully fledged psychological portrait of excitement. He is, rather, an exercise in tautology. Read as a trope, the poem’s narration represents “a passion about passion”(14). Narrowing his own focus to the exactingly specific, seemingly literal description of the pond in lines thirty-two and three, Keston Sutherland denies that the lines are about a characteristic way of talking so much as a way of reading. Sutherland draws on *Minima Moralia* and proposes that the lines, “are about what I have difficulty doing when I read them,” the cognitive and social experience of encountering radical art that cannot be, in Adorno’s phrase, “smilingly catalogued among its kind” by the uncomprehending philistine.<sup>31</sup> Each of these readings captures a vital aspect of “The Thorn.” It is a poem about its narrator. That narrator *is* a “pretext” for the text of his excited utterance. His excited utterance measuring a pond *is* a brazen attempt to confront readers with an unlikable thing and then insist “it ought to be liked.”<sup>32</sup> But it is also a poem about German and Scottish ballads, about the Somersetshire landscape, about the poet’s interaction with natural objects that haunt his imagination, about associationist psychology, about Erasmus Darwin’s *Zoönomia*, Joseph Cottle’s *Malvern Hills*, and even “Tam o’ Shanter.”<sup>33</sup> “The Thorn” is about all of these things and more. Each part is insufficient to represent the poem completely because the irreducible particularity of each detail resists a categorization that would reduce the vivid collection of cultural materials to a monotonous singularity.

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<sup>30</sup> Frances Ferguson, *Wordsworth: Language as Counter Spirit*. (New Haven: Yale, 1977), 13.

<sup>31</sup> Keston Sutherland, *Stupefaction: A Radical Anatomy of Phantoms*, (Seagull Books, 2011), 145, quoted 116.

<sup>32</sup> As reported by Henry Crabb Robinson. See *Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers*, ed. Edith J. Morley (3 vols. ; London, 1938) I, 166. Quoted in Sutherland, 123.

<sup>33</sup>For a comprehensive survey of scholarship on “The Thorn” to see Butler and Green, 352.

The narrative technique of collecting in “The Thorn” asks readers to decide whether a pond might be more than dirty water when the totality it figures is a world where parts and wholes seem to oscillate between a perfect fit and implacable disproportion. The objects the narrator observes are at once perfectly fitted for sinister uses and obviously trivial. Placing them within the logic of a list undermines the macabre implications that the narrator finally makes explicit, while emphasizing his assurance that they unquestionably mean something. A tree, a pond, and a mossy mound are hardly on par with the relics that litter the alter in “Tam o’ Shanter,” and yet, the precise measurements in line thirty-three imply the dark use of the pond as clearly as the blood crusted on the tomahawk on Burns’s “haly table.” Hugh Sykes Davies suggests that the measurements in fact show “that the pond was big enough – and only just big enough – for the woman to have drowned her infant in it, and that if she had done so, it must have been a terribly deliberate act; just as the thorn was ‘Not higher than a two years child,’ so that if she had indeed hanged her infant on the tree, it was a gallows of dreadfully fitting height.”<sup>34</sup> As Sykes Davies suggests the exact fit conveys a sense of intention, but not Martha Ray’s. The lines dramatize the narrator’s compulsion to “make a tale” out of the landscape and his competing urge to couch that tale in uncertainty. His list of natural objects implies that these competing desires generate excess in the incommensurability and disproportion of so many convenient means by which the community imagines Martha might have murdered her child and disposed of the body: a tree the perfect size for an infant’s gallows, a pond just big enough to drown a child and then conceal the

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<sup>34</sup> Hugh Sykes Davies, *Wordsworth and the Worth of Words*, (Cambridge UP 1986), 10, quoted in Sutherland, 126-127.

body, a mound exactly the right dimensions for an infant's grave. The minute observation of context turns out to represent evidence not concerning Martha Ray's intentions, so much as the contending impulses that drive the narrator's presentation of the pond as a *possible* site of infanticide.

The resistance to cataloging that Sutherland hears in "I've measured it from side to side / 'Tis three feet long and two feet wide," is an especially confrontational performance of pedantry that registers the tension between abstraction and specification in Wordsworth's persona for retirement as such. In those lines, the narrator betrays the peculiar afterlife of professionalism abstracted out of any particular occupation. The narrator's status as a retiree is unambiguous, but Wordsworth never specifies his former occupation. His language is not marked by obvious jargon, and he only acknowledges his status as an outsider in the community in passing, when he describes first encountering with Martha Ray after carrying his telescope to a hilltop "[t]o view the ocean bright / When to this country first [he] came" (182-3). The telescope might seem to imply a former sailor, but the narrator's speech only establishes that he came from elsewhere. Notwithstanding the repeated addition of supplements intended to frame the poem, Wordsworth never definitively identifies the narrator. Even in the note to "The Thorn," Wordsworth resists an exact characterization. Instead, the note begins with a counterfactual: "This Poem ought to have been preceded by an introductory Poem, which I have been prevented from writing by never having felt myself in a mood when it was probable that I should write it well."

Rather than a mere failure of mood, however, the note proceeds to dramatically



reveal that the narrator is, as Ferguson argues, less a character than a characteristic way of speaking. The note begins describing the narrator abstractly as a “sufficiently common” character. Rather than name this character, or describe the narrator as a particular instance of it with a determinate background, the note depicts him as a type, and readers “will *perhaps* have a *general* notion of it” if they have ever known an individual who exemplifies this sufficiently common character. The note offers a surfeit of possible details about the kind of man the reader might know, comparing him to “a Captain of a small trading *for example*, who being past the middle age of life, had retired upon an annuity *or* small independent income to *some* village *or* country town of which he was not a native, *or* in which he had not been accustomed to live” (350, my emphasis).

Throughout this sentence, Wordsworth balances specific description against disjunction. Each additional detail that elaborates the example of the retired captain branches in two directions. Whereas these details are subject to a disjunctive logic of opposed possibilities that may or may not conform with the readers’ experience, the next sentence shifts to a uniform account of what happens to men like the hypothetical retiree. “Such men having little to do become credulous and talkative from indolence; and from the same cause, and other predisposing causes by which it is probable that such men may have been affected, they are prone to superstition”(350 – 351). While retirement remains an abstract phenomenon in this description, its effects assume a heightened degree of probability, as reflected in the shift from the disjunctive “or”s in the preceding sentence to the additive “and”s that coordinate the causes that predispose retirees to superstition. The note thus describes retirement as a tendency that leads to superstition, and accordingly justifies the

selection of “a character *like this* to exhibit some of the general laws by which superstition acts upon the mind”(CLB 351). Like the telescope, Wordsworth’s description of the narrator couches specificity in abstraction, struggling to synthesize the details of character into retirement as a manner.

Notwithstanding the emphasis that the note places on describing the narrator as an abstract possibility, its collection of hypothetical detail has sometimes created a sense of alienating particularity. In his introduction to the poems of George Crabbe, for instance, Francis Jeffrey digresses from lauding Crabbe’s verse to indulge a lengthy attack on Wordsworth, taking particular relish assailing the note to “The Thorn.” Jeffrey questions whether anyone has ever encountered a character who meets Wordsworth’s description, and hastens to add that if readers happen to know such an individual, then imagining the workings of the retired captain’s mind seems even less probable:

[T]he annonce appears as ludicrous and absurd as it would be in the author of an ode or an epic to say, "Of this piece the reader will necessarily form a very erroneous judgment, unless he is apprised, that it was written by a pale man in a green coat — sitting cross-legged on an oaken stool — with a scratch on his nose, and a spelling dictionary on the table."<sup>35</sup>

Jeffrey reads the note as unambiguously prescriptive. His burlesque of the note admits no difference between describing the narrator who speaks in “The Thorn” and describing the circumstances in which the poem was written. He collapses persona into author. Mocking the detail with which the note attempts to conjure a hypothetical retiree as needlessly specific and alienatingly particular, Jeffrey refutes Wordsworth’s repeated attempts to distinguish the narrator’s voice from his own.

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<sup>35</sup> Francis Jeffrey. “Crabbe’s Poems,” *Selections from the essays of Francis Jeffrey*. ed. Lewis E. Gates. (Boston: Ginn & Co. 1894) p. 61. Web. Google Books.

Jeffrey's criticisms anticipate Coleridge's more nuanced response to the note in *Biographia Literaria*. There Coleridge resists Wordsworth's distinction between himself and the poem's speaker, but he allows that two moments within the poem do indeed seem appropriate to the speaker that the note describes. The first of those passages is the couplet concerning the muddy pond. The second is a longer passage that exhorts the audience to visit the spot where the thorn stands. Unlike Jeffrey, for whom the note becomes the sole rationale for thinking about "The Thorn," Coleridge turns to the poem and Wordsworth's commentary because he judges the speaker as congruent with the description of poetry in the Preface as an experiment in proportion — in "*fitting* to metrical arrangement a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation" (*CLB* 741, my emphasis). For Coleridge, the hyper-specificity with which the narrator describes a pond proves that "it is not possible to imitate truly a dull and garrulous discourser, without repeating the effects of dullness and garrulity."<sup>36</sup> While critics have occasionally dismissed Coleridge's assessment of "The Thorn" as "perversely insensitive" or as "arguing with Wordsworth at cross-purposes," they also regularly grant that his principle is sound.<sup>37</sup> When Coleridge triangulates the Preface, "The Thorn," and Wordsworth's note in the *Biographia*, he registers the harmonious fit between credulous excitement and the "real language of men." Spoken by a character who repeatedly insists he "cannot tell" what his audience wants to know but tells a great deal nonetheless, "The

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<sup>36</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, (Princeton University Press, 1983), II, 49.

<sup>37</sup> See Parrish, 162; Ferguson, 11.

Thorn” offends Coleridge in precisely the sense that Wordsworth most fully described it in prose: as an exercise in tautology (ll. 89, 175, 214, 243).

While the note exemplifies the beauties of tautology with quotations from Judges, contemporary discussions of the subject associate needless repetition and circular logic with the uneducated. In the mid to late eighteenth century, British works on rhetoric and grammar place tautology among a number of usages that indicate a lack of study. For instance, James Buchanan's *The British Grammar* (1762) singles out tautology as just the kind of infelicity that his textbook will correct, contending that "[i]t is remarkable that not only youth, but all grown persons who have not read with much Attention, or been more or less accustomed to Composition, fall, as it were, naturally into Tautology, both with respect to Sentiment and Words."<sup>38</sup> As Ferguson observes of the note to “The Thorn,” so for Buchanan too, tautology is a characteristic way of speaking. It reflects a basic feature of uneducated expression. But it is also a way of speaking that discloses modest economic and social origins. In this way tautology not only reveals an untutored speaker, but the new wealth that might bring him to a comfortable retirement in Somerset.

George Campbell's *Philosophy of rhetoric* (1774) presents a more varied assessment of tautology, stressing that its implications depend upon circumstance. On the one hand, Campbell warns his readers not to imitate Addison and Swift's use of the trope. On the other, he allows for its propriety in at least two circumstances. The first arises when an author clarifies an unavoidably obscure term with a more familiar synonym. The

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<sup>38</sup> James Buchanan. *The British Grammar: or an essay in four parts, towards speaking and writing the English language grammatically, and inditing elegantly. For the use of the schools of Great Britain and Ireland, and of private young gentlemen and ladies.* (London: A. Millar, 1762). xxi. Web. Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

second occurs if a speaker clings to terms “when language of the passions is exhibited.”

Campbell writes that, “Passion naturally dwells on its object,” and the impassioned speaker seeks to raise his expression in proportion with his feeling finds “that this is impracticable [and] recurs to repetition and synonymy, and thereby in some measure produces the same effect.”<sup>39</sup> In this sense tautology can convey feeling by virtue of the disproportion between the affect that motivates expression and the terms available.

Wordsworth's note similarly describes a speaker whose mind craves words adequate to express his passion and “as long as it is unsatisfied the speaker will cling to the same words, or words of the same character.” Wordsworth articulates a more radical sense of “the deficiencies of language” to convey meaning, but he nonetheless shares Campbell's sense that the use of tautology conveys “an expression in the very effort” (*CLB*, 351; Campbell, 275).

In “The Thorn” the expressive effort of tautology represents a compulsive, even unwilling circumlocution that can only ever talk around the events it strives to reproduce for its audience. The poem revolves around the collection of thorn, pond, and hill of moss without authoritatively interpreting them or demystifying Martha's attachment to the mountaintop. Instead, the narrator repeatedly points to these ordinary objects and insists that exactingly close attention represents the best hope of arriving at some semblance of meaning. The narrator's repetition reaches a peak in stanza nine, when he exhorts his listener to visit the thorn. Although the second speaker contributes only a few lines to the poem, in stanza nine his dialogue with the narrator dramatizes how tautology itself

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<sup>39</sup> George Campbell. *The philosophy of rhetoric*. Vol. 2. (London: W. Strahan & T. Cadell, 1776), 275. Web. Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

recreates and amplifies feeling. His excited demand to know Martha Ray's reason for visiting the eerie spot - "Whatever star is in the skies / Whatever wind may blow" - reproduces the narrator's description of Martha's visits to the mountain three stanzas earlier. The narrator interprets that repetition as evidence his listener has become caught up in a fruitless circuit of interpretation, and proposes visiting the thorn as an alternative:

Nay rack your brain—'tis all in vain,  
 I'll tell you every thing I know;  
 But to the thorn and to the pond  
 Which is a little step beyond,  
 I wish that you would go:  
 Perhaps when you are at the place  
 You something of her tale may trace.                   (105-110)

According to the narrator, interpretation is "vain," a painfully reflexive, inward looking affair. In lieu of such vanity, he advocates the outward experience of visiting the mountaintop in order to "trace" Martha's tale. Again refusing to tell, the narrator inscribes Martha's tale on the landscape and invites his audience to trace her tale in turn.

The transit from reading to writing that emerges from the narrator's instruction to trace Martha's compellingly uncertain tale reflects the central place inscription occupies in Wordsworth's poetics. According to Geoffrey Hartman's influential account, inscription is both the genre of the poet's first mature lyric and a genre of writing that undergoes a fundamental imaginative transformation in his hands.<sup>40</sup> The Wordsworthian inscription binds text, place, and subject in an ideal coexistence. "The Thorn" defines that bond as the outcome of attending to objects and lives that lack obvious interest. Groping

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<sup>40</sup> Geoffrey Hartman, "Wordsworth, Inscriptions, and Romantic Nature Poetry," *Beyond Formalism*. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1970) pp. 206-230.

after communal meaning, the narrator and his listener are caught up in the gyre of tautology. Without ever reaching the center that holds their interest, they circle a location where a pond three feet long and two feet wide measures the impossibility of discrete, self-sufficient meaning in pedantically exact dimensions.<sup>41</sup>

The pedantry of “The Thorn” helps illuminate how thoroughly making much of little defines the aesthetic and rhetorical approach of the *Lyrical Ballads*, particularly in poems with a similar investment in inscription. Hartman demonstrates how the first instance of this genre in Wordsworth’s corpus, “Lines left upon a seat in a Yew-Tree,” synthesizes Greek epigram and eighteenth-century Augustan loco-descriptive conventions in order to create a work that is at once specific to the site it memorializes and at the same time freestanding. Like “The Thorn” it is a poem with a sharply divided reputation. On the one hand, critical analysis of the Yew -tree lines’ genesis and their status relative to the rest of the *Lyrical Ballads* has provided powerful insights into Wordsworth and Coleridge’s collaboration during the summer of 1797 and the fruits that collaboration yielded.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, scholars have repeatedly suggested, albeit

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<sup>41</sup> In this regard, my reading of Wordsworthian inscription draws on Penny Fielding’s account of Burns practice as a writer of inscription in *Scotland and the Fictions of Geography* (Cambridge University Press, 2008). Fielding argues that in Burns’s hands, “[i]nscription, so far from demarcating the singular locality, shows that place can never preserve a self-sufficient and discrete interiority.”

<sup>42</sup> Jonathan Wordsworth sees the poem as imperfectly integrating ideas that Wordsworth first encountered in his discussions with Coleridge during the summer of 1797. Stephen Parrish counters that Coleridge simply composed the final seventeen lines. See Jonathan Wordsworth, *The Music of Humanity*, (London: Thomas Nelson, 1969) 195-7; Parrish, *The Art of Lyrical Ballads*, 65-70; and Jared Curtis, “Wordsworth, Coleridge, and *Lines, left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree*,” *Bulletin of Research in the Humanities*, 87.4 (1986-1987), 482-488.

ever so slightly, that only a reader as beset by emotional turmoil as poor, pitiable Charles Lamb could possibly find the Yew-tree inscription satisfying.<sup>43</sup>

The trouble with the Yew-tree lines is a matter of proportion, of the relation between parts and wholes. The first forty-three lines describe a misanthropic genius and the prospect of lake Esthwaite commanded by the seat he created in a Yew. They describe his youthful promise and the foreclosure of that promise in his response to “neglect”(l. 18). Leading a life of solipsistic reverie, the solitary consumed “visionary views” of social life. Lines 42-43 conclude the narrative of the lost man’s life by making explicit what has been tacit throughout: “In this deep vale / He died, this seat his only monument.” Then, following a stanza break, the final seventeen lines exhort the reader to arrive at a sense of transcendental union with humanity. “Lines left upon a seat in a Yew-Tree” asks the reader to inhabit the solitary’s perspective by inviting her to place herself in the seat, to contemplate his view of Esthwaite Lake, and to consider the implications we can draw from the lost man’s fate. For many critics, the solitary is too small, too isolated, too remote “to engage our interest.” The solitary cannot support the moral in whose service his story seems to have been told, and so the final seventeen lines ask the reader to make an irrational leap from the perspective commanded by the seat in the Yew-tree into a larger view of the self and the world. What would it require to make the poems parts fit? Implicitly what readers have objected most often is quite simply that the “Yew-tree” inscription reads as apprentice work on the road to Tintern Abbey, that the solitary is not as interesting and thus not as eligible a subject on which to hang reader’s sympathy as

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<sup>43</sup> Accounts of the poem regularly begin by noting Charles Lamb’s effusive praise for the inscription in a letter to Coleridge, and then shift to consider how the poem represents a less developed iteration of many of the concerns that inform Tintern Abbey. See Jacobus, 35-6; Hartman, 206-7



the poet addressing Dorothy. Rather than dismiss the Yew-tree inscription as an instance of a moralism that makes a mountain of a mole hill, however, I want to ask what it might mean to imagine the lines as poetry that earnestly espouses an ethical stance in the persona of a pedant, a speaker who demands our attention while insisting that what he has to say holds no interest because it resists our desire to move from the particular to the general.

The “Yew-tree” inscription marks its resolute lack of interest in the opening line. Hartman presents the poem’s opening as consistent with the “*Siste, viator*” of Roman epigraphy, but the “Yew-Tree” inscription addresses a reader less willing to be halted in his travels than that tradition had imagined. Roman inscriptions and neoclassical imitations command the passing traveler to halt at the moment of first encountering the monument. The Yew-tree “Lines” imagine a different encounter between text and reader. Rather than commanding the passerby to stop and read, the opening address, “—Nay, Traveler! rest,” attempts to arrest a reader on the verge of departure. The poem’s first line addresses a traveler who stopped to inspect the seat of the yew tree, read the conventionally elaborate title engraved there and found no obvious cause to continue reading. The first line imagines a audience whose attention is divided between the act of reading and turning to depart. Wordsworth’s “Lines” revise the *Siste, viator* moment in order to establish the traveler’s unwillingness to assume the role of audience.

As the poem progresses it describes the situation of the tree and its seat by negating the grottoes, bowers, and fountains ornamented with inscriptions by Wordsworth’s eighteenth century predecessors:

This lonely yew-tree stands  
 Far from all human dwelling: what if here  
 No sparkling rivulet spread the verdant herb;  
 What if these barren boughs the bee not loves (2-4)

These lines develop the desolation announced by the poem's title by pointing to the absence of familiar marks of pastoral fecundity. Meanwhile, the alliteration and Latinate transpositional syntax of the fourth line underscore the poem's artifice, placing the yew-tree and its environs in relief through an implicit comparison with the conclusion of *Georgics*, Book IV. Recent criticism has offered extensive evidence of Wordsworth's persistent interest in the georgic as a mode as well as the significance of his attempts to translate Vergil, particularly his aborted translation the Orpheus *epyllion* of Georgic IV begun in the late 1780's<sup>44</sup>. In this instance, Wordsworth echoes Vergil in order to

In his first contribution to the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth presents the yew-tree's boughs as an inversion of the final agricultural image of Vergil's poem: "iamque arbore summa / confluere et lentis uvam demittere ramis"[at last they stream together on the treetop and hang in a cluster from bending boughs](557-8). The image of Aristaeus's bees swarming the branches of the tree provides an especially interesting counterpoint to the yew-tree insofar as Vergil does not offer the narrative as instruction—he instructs us in the methods of restoring a lost hive before he begins Aristaeus's narrative. Having explained the method of producing bees from the putrefied carcass of an ox, Vergil asks:

"Quis deus hanc, Musae, quis nobis extudit artem? / unde nova ingressus hominum

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<sup>44</sup> On W. and Georgic, see Graver, Bruce E. "'Honorable Toile': The Georgic Ethic of Prelude 1." *Studies in Philology* 92.3 (1995): 346-60., ---. *Wordsworth's Translations of Chaucer and Virgil*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1998., ---. "Wordsworth's Georgic Beginnings." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 33.2 (1991): 137-59. ---. "Wordsworth's Georgic Pastoral: Otium and Labor in 'Michael'." *European Romantic Review* 1.2 (1991): 119-34. ; Goodman, Kevs. *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism: Poetry and the Mediation of History*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 2004. ; and Heinzelman, Kurt. "Millenaral Poetics: Wordsworth's 'Nutting'." *Raritan: A Quarterly Review* 19.4 (2000): 148-58.

experientia cepit?” [What god, Muses, forged this device for us? Whence did the advance of men seize this new experiment?](315-6). As such, when Aristaeus’s bees burst from the oxen he has slain to appease Orpheus, their confluence in the bending boughs answers a historiographic imperative, cementing a moment in the *ingressus hominum* and fashioning a historical continuity through mythologized agricultural practice.

Wordsworth’s barren boughs invert the historiographic status of Vergil’s bending limbs, reflecting the uncertain future of the narrative recorded by the “Lines” grafted into the yew-tree. The tree limbs bent with bees hanging in clusters quite directly represent the ability of *ars* to restore what has been lost through human errancy, namely Aristaeus’s attempt to rape Eurydice, and her subsequent death. The yew-tree’s boughs, despite the artifice with which the lines present them, no longer reflect the labor of the solitary genius who “taught this aged tree, / Now wild, to bend its arms in circling shade”(10-11). The exercise of artifice upon the tree’s limbs has failed to produce continuity, and the sole hope of restoring the solitary to some belated form of social sympathy relies upon the lines. But as an inscription inextricably bound to the tree, the lines themselves appear subject to the same vicissitudes of mutability. Consequently, the preservation of the solitary’s history rests with the ability of the lines to connect to a reader before they too inevitably disappear.

The inscription, as such, occupies a precarious seat both physically, and in the imagined community to which the spot and its resident genius stand adjacent. To inscribe these lines requires personal investment. Their author admits as much by conceding, “I knew him well,” while addressing the passerby as one unaware of the solitary’s history.

There are, after all, only three people in the poem: the author, the solitary, and “you,” the “Stranger” reading the lines. The writer assumes a unique position in granting himself knowledge of the “lost man.”<sup>45</sup> While his readers confront the spot without an immediate sense of its relevance, he presents the location and the narrative attached to it from a vantage of intimacy. Insofar as every reader of the lines confronts them as a stranger to their author and to the solitary, within the fiction of the poem, the man is “lost” not only metaphysically, but also forgotten. He has already slipped through the cracks of a communal memory, and the author’s commemorative gesture at once struggles against his final disappearance while seemingly acknowledging the gap between his own investment and that of the reader. If the Yew-tree lines constitute a literary monument in their form as poem published in *Lyrical Ballads*, they assert that this form is a translation from a marginalized, and threatened position upon the seat of the Yew-tree. Wordsworth, like so many writers at the turn of the nineteenth century, responds to the disciplinary boundaries established a generation prior by bringing what has been ruled out of the serious knowledge genres into the field of the profession of poetry. The Yew-tree lines enact this process most powerfully through a mode of thinking that constructs wholes from parts with a conscious disregard for proportion.

The desirability of such thinking becomes initially evident in the solitary’s failure to practice it. The lines describe his turn from society as a response to the neglect of his genius, but what seems to cement his isolation is an inability to connect

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<sup>45</sup> While I’m interested here in accepting the poem’s more obvious presentation of the author of the lines and the solitary as two separate individuals, William Galperin offers a provocative deconstructive reading of these two figures as “one divided self.” See, William Galperin. *Revision and Authority*. (Philadelphia: Univ. of Penn. 1989). 77-79.

the minute to the large. The seat in the yew, as it turns out, commands not only “the beautiful prospect” of the title, but a nearer spectacle, “barren rocks, with juniper, / And heath, and thistle thinly sprinkled o’er,”(25-6). What the solitary sees in his immediate surroundings is the canvas upon which,

Fixing his downward eye, he many an hour  
A morbid pleasure nourished, tracing here  
An emblem of his own unfruitful life: (27-28)

The minutiae of place become in these lines the pathological equivalent to Tintern Abbey’s world “Of eye and ear, both what they half-create / And what perceive” (108-110).

Whereas the solitary can constitute a self-image from objects in close proximity with seeming ease, “the more distant scene” produces a sense of alienation (31).

Tellingly, the solitary shifts his gaze from his immediate surroundings to the lake by “lifting up his head”(30). His eye, implicitly, remains “downward,” maintaining a perspective that holds the object of sight at a distance in order to produce a sense of accurate proportion. In a construction evocative of Milton’s double negatives, we discover the fullness of his isolation as he regards the beautiful prospect across the lake:

Nor that time,  
Would he forget those beings, to whose minds [...]
   
The world, and man himself appeared a scene
   
Of kindred loveliness: then he would sigh
   
With mournful joy, to think that others felt
   
What he must never feel

The lines represent their subject as one who maintains a consistency of perspective that requires making strict distinction between the objects he views. To look down, to regard the minute and local, is to see a reflection of self. To look up is to see an image of

“kindred loveliness,” from which he stands apart. By maintaining a sense of proportion and distance about the scale of prospects, the solitary is left, then with an amplified sense of isolation and misanthropy. He enables himself to wallow in that sense of “mournful joy” that can find only some vague sense of satisfaction that somewhere other people feel connected to one another in manner his “fancy” can entertain, but he cannot feel.

Over and against the solitary’s consistency of vision and his sharp distinction between the local and the universal, the conclusion to the Yew-tree lines advocate a willingness to engage a more pedantic perspective. Most readings have stressed the “lowliness of heart” from which the poem at last invites the reader to confront the world in a vein of Christian stoicism consonant with Coleridge’s thought (60). I want to suggest that the tenor of the conclusion and the stakes it posits in adopting this pose seek to underwrite a mode of thinking about proportion that has special relevance in understanding why the poem has seemed comparatively unsatisfying to so many readers. If, the conclusion suggests, we can escape the illusory confines of a rationally consistent and proportional way of thinking about the self in the world, we may escape the abysmal solipsism into which the “lost man” has fallen. “Lowliness” appears at first glance diametrically opposed to the preening attitude of the pedant, but what this humility enables is the ability to occupy opposed intellectual positions without contradiction.

True dignity abides with him alone  
 Who, in the silent hour of inward thought  
 Can still suspect and still revere himself  
 In lowliness of thought. (57-60)

The simultaneity of suspicion and reverence of the self in this formulation relies on what was, by 1797, already an archaic sense of what it means, “to suspect.” Taken within the

full context of the sentence it seems self evident that to suspect here signifies the same activity as its etymological root, *susplicere*: to look up to, admire, or esteem. This meaning becomes fully apparent when the final line situates thought in “lowliness,” suggesting the reversal of the solitary’s perspective. Before the final line reveals the lowly vantage from which we’re encouraged to “suspect” ourselves, however, the more familiar sense of the word as a surmise of something evil or undesirable is available if only for the moment of the line. The penultimate line courts our misapprehension that suspicion here is an activity opposed to, but nonetheless simultaneous with, reverence. Although the poem resolves the tension between the act of suspecting as a looking down upon and a looking up to, suspicion irresistibly draws us back to the downward eye of the solitary. Pedantry turns out to draw the reader down and in, where we partake of some small measure of the solitary’s morbid pleasure. When the poem turns outward in pursuit of a corrective to the solipsistic perspective with which the reader has been encouraged to sympathize it wanders after vast abstractions. The Yew-tree lines attempt to rescue the mind from solipsism by encouraging an inconsistency of perspective, a shifting that is pedantic.

The pedantry of the “Yew-tree” inscription elicited both parody and revision from Robert Southey in the *Annual Anthology* (1799-1800). Southey’s “Inscription under an Oak,” signed with the pseudonym “Theoderit,” adopts stilted diction and overbearing sententiousness in burlesque imitation of the “Yew-tree” lines. The Oak tree inscription mocks Wordsworth by impersonating a similarly moralizing poet who celebrates the stench of the kennel and the grunting of pigs. But Southey includes another imitation of

the “Yew-tree” inscription in the *Anthology*: “In a Forest.” Unlike the parodic Oak tree inscription, it appears under Southey’s name, the fifth in a series of eight inscriptions. It closely echoes Wordsworth’s poem with a crucial revision, exhorting the reader to tend a stone memorial that marks a “lonely spot [...] dear to one / Devoted with *no unrequited zeal* / To Nature.”<sup>46</sup> As a pair, Southey’s poems demonstrate that the “Yew-tree” inscription had hit a nerve. Matching a decorous memento to the happy nature worshiper with a parodic depiction of the poet who celebrates what is unlikable in nature, Southey disassembles Wordsworth’s poem in order to defend the genre of the inscription against the pedantry of the “Yew-tree” lines.

Mocking Wordsworth, the *Annual Anthology* repeats a pattern that emerges in responses to the use of the pedant as a lyric persona in romantic poetry. Like Wordsworth’s remarks on Burns, like Coleridge’s commentary on Wordsworth in the *Biographia*, like Byron’s Preface to *Don Juan*, Southey’s imitations level the distinction between poet and persona in the “Yew-tree” inscription, while affirming that they differentiate between expression and art. Writing under his own name, Southey’s series of inscriptions are generic and impersonal. Meanwhile, Southey’s pseudonym, “Theoderit,” is both a greco-roman portmanteau meaning “he will be a god,” and an anagram for “the editor.” It simultaneously attacks what the “Inscription under an Oak” presents as Wordsworth’s naive expression of egotism in the “Yew-tree,” and detaches the poem’s parodic imitation from its authorship.

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<sup>46</sup> Robert Southey, “In a Forest,” ll. 2-4 in *The Annual Anthology*, ed. Robert Southey, 1799 - 1800, Reprint (New York: Woodstock Books, 1997). My emphasis.



Southey's pseudonym underscores the detachment of his parody. "Theoderit" marks the difference between persona and poet, coolly reassuring the reader that the editor's pedantry is only a pose. It insists that the pedantry of the poem remains legible as a mere joke, and affirms that clarity, proportion, and modesty remain the order of the day. Making much of little, Wordsworth proposes an alternative poetics that enacts the same dialectic between immersion and effusion through which Burns catches a glimpse of universal brotherhood. Embracing the multiple concurrent possibilities that become visible to the pedant's disproportionate gaze, Wordsworth's pedants refashion the galvanizing refrain of an anthem into a tautology. In this way, the revolutionary potential of "For a' that and a' that," informs the plaintive repetition of "the Thorn" :

"Oh misery! oh misery!  
Oh woe is me! oh misery!"

## Postscript

Reader, I buried him.

### The Realist Death of the Romantic Pedant

Like Wordsworth's Solitary, Edward Casaubon dies seated beside a yew tree. And like the solitary, what he leaves behind is writing: the fragments and notes for his *Key to All Mythologies* and a last will and testament. As Wordsworth's "lost man" turns away from society out of a disappointed sense of neglect, Casaubon too suffers from a "consciousness that others did not give him the place which he had not demonstrably merited."<sup>1</sup> Although the narrator extends a measure of sympathy to Casaubon in imagining his inner life, the novel strongly suggests that his life and labors have no share among those "unhistoric acts" that the novel celebrates (785). Rather, he personifies a set of literary, intellectual, and psychological threats that the novel must surmount and expunge in order to achieve its moral aims.<sup>2</sup> Where *Jane Eyre* chastens and subdues the Byronic hero, reconciling its personification of romanticism within Victorian domesticity,

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<sup>1</sup>George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. David Carroll, (Oxford UP, 2008) 391.

<sup>2</sup>Studies of *Middlemarch* have frequently posed an imperative to correctly identify a model for Casaubon. Literary and scholarly figures include Milton and his contemporary Isaac Casaubon, as well as their Victorian biographer, Mark Pattison. See: Francis C. Blessington, "The Portrait in the Spoon: George Eliot's Casaubon and John Milton," *Milton Quarterly*(20:1) 29-31, March 1986; D.B. Nimmo, "Mark Pattison, Edward Casaubon, Isaac Casaubon, and George Eliot," *Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society*, (17) 1979, 79-100; Dominick La Capra, *History, Politics, and the Novel*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987) 56-82. Anthony David Nuttall, *Dead from the Waist Down*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 2003). Biographical and psychoanalytic readings have presented Casaubon as an avatar for Dr. Robert Brabant and for George Eliot herself. See: Richard Ellman, "Dorothea's Husbands," *George Eliot: Modern Critical Views*, ed. Harold Bloom, (New York: Chelsea House, 1986) 65-80; Seth Lerer, *Error and the Academic Self*, (New York: Columbia UP, 2002) 103-174; Neil Hertz reads Casaubon as the personification of both the dead letter and the narcissistic imagination, coming in chapters 20 and 21 solely to represent narcissism and thus allowing him to "be recognized and banished from the novel," *George Eliot's Pulse*, (Palo Alto, Stanford UP, 2003) 31.

*Middlemarch* kills the scholar who quests after *esemplastic* knowledge; it overthrows the “reductive monism” that would shape all things into one.<sup>3</sup>

In this sense Tertius Lydgate shares Casaubon’s fate. Both men pursue a totalizing system that would reconcile discordant detail within an overarching theory. Both publish work in the field of their scholarship but fail to produce a longed for magnum opus. And both die in middle age, leaving behind widows who find happiness in their second marriages. Rosamond explicitly regards her second marriage to an elderly and wealthy physician as “a reward for her patience with Tertius” (782). Dorothea’s recompense is more diffuse and less narcissistic, but whatever happiness each woman achieves in later life is a product not only of surviving an unhappy marriage, but also of escaping the grasp of a controlling “dead hand,” of successfully burying her husband.

In its rebellion against patriarchal monism, *Middlemarch* also rejects an ideology of vocation that equates an individual’s worth with his profession and his ability through that profession to make “some mark in the world” (510). Will Ladislav uses this phrase to describe the conditions of his self-imposed exile from Middlemarch. Only when he has achieved professional distinction will he return to the town. Of course, it’s precisely his lack of a clear professional path and his repeated contradiction of this resolution that eventually unites him with Dorothea. In contrast, the characters who most typify their professions — Reverend Casaubon, Doctor Lydgate, Bulstrode the Banker — are also those characters *Middlemarch* depicts as least personally fulfilled. They are men

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<sup>3</sup> On the Byronic hero in *Jane Eyre* and the female rebellion against an acquisitive and reductive monism in *Middlemarch* See: Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven: Yale, 1979).

hollowed out by the exclusivity with which they pursue their attachments to professional ambitions and desires.

*Middlemarch* most explicitly connects professional feeling with eros in the case of Lydgate. Remarking on readers' lack of interest in stories concerning the choice of a profession compared to the "twanging of the old Troubadour strings," the narrator characterizes Lydgate's medical studies as a modern romance that entails wooing and sacrifice to win its object (135). Indeed, his relation to medicine begins with a considerably more chivalric attachment than his casual flirtation with Rosamond. Enthusiastic and single-minded, he pursues his studies firm in "the conviction that the medical profession as it might be was the finest in the world" (136). But where the Troubadours' *chansons* narrate "how a man comes to fall in love with a woman and be wedded to her, or else be fatally parted from her," *Middlemarch* documents the costs of exclusive passion as they unfold and develop over years and decades. The novel sustains the link between eros and profession as it narrates the obstacles Lydgate's research encounters in the town, his growing discontent with his wife, and his gradual entry among "the multitude of middle-aged men who go about their vocations in a daily course determined for them much in the same way as the tie of their cravats"(135).

Beginning his career under the sway of an exclusive attachment such as those Hazlitt attributes to the soldier mounting the breech or the miser starving himself, Lydgate is proud to shoulder the painful and trivial costs of his profession. He accepts his relatives' disapproval and sacrifices many conveniences in order to live in a provincial town where he can pursue his professional ambitions. Suspected of grave-robbing by a

community that cavils at his research, he imagines himself as a latter-day Vesalius, flaunting the mores of a society whose “respect” for the dead hinders the advance of medicine. As they discuss this professional obstacle and the model with which Lydgate compares himself, Rosamond gently registers her discomfort with the parallel: “Do you know, Tertius, I often wish you had not been a medical man.” Lydgate demonstrates the extent to which his profession defines his identity and the strength of his attachment to it in his reply to Rosamond. “That,” he replies bluntly, “is like saying you wish you had married another man.” Lydgate can only see a personal affront in Rosamond’s comment and in a moment of unguarded narcissism, he hints at the vanity that informs his professional identity:

“It is the grandest profession in the world, Rosamond,” said Lydgate, gravely.  
 “And to say that you love me without loving the medical man in me, is the same sort of thing as to say that you like eating a peach but don't like its flavor. Don't say that again, dear, it pains me.” (430)

In the midst of a conversation in which he compares himself to a man who “died rather miserably” in part owing to his research, Lydgate refuses to countenance the possibility that his wife might find a similar sacrifice unacceptable. He fails in the pursuit of his professional ambitions not only because he marries a woman who refuses to match the sacrifices he seems willing to accept, but because his exclusive attachment to his research blinds him to the extremity of his infatuation with medicine and the nature of the sacrifices that society might demand in order to support his research. In his pedantry, Lydgate cannot imagine the possibility that his wife might not measure her own happiness and his worth on the discovery of primitive tissue. His decisions are guided by a prejudice in favor of his profession and a narcissistic assumption that the achievement

of his narrowly defined sense of accomplishment is the only means by which he might achieve happiness. The Finale contrasts his consequent sense of failure and Dorothea's sense of unrealized possibility. Looking back, Dorothea perceives in herself an indefinite potential: "there was always something better which she might have done, if she had only been better and known better"(782). In contrast, Lydgate judges himself according to the standards he set for himself before he had arrived in Middlemarch: "He regarded himself as a failure: he had not done what he once meant to do"(781). Lydgate's sense of failure manifests the high costs of his vocational identity, an identity that deems making a mark on the world and on a profession as the sole measure of success. In his pedantry, Lydgate subject himself to a monism that reduces a man to a doctor.

The narrator grants Casaubon a similarly emotional engagement with his professional pursuits. He is capable, of experiencing, "a tenacity of occupation and an eagerness which are usually regarded as the effect of enthusiasm" in his study of ancient traditions(185). But the novel emphasizes that even in these pursuits, Casaubon has no share of joy. Affirming her own fellow feeling as she imagines Casaubon's lack of sympathy, the narrator imagines what a hardship it would be "never to be fully possessed by the glory we behold, never to have our consciousness rapturously transformed into the vividness of a thought, the ardor of a passion, the energy of an action, but always to be scholarly and uninspired, ambitious and timid, scrupulous and dim-sighted"(263).

Casaubon's joylessness marks him as a man apart, an individual with no share in the fellow feeling that binds communities.<sup>4</sup>

Like *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, *Middlemarch* presents pedantry as unsympathetic. But if Smith sees such failure as subject to the intercession of proper training in moral philosophy and rhetoric, Eliot's narrator appears to share the belief, common among the romantic-era writers this study examines, that pedantry is not only a failure to observe decorum but a distinct affect. *Middlemarch* refashions the pedantry celebrated by the romantics from an enthusiasm that dampens sensitivity to others' boredom into a joyless, narrow self-absorption. Personified in Casaubon it represents a "proud narrow sensitiveness which has not mass enough to spare for transformation into sympathy, and quivers thread-like in small currents of self-preoccupation or at best of an egoistic scrupulosity." Stressing Casaubon's scruples, his "severe self-restraint," the narrator presents his lack of fellow feeling as an anti-social inversion of Smith's theory. He is perfectly capable of imagining what others think of him and of altering his behavior and expression to suit the occasion. In doing so Casaubon refers his judgment not to Smith's robust "man within the breast," but rather a soul "fluttering in the swampy ground where it was hatched, thinking of its wings and never flying"(262). Casaubon's pedantry is monstrous. It originates in circumstances beyond his control — the swampy ground from which he springs — but no act of generosity, no sacrifice can set him free of it.

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<sup>4</sup> In his joylessness, Casaubon might be read as a de-sacralized corollary for Edmund Spenser's evil knight, "Sans-Joy." On that character's place within the Protestant theology of joy as a sign of adhesion to God and fellow man, see: Adam Potkay, *The Story of Joy from the Bible to Late Romanticism* (Cambridge UP, 2007) 73-94.

By burying its pedants, *Middlemarch* not only frees Dorothea and Rosamond, it also trains readers to recognize pedantry, to see the connections between Casaubon's stillborn sympathy and Lydgate's self-flattering passion for medicine. Celebrating the marks left by characters such as Dorothea, Will, Fred, and Mary, the novel asks readers to question the sacrifices that pedants might demand of us. The Finale cautions that, like Dorothea, we risk much when we misconstrue exclusive attachments and inflexible ambitions as greatness. Vouching for the "incalculably diffusive" contributions of average lives to "the growing good of the world," *Middlemarch* affirms its title (785). It disavows the passionate rambles of solitary pedants in favor of the collective, measured cadence of the forward march.



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