View metadata, citation and similar papers at core.ac.uk
brought to you by CORE
provided by University of Missouri: MOspace

Oral Tradition, 15/1 (2000): 74-95

"O man do not scribble on the book": Print and Counter-print in a Scottish Enlightenment University

Matthew Simpson

The University of St. Andrews in the latter half of the eighteenth century was a small and under-funded institution. Nevertheless, it shared in the changes and accomplishments that made Scottish intellect in that period a European phenomenon. Some evidence of the university's intellectual vitality at that time can be seen in the very full records that survive from its contemporary Library: records of the Library's administration and of its everyday business, and also such records as the books themselves represent. It is with this last sort of evidence that I will be mainly concerned here. The books at St. Andrews unwittingly preserve a remarkable corpus of marginalia added by the students. In this article, I hope to relate these student writings to their educational context. Making use of the distinctions that Walter Ong has so instructively drawn between print, manuscript, and oral habits of mind, I will suggest that the marginalia oppose the Enlightenment ideology of their university with the values of an older style of discourse.

Much has been written about that astonishing flourish of Scottish intellect commonly called the Scottish Enlightenment, and there have been various attempts to account for it.[1] Since we know it largely by its published works—or indeed *as* those works—we may confidently say at least that a necessary condition for its development was the adaptation of Scottish intellectual culture to the printing press. Such adaptation can indeed be observed directly. In religion, for instance, it was not just that the

[1] See Broadie (1997:10): "Scotland's situation at the start of the eighteenth century has prompted many to ask how this of all countries could, just then, have moved towards the accomplishment of so much."

liberalizing and gentrifying of the Church of Scotland in this period made polite literature an accepted part of the minister's mind, active in his sermons and his conversation; this minister, now so well equipped to please and edify, was urged to publish. Print was asked from him both as a professional, a provider of sermons and prayers, and more largely as a practitioner in belles lettres. In the 1770s, a series called *The Scotch Preacher* began to offer to ministers, even to those in "obscure corners of the country," the printed way into "public notice and regard" as "Authors"; they had only to bring their sermons into "that state of correctness which would render them fit for publication."[2] One of the sermons that subsequently did appear in that series (though by no means from an obscure corner) was Alexander Carlyle's address given in 1767 to the Synod of Lothian and Tweeddale, in which he had invited his clerical audience beyond such merely professional discourse and into "that field of distinction so lately opened to the learned of this country, I mean composition, and the art of writing [. . . .] It is here, ye rising hopes of our Jerusalem! it is here that you must look for your rewards in this world" (*The Scotch Preacher* 1789:II, 25). The printed results, both spiritual and secular, are indeed part of what we count as the Scottish Enlightenment.[3] Most notable among these clerical authors was Hugh Blair, whose *Sermons* (1777-1801) and *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783) were publishing triumphs of both sorts.

The universities (whose leaders were mostly the same men as those leading the liberalized Church, and many of whose students were destined for the ministry) were making a similar adjustment. Of course, they had always needed and produced texts that were standardized by copying or printing, but some changes in the academic profession were now giving that part of their function a new motive force. It was during the eighteenth century that the teachers' part in that much-prized polymathic tradition of the Scottish arts course was abandoned: the "regent," who had hitherto taught most subjects to his one group of students as they passed through their arts course, and who had also acted as their moral tutor, was now wholly replaced by the specialist professor.[4] The effect of this change was to channel academic work in the direction of research, making the university

---

[2] Quotations from the Advertisement to *The Scotch Preacher* (1789:I, v-ix).

[3] Richard Sher (1985:164-65) provides a list of "Polite Literature Published by Scottish Ministers, 1746-1793."

[4] The change was completed at Edinburgh in 1708; Glasgow in 1727; St. Andrews in 1747; Marischal College, Aberdeen, in 1753; and King's College, Aberdeen, in 1799.

teacher's ideal sphere of activity the printed book rather than the classroom or lecture-hall. As Dr. Chalmers, Professor of Moral Philosophy at St. Andrews University in the early post-Enlightenment period, said, "I make the Chair the medium of conveyance to the press" (*Evidence* 1837:80). A contemporary of Chalmers on the staff at St. Andrews fitted the student into this revised model of academic communications by suggesting that, rather than attending the live lecture, he should obtain a copy of his professor's published text and "study the subject coolly and without distraction in his closet."[5]

The lectures continued in spite of such professorial reasonableness, but there was another university reform that was more persuasive in drawing the student into the new print-orientation. During this same period, the later eighteenth century, the Scottish universities made significant changes in the academic subject that had discourse for its field of study—namely Rhetoric. Its professors now added to the subject's traditional preoccupation with the techniques of persuasive oratory a much broader interest in composition of all kinds. The illustrative texts were no longer the Latin and Greek classics only; there were modern English samples too, and these were given attention not merely as samples but in their own right as objects of literary criticism. There has recently been much discussion of this "New Rhetoric" in the Scottish universities.[6] It has been convincingly identified as the starting-place of the modern academic subject of English Literature. If this seems an odd place for English studies to start, we must remember that Rhetoric's Scottish students were being educated for participation in the London-centered nation of Britain: the study of English literary models—Pope, Swift, Thomson (a Scot, but writing, of course, in a Scots-free English)—would help these students to avoid self-betrayal and consequent self-limitation as provincials. In this way Rhetoric was part of the assimilation of Scottish culture to English culture. This trend has been regretfully acknowledged even while the New Rhetoric's great academic import has been celebrated.[7]

What has been less frequently noticed (or perhaps simply taken for granted) is that the reform of Rhetoric also involved a shift from its traditional, essentially oral character as a science of public speaking toward literary and critical interests that made it more nearly a science of the printed

---

[5] *Evidence* 1837:151—testimony of Thomas Duncan.

[6] See esp. Crawford 1992, 1997, 1998.

[7] E.g., in Crawford 1992:42.

book, which is indeed what modern English Literature has largely been— at least in British schools and universities. This shift is one that Robert Watson, professor in Rhetoric at St. Andrews University and one of the pioneers of the New Rhetoric, expressly announced at the start of his course of lectures on the subject, as surviving notes of those lectures show (Watson 1758:fol. 1r-1v):

> In order to fix the Notion of Rhetorick, let me observe the chief Particular in which it seems necessary to find Fault with the common Writers on Rhetorick, is for confining their Precepts to one particular Sort of Discourse viz; Publick Orations. First because many of the Rules of this Art are of a General nature, and therefore ought to be delivered as general. And Secondly. Because an Acquaintance with the Rules of History, and Poetry, is at least of equal Consequence to the Improvement of Taste, as an Acquaintance with the Rules of Orations.

This "taste," then, was to be as much related to texts as to speech. It was, besides, to be a reader's taste as much as a writer's: "To what follows then you may give the Name of Rhetorick, or Criticisms as you please; if they deserve the one they will deserve the other also."[8] If Scottish intellectual culture was migrating into print, Rhetoric was teaching the future generations how to consume it in that form.

That migration is not my primary subject here; I only wish to establish it as a necessary and leading characteristic of the Scottish Enlightenment. Nor can I attempt here to say how that migration related to the Anglicization of Scottish culture; the two were certainly inseparably involved. And just as that Anglicization was after all only partial—in some areas of Scottish life nearly ineffectual, here and there actively resisted—so in the matter of print, there was resistance, conscious and otherwise. It was most conscious, perhaps, in the Church, where the difference between print and speech had important theological implications. As Samuel Johnson said (with reference to Church of Scotland prayers, but much the same principle applied to the sermon), "The minister formerly, in the effusion of his prayer, expected immediate, and perhaps perceptible, inspiration, and therefore thought it his duty not to think before what he should say" (1985:87). This traditional practice of the Presbyterians, condemned by less sympathetic observers as "extemporary ravings, which they miscall spiritual preaching and praying," may be compared to the week's compositional labor that Hugh Blair would

[8] Watson 1758: fols. 1v and 2r. See also Warnick 1993:34-35.

devote to a sermon.[9] Johnson was pleased to find the old doctrine in disuse: he, after all, regarded the sermon as "a considerable branch of English literature" (Boswell 1980:1145; entry for May 8th, 1781). But a substantial grouping in the Church of Scotland, the "orthodox" or evangelical party that had opposed the liberalizing reforms of the "moderates," was in fact holding on to that old doctrine and deploring the transformation of the sermon and prayer into a subsection of what this party's most eloquent spokesman, John Witherspoon, scornfully called "fine writing" (1754:18).

Could there reasonably have been an equivalent resistance in the universities, where the new arrangements had such obvious professional advantages? Certainly some educationists worried about the incidental loss of that pastoral attention to students that the all-purpose regent had provided, a loss that eventually made student residency in the Scottish universities impractical. (In St. Andrews, it ended in 1820.) Although this concern gave rise to some more welfare-conscious alternatives—real or imagined college communities, glorifications of the tutorial relationship[10]—it was just as likely to produce printed remedies. The New Rhetoric itself was one such remedy; since good literature provided "a profitable exercise to the virtuous affections and passions," the study of it was really a moral discipline (Watson 1778:142-43). In addition, there was a growing body of print aimed at supplying just that holistic pedagogy that was disappearing from the Scottish universities. Texts like John Clarke's *Essay on Study* (1731), Isaac Watts' *Improvement of the Mind* (1741), Eliza Haywood's *Female Spectator* (1745), or Robert Dodsley's *Preceptor* (1748)—all of which were being read at St. Andrews[11]—took in hand most or all aspects of the student's development. Dodsley's very title neatly announces the printed book as substitute teacher. In fact his text went further; by incorporating the voice of the pupil as well, it attempted to put into type the whole apparatus

---

[9] Quotation from Crokatt and Monroe 1786:43; for Blair's sermon, see Boswell 1963:45 (entry for August 19th, 1773).

[10] For examples of these types of alternative, see, respectively, John Witherspoon, the Scottish minister who became principal of the College of New Jersey, promoting the College in his *Address* of 1772 (Witherspoon 1815:308-30); the Scottish academic David Fordyce's fictitious "Academy" (Fordyce 1745-48); Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile*, a book that had a great influence in Scotland (Rousseau 1762); and the St. Andrews alumnus Andrew Bell's "Madras System" of "Mutual tuition" (Meiklejohn 1881:124).

[11] Records of borrowing survive for most of the period. Dodsley's *Preceptor* emerges as one of the most frequently borrowed of all titles during the later eighteenth century.

of pedagogy. In short, the student might pursue maturity as well as knowledge "in his closet."

Probably no professor would have believed wholeheartedly in such a project, but in order to justify the new academic regime it was necessary at least to suppose the students more adult than they really were. It should be remembered that students in the Scottish universities were in fact very young, commonly matriculating in their early teens. From such youths the new bookish regime was requiring not an absolute self-sufficiency, of course, but a strenuous degree of it. It was upon them that the shift from voice to print bore least favorably, and so it is among them that one might look for signs of resistance. One would not expect formal or corporate opposition of the sort that clerics might assemble—what sort of student would even have identified the change of which I have been speaking, among all the more immediate changes in his own and the national life? More likely there would be some unordered, habitual resistance, something in the nature of a friction as the force of change came to bear. It was just such a friction, I believe, that showed itself when the students at St. Andrews suddenly took to scribbling in the library books.

This outbreak of writing in books was most directly the consequence of an unpopular regime in the Library, the regime of Librarian William Vilant (nicknamed "Punctum" by the students), which lasted from 1768 until 1788.[12] For that reason, although I hope to ascribe a convincing meaning to it as a response to the established literary culture at St. Andrews, I must allow that its energetic, subversive spirit was prompted at least partly by an essentially extraliterary motive—the war with Vilant. Moreover, once under way, marginalia like these tend to become timelessly a function of the general pathology of writing on forbidden surfaces. As such, they tell us about psychology, especially male adolescent psychology, rather than about phases of cultural history. Therefore, the St. Andrews marginalia do have both a more local and a more universal reference than the one in which I am interested here.

However, as to the local reference, William Vilant was after all the custodian of the Library's books, and his power to refuse requests for loans

[12] The marginalia frequently incorporate their own dates. If not, they can very often be approximately dated from personal allusions or signatures, or much more vaguely from their handwriting and ink. Vilant's time in office deposited the richest vein, but certainly there was some writing in books both before and after that, and I am only concerned to keep my examples within the Enlightenment period. I have quoted the marginalia in bold type, in order to retain something of their distinctive appearance in the books. Doubtful readings are in square brackets.

that were not authorized by a professor's signature ("**Punctum Vilant if ye do not give me out a Book when I want you may assure yourself that I will murder you some dark Night**")[13] tended to cast him as the proprietor of them. As such, he was the target not only of personal invective but also sometimes of comments that were really the expression of attitudes toward the books themselves. Perhaps the most intriguing of these is the simple statement "**Punctum is Addison.**" However ironic or fantastic in spirit, this identification of the Librarian with a key figure in English literature and in the New Rhetoric that studied it (four of Hugh Blair's *Lectures* were devoted to a study of Addison) suggests that Vilant was felt to stand in some elementary relation to the culture that he physically distributed.[14] At any rate, the scribbling craze that embarrassed Vilant's period of office ranged well beyond Vilant himself for its subjects.

As to the universal psychology of writing on forbidden surfaces, the surfaces in this case were printed books and not, for instance, lavatory walls. And just as graffiti in lavatories have as their context the act of evacuation, so marginalia, however unscholarly, have as theirs the act of reading. Everything written in margins must be, however obliquely, a reflection upon reading, the more so because, unlike lavatorial graffiti, marginalia have a context that is also their own medium of communication. To read them is in itself to modify the act of reading envisaged by the makers of the printed book. Sometimes, indeed, the student marginalia in the St. Andrews Library books directly address the business of reading. A reader of James Harris' *Philosophical Arrangements*, for instance, candidly muses, across the front end-paper of the Library's copy, about the way reading experiences bed down in the mind:

> **This is a very good Book I never read a better in my life here** [before?]**, not I, you may believe me for I tell the real truth**
> **It is curious what made me say so The book is good enough but I have seen a better** [15]

---

[13] Marginal comment appearing in Addison 1721:II, 459, of the St. Andrews University Library copy class-marked sPR3300.D21 (hereafter referred to as "Addison ms.").

[14] It may be evidence of Addison's status at St. Andrews University that its copy of his *Works* (1721) is the most extensively written in of all the books I have inspected. However, this particular marginalium appears in Baxter 1740:II, title page, of the St. Andrews University Library copy class-marked sQB50.B3D40A.

[15] Harris 1775, copy class-marked sB1374.H2.

In other cases, the marginalia seem to challenge the business of reading altogether. "**1, 2, 3, come follow me**" may be a nonsense verse, or perhaps a tag in some playground game (I have mentioned that St. Andrews students were in many cases not so far off playground age). In either case, it invites the reader away from his text.[16]

It may yet be asked: is there not a characteristic psychology governing all defacement of books and lifting it from particular contexts of time and place? It is certain (as anyone who uses university libraries must know all too well) that such scribbling is not a rare or merely historical thing, and anything said about one sample of it will perhaps readily apply to most or all of the rest. Much of what I observe below will undoubtedly be generally true (if true at all) in that way. However, I believe that the St. Andrews marginalia are distinctive to this extent: that they do not have it as their overriding motive to manage, quiz, or deride the intellectual content of books (by far the most common motive behind modern student marginalia, in my experience of it), but consist rather in the self-sufficient or parasitical exercise of their own subjects and habits of conversation. And the fundamental statement that I wish to make about the marginalia at St. Andrews is that they are conversation: their habit of discourse, counter-colonizing the pages of the newly expansive print empire in Scotland, was distinctly the habit of an older colloquial culture.[17]

These marginalia characteristically open a dialogue of some sort—with the text, with other students, or with both. They therefore tend to be concentrated in a few books where, the ice having once been broken, new voices readily join the conversation. But they are absent from other books that were, as the Library records show, no less freqently borrowed (this indeed remains a familiar fact of the genre). And these conversations do not just accrete speakers; they evolve audiences. The first student may speak at large, then another will address that student, a third will call up a new audience to condemn the debate, and so on. Therefore, the merely notional, undefined, or universal audience, which the printed book as such usually addresses, is partitioned by these marginalia to create identified and self-conscious groups or individuals within it, remodeling the book on the

---

[16] It appears in Bolingbroke 1754:I, 338, copy class-marked sB1355.A2D54. Chants not unlike this one, used for a variety of the game "leapfrog," are given as number 304 in Gullen 1950:94.

[17] In this connection, I note that one sociologist has referred to graffiti as "a written source of material that is almost solely colloquial" (Allen Walker Read, quoted in Abel and Buckley 1977:8).

pattern of colloquial exchange. At the same time, the fixity that a printed text embodies, as one copy of a mass-produced edition, is refuted by these visible changes, expressive as they are of the influence of locality and occasion on that text. I will here quote from Walter Ong in confirmation of my argument (perhaps already self-evident) that the marginalia were thus drawing printed books back into the habits of earlier scribal and oral cultures (1982:132):

> Print encourages a sense of closure, a sense that what is found in a text has been finalized, has reached a state of completion [. . . . It] situates utterance and thought on a surface disengaged from everything else, but it also goes farther in suggesting self-containment. Print encloses thought in thousands of copies of a work of exactly the same visual and physical consistency. . . . The printed text is supposed to represent the words of an author in definitive or "final" form. For print is comfortable only with finality. . . . By contrast, manuscripts, with their glosses or marginal comments [. . .], were in dialogue with the world outside their own borders. They remained closer to the give-and-take of oral expression.

The phrase "give-and-take" very well describes both the tone and the structure of the St. Andrews marginalia.

In various other ways these marginalia have the character of colloquial utterances. I will briefly discuss three of them: their punctuation (or lack of it), their formulaic character, and their adversarial relationships. They are, as my quoted examples show, frequently unpunctuated, as if nearer to the habit of voice than to that of text, and perhaps intended by the scribes as a heard voice rather than a read text. The connection between punctuation and merely visual reading, and conversely between unpunctuated texts and reading aloud, has been made by Marshall McLuhan in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. Tracing the rise of private, silent reading, he argues that the work of some modernist writers—Gertrude Stein, e. e. cummings, Pound, and Eliot—"with its lack of punctuation and other visual aids, is a carefully devised strategy to get the passive visual reader into participant, oral action."[18] Of course there is no such "strategy" on the part of student writers in books, but juxtaposed as their writings are with fully punctuated texts, their common disregard of "visual aids" is a reminder that they were bringing to such texts the practices of a different tradition of discourse.

[18] McLuhan 1962:83. More recently, the same connection between punctuation and silent reading is made by Alberto Manguel (1996:49-50).

Another of those practices was the ready recourse to verbal formulas, the preference for familiar collocations of words over individual expression. Aspects of this practice—the "massive use of formulaic elements"—are related by Walter Ong to the exigencies of oral, as opposed to scribal, tradition (esp. 1982:38-42). Perhaps only by reading the marginalia in this context—by understanding them, that is, as the exercise of an uninstitutionalized, extraliterary culture—will one be unsurprised by the repetitiveness and unoriginality shown by most of them.[19] Their invective, for instance, consists rather in the ritual re-use of familiar terms—*ass*, *bitch*, *blockhead*, *idiot*—than in anything individually aimed. And it is surely as an instance of this formulaic character that we must explain the otherwise anomalous dragging of the Librarian's name into fantasies of unusual sexual endowment: "**Damn ye Punctum your Prick is as long as a red Carrot with three months growth and your Stones as large as 2 Large Turnips well wintered.**"[20] Here were two recognized tropes of marginal rhetoric at St. Andrews—abuse of William Vilant and preoccupation with sexual hypertrophy and excess—brought together more by random than by deliberate composition, just as in oral verse "the formulas and themes are reshuffled rather than supplanted with new materials" (Ong 1982:42).

One common manifestation of the formulaic habit is indeed the use of verse to structure and standardize exchanges, and there is some verse or doggerel in the St. Andrews material.[21] One marginalium, which responds to an attack on Robert Fergusson (the poet, who was then a student at St. Andrews) and was perhaps therefore written down by Fergusson himself, is a couplet that sounds like common property (and certainly survives today in various forms):

The man that wrote these cursed lines on me

---

[19] This is a phenomenon that Iona and Peter Opie comment upon in the introductory chapter to *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* (1959:2): "Conscious as we were of the economy of human invention, and the tenacity of oral tradition (the two elements without which there would be no folklore), we were not prepared for quite the identity of ritual and phraseology which has been revealed throughout the land in children's everyday witticisms, and in the newer of their self-organized amusements."

[20] In Swift 1727-35:III, 29, copy class-marked sPR3724.M4D27 (hereafter referred to as "Swift ms."). A photograph of this marginalium appears in Crawford 1997:51 (Plate V).

[21] This tendency again is amply evidenced in Opie and Opie 1959, as well as in the comparable collections Gullen 1950 and Chambers 1870.

he now is damned and ever more shall be. [22]

Some words inscribed along a margin in Kames' *Sketches of the History of Man*—"At the hour of ten at night"—may have their explanation in one of the "miscellaneous puerile rhymes" that Robert Chambers included in his *Popular Rhymes of Scotland*:

> In the principal country-towns in Scotland, it used to be customary for the boys to parade the streets at night in bands, bawling, at the full extent of their voices, various rhymes of little meaning, such as:
>
> The moon shines bright,
> And the stars gie a light,
> We'll see to kiss a bonny lass
> At ten o'clock at night! [23]

Other instances of formulaic composition will appear later in my discussion. The examples chosen here are intended merely to relate the marginalia, in this respect, to folk habits of discourse.

The third characteristic of oral culture in these marginalia is their adversarial spirit. Walter Ong calls this cultural characteristic "agonistic dynamics"; his examples include flyting and other traditional polemical oratory, and he relates it most basically to the necessarily personal character of spoken exchange, in contrast to the disengaged character of written texts (see 1982:43-46). Sometimes the St. Andrews marginalia do indeed seem to be only momentary incursions into writing of spoken oppositions**. "Devil damn you to hell**" at the top of a page suggests that the book was being used as a vehicle in a hitherto vocal exchange now perhaps interrupted by the necessary silence of a class or of the Library itself.[24] A slightly more complicated relation between script and orality is suggested by "**David Savile if you don't speak lower I will kick you to the door, or else cut out your tongue. R. Knox.**," but even this marginalium preserves all the

---

[22] See Swift ms.:IV, 92. The originating abuse of Fergusson is on the opposite page.

[23] Chambers 1870:151-52. The marginalium is in Kames 1774:I, 377, copy class-marked sJC176.H7. But the same hand has written, on the next page, "**Come all you jolly seamen**," so possibly another song, or some coastal variant of Chambers' (St. Andrews being by the sea), was in the writer's mind.

[24] See Quintilian 1756:II, 423, copy class-marked sPA6650.E5G8.

ad hominem immediacy of the speech that it seems to threaten.[25] Elsewhere, some comments on the rhetorician John Ward show an interesting gradation from the scholarly towards this colloquial type of opposition, concluding as they do in this way: "**We might find many more faults with him but as we do not intend to criticize him it may be sufficient to say he is a damned Blockhead.**"[26] The pseudonym "Inimicus," which signs off some inter-student abuse in the same book, will perhaps summarize the attitude.[27] Again, this characteristic of oral culture needs no further evidencing here since it will be seen often enough in the following material.

In case these colloquial characteristics in the St. Andrews marginalia should seem merely inherent in the genre, it may be instructive to mention two quite unconforming varieties of marginalium found in the Library's books. The more common of the two consists simply in the re-writing in a neat, italic hand (occasionally in imitation print) of phrases from the printed text. Whether we interpret this as the misplaced but diligent practicing of the taught hand of the day, or as a mere byproduct of daydreaming, it did tend to assimilate manuscript habits to printed book values, and it seems significant that it remains a private response to the text, inviting (and in practice receiving, as far as I have seen) no rejoinder.

Then there is the less frequent but not rare practice of correcting the English of printed texts. Against Swift's phrase "in the Condition he was," for instance, a student writes "**perspicuity requires that the author should have said *in which* he was.**"[28] Even this sort of scholarly interference may be intemperately expressed, and it sometimes produces its own controversies, but it otherwise differs from the kind of marginalium that I have been discussing hitherto in that its motive is deliberately towards the ideal of standardization implied in printing, rather than counter to it. It shows, no doubt, the application to student reading of lessons learned in the

---

[25] Fielding 1743:II, 128, copy class-marked sPR3454.M5D43 (hereafter referred to as "Fielding ms.").

[26] Ward 1759:II, 93, copy class-marked sPN4105.E5W3 (hereafter referred to as "Ward ms.").

[27] Ward ms.:I, 15. The accompanying date is 1772.

[28] Swift ms.:I, 284. There are several corrections of this sort in the same text. Swift was in fact commonly cited as a model of English prose by the Scottish rhetoricians.

Rhetoric classes: "perspicuity" was a key word there.[29] To write in books, then, was not necessarily to challenge their type of discourse; it might signal acceptance and even promotion of that discourse. However, the essential habits of oral culture did in general persist in the student marginalia, as I hope to have shown, and accordingly there was at least implicit in them a challenge to the newer culture of print. I will now consider some of the devices and strategies distinguishable in these marginalia, and suggest what sorts of challenges they represented.

By defacing books the students were necessarily abusing them, whatever it was they wrote, and it is evident that this abuse was often a conscious motive. In one identifiable genre of marginalium, in fact, it is the defining motive. The scribe will specifically deplore the practice of writing in books: "**O man do not scribble on the book.**"[30] This seems a sincere and very welcome remonstration, but of course there is at least a paradox in it, and when one finds similar injunctions spreading into several lines of hand-writing one cannot dispute the irony. In one variety of this *jeu d'esprit*, the scribe defends the dignity of the book by claiming his own defacement of it for a special privilege: "**Damn everyone that writes on any of the library books except W. B. S.**"[31] Or he may at least mischievously acknowledge, while he offends, that dignity: **"David Balmain the old pistol footed scoundrel I will have** [?] **the impudence to insert his name in this honourable book of Punctum's.**"[32] As this last example indicates, the immediate authority being challenged was that of the Librarian, or more generally of the Library and the University: but the word "honourable" (perhaps, with "impudence," taken from Vilant's own vocabulary) suggests that this authority was also representative of, and spokesman for, the larger authority of print culture.

---

[29] The word appears in the lectures of both Watson and his successor William Barron, and evidently Barron also set it as a topic for composition: an extensive manuscript addition to the Library's *Female Spectator* alleges that one Colin McVean (matriculated 1779) tried to deal with this set task by bribing the professor (see vol. IV, facing p. 323, of the copy class-marked bAP4.F2S6).

[30] Hooke 1738-71:I, 42, copy class-marked sDG208.H7D38 (hereafter referred to as "Hooke ms.").

[31] Johnson 1767:III, 118, copy class-marked sPR1365.R3D67 (hereafter referred to as "Johnson ms.").

[32] Addison ms.:I, 382. The wording is obscure, but Balmain's name appears elsewhere on the page. He matriculated in 1789.

It is clear that recording a name was often sufficient in itself to satisfy the urge to deface. This practice seems indeed to be the most common type of marginalium, and names of course play a part in many other types. It is one of Walter Ong's reiterated themes that the moving of discourse from speech through writing and into print meant "removing it from the rich but chaotic existential context of much oral utterance" (1982:103-4). Even between writing and printing, Ong finds a difference in this respect. Each of them "situates utterance and thought on a surface disengaged from everything else," but print "goes farther in suggesting self-containment" (132). Ong instances the textbooks of Peter Ramus and his successors: "A Ramist textbook on a given subject had no acknowledged interchange with anything outside itself" (134). By contrast, the students did indeed take communications back into the "chaotic existential context" of current life when they wrote their names in books, often adding dates and even places of abode. Here again, no doubt, there is some element of the more primitive motivation shared with writing on trees, lavatory walls, desks, and so on, and having to do with territory and self-announcement. We may recognize as merely primitive and universal such marginalia as "**John Roger wrote this**" (assuming that he did).[33] But something more directly challenging to what Ong calls the "closure" of the printed text is implied in various St. Andrews localizations of Addison's sentimental drama *Rosamund*. For instance, next to the heroine's printed name one hand writes "**not so beautiful as a Bell Tibby** [?] **in this town to wit St. Andrews I love her more than Harry loved Rosamund A: Student 1785.**"[34] The student's own name is in fact missing here, no doubt in that common bashfulness of the lover that another scribe expressly acknowledges later in the same volume.[35] However, place and date are identified, asserting themselves further in the word "this" and in the present tense of the student's affection, surpassing and superseding that of Addison's Harry.

This personalizing of the printed texts is not necessarily self-assertion; the names and contexts are often other people's. A story told in *The Scotch Presbyterian Eloquence*, about a canny minister who revises his gloomy spiritual prognosis for a dying parishioner when he hears that he

---

[33] Johnson ms.:IV, 137. Roger matriculated in 1780.

[34] Addison ms.:I, 118.

[35] In an exchange on p. 205: "**Alexr.** [surname scored out] **dreams all night and thinks all day about a lovely girll** [*sic*] **in this town**," below which is written, "**He that wrote this wrote what was true but I don't want it published to the world I have put out my name.**"

himself is to do well from the man's will, is reattached to a member of staff, George Hill.[36] Henry Fielding's *Journey from this World to the Next* has been thoughtfully personalized thus: "**I think this book is just fit for punctum to inform him about the journey he must soon goe, then he'll put off his ill nature.**"[37] Poor William Vilant's was indeed the most common name in such recastings. Elsewhere in this same text, a marginalium of about 230 words pictures Vilant's soul—rejected even by the devil—suffering a series of unflattering transmigrations. In another ambitious attempt upon the abstraction of the printed page, a reader of the *Spectator* papers addresses a twenty-two-line poem to Joseph Addison, telling him that "**gin [=if] ye knew / How short-legged P– uses you**" he would leave his classical retreat in "**th'elisian fields**" and visit St. Andrews to punish the Librarian for the unspecified offense. Possibly the offense in question is that of allowing the much-defaced book to be written in, so that the poem may belong also to that ironic genre that I have already identified.[38]

This last example, with its un-Addisonian "gin ye knew," is a reminder of the specifically national dimension, in Scotland, of the confrontation between colloquial and print culture. As one would expect, the student marginalia seem to resist that promotion of Englishness I mentioned above. They do not in general make language itself the site of that resistance. Since they deal much in scurrility and invective, they necessarily use a more demotic vocabulary than does print, and one might expect a rich Scottish content to this vocabulary. In fact, however, among the standard terms of abuse the only common Scots term is *bitch* (used for men). Other Scots words are indeed used: "**Sandie M Flockherd** [is a] **muckle moued** [= big-mouthed] **bitch**," for instance, and "**The French are clorty** [= dirty] **bodies.**"[39] But national feeling among the students was generally asserted, here at least, in other symbols than language. The

---

[36] On p. 37 of the Library's copy of the London, 1719 edition, class-marked sBX9180.C8D19. Trimming of the page has made some of the writing illegible, but the part that can be read says "**This is a** [. . .] **George Hill** [. . .] **trick I dare say it was just** [. . .] **him**." George Hill became a professor in 1772 and Principal of St. Mary's College in 1791.

[37] Fielding ms.:II, 151.

[38] Addison ms.:III, 250.

[39] Clarke 1731:196-97, copy class-marked sLC30.C6, and Addison ms.:I, 73. Flockhart matriculated in 1782.

remark about the French was prompted by a reference in Addison's poetry to "the Gaul." Nearby, in the same poem ("The Campaign"), his praise of the Duke of Marlborough, and of English heroism in general, produces further restiveness. Someone has written "**I can write better**," and more curiously "**Lieutenant Hismacago** [*sic*]": the possibility that the writer is proposing a Scottish hero seems confirmed by the appearance over the page of the words "**Humphray Clinker**" (Lieutenant Lismahago is a spokesman for Scotland in Smollett's novel of nearly that name).[40] More self-explanatory is a marginalium in *The Rambler*: "**The Ramblers name is Johnston, a most hellish surly, lying fellow who says there is not a tree but two in all the Shire of Fife which certainly is a damn'd lie. John Grant attests.**"[41] A similar correction is made in a copy of Pennant's *Tour in Scotland*, where that author mentions "a few rows of tolerable trees" as "the only trees that I saw from Berindale to the extremity of Caithness": "**you have not been looking about you then**," someone has written.[42] Both these writers, Johnson and Pennant, were celebrated reporters on Scotland to English readers; both books were published in London, returning to Scotland to represent the Scots to themselves in an English mirror. The resistance being effected in these marginalia, therefore, was not only to a particular libel, but also to the centralized revision of Scottish culture that print both effected and enshrined. The center in question was, of course, London, still the publishing center even for the Scottish Enlightenment (Hugh Blair's *Sermons* and *Lectures* were both printed there). We may therefore take as a motto for this type of resistance the assertion, more patriotic than accurate, which one student has written into a course text, "**Edinburg is the Metropolis of my Country.**"[43]

I wish to make a final point about Scottishness, this time suggested by John Grant's epithet "hellish," quoted in the previous paragraph. The word "hellish" may well be read as careless hyperbole, along with the "damn'd lie," but there were orthodox Scottish ministers in the 1770s who would have seen no hyperbole in the second phrase at least. And if the cast of Presbyterianism to which such ministers belonged was—as I have

---

[40] Addison ms.:I, 69 and 71.

[41] Johnson ms.:I, 192. This John Grant matriculated in the 1770s, probably in 1775.

[42] Pennant 1776:I, 195, copy class-marked sDA855.P3. This marginalium may well be of nineteenth-century date.

[43] Hooke ms.:II, 381. There is no apparent context in the print for this statement.

suggested—allied, like the marginalia, to popular oral traditions, while the new liberalism preferred politeness and print, it is not surprising that any religious affiliations apparent in the marginalia should be to that orthodox kind. Probably, most of their many passing references to hell, damnation, and the devil are no more than the ordinary currency of invective.[44] In that case, they tell us more about old-style Presbyterianism and the powerful appeal to popular habits of thought that its downright theology made than about student spirituality. But even where there is a more attentive theology in the marginalia, the same preference does appear. A user of the Library's much-borrowed and much-maltreated volumes of Hooke's *Roman History* adds this comment: "**The damd villans that tears these fine histories should be hunted with dogs till the day of Judgement & that in the afternoon**" (Hooke ms.:I, 449). Here is just that sort of literal-minded and savored eschatology that caricaturists of the Scottish church ridiculed and that was being shunned by the moderates.[45] We are alerted, too, by the syntax of "tears" and its plural subject (an idiom in Scots grammar) to the specifically Scottish allegiance of this marginalium. Even if, therefore, we may doubt the seriousness of such Knoxian animus, it certainly shows the choice of a peculiarly Scottish demotic rhetoric in which to debate personalities and deface printed books, a rhetoric directly opposed to the Anglicized liberalism of the Scottish university establishments.

We return to a more general critique of authority in that pompous formula from the same *Rambler* marginalium, "**John Grant attests**." Devices to celebrate the descent from the dignity of the printed context to the familiarities of student life are not uncommon in these marginalia. A proclamation of "Geo: Rex," for instance, makes public John Whyttock's relations with "**that damed clapped whore in the north gate**."[46] At the back of the Library's copy of William Duff's *Essay on Original Genius*, a similarly scurrilous observation is signed "**A. Divine**" ("Divine" is a Scottish name, but since no such student formally matriculated it may have been assumed to embellish the occasion).[47] A common formula for signing

---

[44] See for instance, in Dixon 1789:220, under the running head "A Voyage to the North-West Coast of America" the suggested variant "**A Voyage to the Devil in H-ll**" (copy class-marked sG440.D5).

[45] See for instance the account of it given in *The Scotch Presbyterian Eloquence*.

[46] Addison ms.:I, 254. John Whyttock matriculated in 1781.

[47] Duff 1767, copy class-marked sPN1031.D8. The observation in question is "**The Close with a wench is a better place than a bawdy house.**"

these marginalia is the legalism "quod testor" [= which I hereby attest], as in "**Why the Devil Bruce do you write your name here. see if I do that. quod testor Batchelor.**"[48] More violent translations of register may occur: there is, for instance, the evergreen fun of making the text lampoon itself, as when the list of subscribers fronting Henry Ellis's *Voyage to Hudson's Bay* is altered so that "His Grace the Duke of Montague" becomes "**His arse the Duke**."[49] The occasional macaronic exercises and the writing of the Librarian's nickname in Greek letters (evidently a rather fascinating practice to some: the new students of Greek, perhaps) belong, I would suggest, to this same type of ironic interplay between popular and high cultures.

In this last variety of marginal rhetoric, specializing in the mockery of print-borne authority, the collision of two modes of discourse is seen in its most willed and elementary form, and it may be reasonable to find in it the essential pattern and sentiment for all the subversive writings in books that I have been instancing. For all these writings persistently assert, whether consciously or not, the rivalry of an oral culture, and in the case of the more self-conscious assertions that I have lastly spoken of, there seems to be a deliberate celebration, in mockingly artful juxtapositions and translations, of the power of the hand acting on behalf of the voice to ambush and discomfort print.

Yet subversive and oppositional as these marginalia are, they are also essentially reactionary. Their writers wittingly or otherwise speak for pre-Enlightenment values in their own and the nation's life: in particular, for juvenile culture against the adult culture of their immediate future, and for Scottish culture against the new Anglo-British values of their professors. More generally, and incorporating these, they reassert oral culture against the print culture into which their university was inducting them. These marginalia were merely a local and transitory defiance of print culture, but they now provide, sited as they are right on the invasive printed page, a vivid instance and image of the post-Gutenberg collision of discourses.

University of St. Andrews

[48] Ward ms.:I, 97. The Bruce in question matriculated in 1777.

[49] Ellis 1748, copy class-marked sG650.E5.

References

Abel and Buckley 1977 — Ernest Abel and Barbara E. Buckley. *The Handwriting on the Wall: Toward a Sociology and Psychology of Graffiti*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Addison 1721 — Joseph Addison. *Works*. 4 vols. London: Jacob Tonson.

Baxter 1740 — Andrew Baxter. *Matho, or the Cosmotheoria Puerilis*. 2 vols. London: A. Millar.

Blair 1777-1801 — Hugh Blair. *Sermons*. London: W. Davies and T. Cadell.

Blair 1783 — Hugh Blair. *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*. London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell.

Bolingbroke 1754 — Henry Saint John, Viscount Bolingbroke. *Philosophical Works*. 7 vols, 1754-98. Vol. 1, London: D. Mallet.

Boswell 1963 — James Boswell. *Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson, LL.D, 1773*. Ed. by Frederick Pottle and Charles Bennett. London: Heinemann.

Boswell 1980 — _____. *Life of Johnson*. Ed. by R. W. Chapman, revised by J. D. Fleeman. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Broadie 1997 — Alex Broadie. *Introduction to the Scottish Enlightenment: An Anthology*. Edinburgh: Canongate.

Chambers 1870 — Robert Chambers, ed. *Popular Rhymes of Scotland*. 2nd ed. Edinburgh: W. and R. Chambers.

Clarke 1731 — John Clarke. *Essay on Study*. London: Arthur Bettesworth.

Crawford 1992 — Robert Crawford. *Devolving English Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Crawford 1997 — _____. *Launch-Site for English Studies*. St. Andrews: Verse.

Crawford 1998 _____. *The Scottish Invention of English Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Crokatt and Monroe 1719 Gilbert Crockatt and John Monroe. *The Scotch Presbyterian Eloquence*. [No edition given.] London: n. p.

Crokatt and Monroe 1786 Gilbert Crokatt and John Monroe. *The Scotch Presbyterian Eloquence*. [11th ed.?] London: n. p.

Dixon 1789 George Dixon. *A Voyage Round the World*. London: George Goulding.

Dodsley 1748 Robert Dodsley. *Preceptor*. London: Robert Dodsley.

Duff 1767 William Duff. *Essay on Original Genius*. London: Edward and Charles Dilly.

Ellis 1748 Henry Ellis. *Voyage to Hudson's Bay*. London: H. Whitridge.

Evidence 1837 *Evidence, oral and documentary, taken and received by the Commissioners appointed by his Majesty George IV, July 23rd 1826; and re-appointed by his Majesty William IV, October 12th, 1830; for visiting the Universities of Scotland*. Vol. III: *University of St. Andrews*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office.

Fielding 1743 Henry Fielding. *Miscellanies*. 2 vols. London: A. Millar.

Fordyce 1745-48 David Fordyce. *Dialogues concerning Education*. 2 vols. London: n. p.

Gullen 1950 F. Doreen Gullen. *Traditional Number Rhymes and Games*. London: University of London Press.

Harris 1775 James Harris. *Philosophical Arrangements*. London: James Nourse.

Haywood 1745 Eliza Haywood. *The Female Spectator*. 4 vols. London: T. Gardner.

Hooke 1738-71 Nathaniel Hooke. *The Roman History from the Building of Rome to the Ruin of the Commonwealth*. 4 vols. London: G. Hawkins and others.

Johnson 1767 — Samuel Johnson. *The Rambler*. 4 vols. London: A. Millar and others.

Johnson 1985 — Samuel Johnson. *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*. Ed. by J. D. Fleeman. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kames 1774 — Henry Home, Lord Kames. *Sketches of the History of Man*. Edinburgh and London: W. Creech, W. Strahan, and T. Cadell.

Manguel 1996 — Alberto Manguel. *A History of Reading*. London: Harper Collins.

McLuhan 1962 — Marshall McLuhan. *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Meiklejohn 1881 — J. M. D. Meiklejohn. *An Old Educational Reformer: Dr. Andrew Bell*. Edinburgh: Blackwood and Sons.

Ong 1982 — Walter Ong. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. London: Methuen.

Opie and Opie 1959 — Iona and Peter Opie. *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pennant 1776 — Thomas Pennant. *A Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides; 1772*. 2 vols. London: Benjamin White.

Quintilian 1756 — Quintilian. *Institutes of Eloquence*. Trans. by William Guthrie. 2 vols. London: T. Waller.

Rousseau 1762 — Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Emile, ou, de l'Education*. Amsterdam: Jean Neaulme.

The Scotch Preacher 1789 — *The Scotch Preacher*. 4 vols. Edinburgh: J. Dixon.

Sher 1985 — Richard B. Sher. *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Swift 1727-35 — Jonathan Swift. *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse*. 5 vols. London: Benjamin Motte.

Ward 1759 — John Ward. *A System of Oratory*. 2 vols. London: John Ward.

Warnick 1993 — Barbara Warnick. *The Sixth Canon: Belletristic Rhetorical Theory and its French Antecedents*. Columbia: Columbia University Press.

Watson 1758 — Robert Watson. "A Treatise on Rhetorick." Unpub. MS, University of St. Andrews.

Watson 1778 — Robert Watson. "Introduction to Logic and Rhetoric." Unpub. MS, University of St. Andrews.

Witherspoon 1754 — John Witherspoon. *Ecclesiastical Characteristics*. 2nd ed. Glasgow: n. p.

Witherspoon 1815 — John Witherspoon. "Address to the Inhabitants of Jamaica, and other West-India Islands, in behalf of the College of New-Jersey." *Works*, vol.8. Edinburgh: J. Ogle.