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Susan Manly. Language, Custom and Nation in the 1790s: Locke, Tooke, Wordsworth, Edgeworth

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lisher John Newberry, both authors saw the economic propulsion of the literary market as "inimical to the virtuous sensibility it proclaimed, and for both men, this meant a religious turn" (127).

The fifth chapter focuses on Wordsworth. Its aim is to argue "for the vital connection between the 'spontaneous overflow' of emotion and Wordsworth's later concern with ritual [in *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*]," and to take on a "double challenge"—"both that of unraveling this seemingly paradoxical reversal and that of countering the mistaken notion of dramatic discontinuity between the early and late Wordsworths" (177). The key to understanding the continuity between the two Wordsworths, she argues, is his concern early and late "to explore and account for human agency, while engaging with the long tradition of understanding morality in terms of natural laws and spontaneous instinctive responses"; this concern is one of the "most potent forces emerging in *Lyrical Ballads* and shaping subsequent poems" (185). Developing this idea, Branch connects Wordsworth's theory and practice between "repetition and self-shaping agency" (185), a claim that leads ultimately to the assertion that the "failure" of the early poems to find a morality "fully grounded in Nature and in knowledge" prompts the poet to "find through [that failure] an alternate path that the later poems follow" (190). Branch focuses her attention on the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* and the evidence they provide of Wordsworth's engagement with ritual, as opposed to spontaneity. Branch faults New Historicist critiques of Romanticism for their inability to bridge the gap between capitalist and Marxist notions of autonomy and "transhistorical causality." Branch claims that, "By examining the paths between Wordsworthian spontaneity and ritual, this chapter enables us to locate Wordsworth's sense of both agency and politics 'somewhere else' than either complete autonomy or determinism" (207). Agreed. Yet neither autonomy nor determinism need have a religious cast; thus her demonstration of a continuing interest in these concepts says little about Wordsworth's religion or lack of it.

Branch's "Conclusion, On the Religiousness of Criticism" explores the extent to which "we are witnessing what is being hailed and even invited in some quarters as the 'return of religion' to literary theory and critical discourse" (211). The chapter takes on a proselytizing tone and swerve into prophecy of a sort. I cite the following as a case in point:

> The scholarship I imagine will own up to the religiousness of all intellectual endeavor, to the way that a belief, even the basic belief in language, is the predicate of all knowledge production. And it will embrace this not simply as a burden but as a positive possibility; that is, the "post" in post-enlightenment may likely bring a perpetual bit of melancholy longing with it, but can also inspire celebration and a sober sort of playfulness. This scholarship will have a theological cast, in the sense that belief will be shown to inhabit and enliven every discipline. (221)

Perhaps these sentiments can be seen as in tune with Wallace Stevens' assertion that "We use the same faculties when we write poetry that we use when we create gods or when we fix the bearing of men in reality" (*Opus Posthumous*, "Two or Three Ideas" 266).

But perhaps not. As readers finish the study they may find themselves bemused by the tone and perhaps by an awareness that familiar words have become unfamiliar—*religiousness, belief, theological*—or have donned figurative dress somewhere in a backroom of the text. I shall no doubt return to this intriguing study many times.

[For 2006, Lori Branch, *Rituals of Spontaneity: Sentiment and Secularism from Free Prayer to Wordsworth* won the Book of the Year Award by the Conference on Chritianity and Literature].

Susan Manly. *Language, Custom and Nation in the 1790s: Locke, Tooke, Wordsworth, Edgeworth*

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A Review by James C. McKusick
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In *Language, Custom and Nation in the 1790s*, Susan Manly demonstrates how a populist and materialist philosophy of language contributed to the radical politics and poetics of the British Romantic period. Specifically, Manly shows "how the radical 'Jacobin' poetics of the 1790s, and the con-

cept of a 'revolutionary' poetry, were impelled – one might say 'invented' – by the seventeenth-century English philosopher John Locke" (1). In Locke's philosophy, and especially in his account of the origin and development of language, these radical authors found a firm theoretical basis for their stubborn resistance to tyranny and their confidence in the wisdom of the common people. Manly traces the influence of Locke's linguistic theories on the work of John Horne Tooke, a prominent radical linguist of the 1790s, and thence to the poetry of William Wordsworth and the prose of Maria Edgeworth. The distinctive scholarly contribution of *Language, Custom and Nation in the 1790s* is to show how a Lockean theory of language provided a conceptual framework for some of the most radical and transformative political ideas of the 1790s.

In Manly's view, the populist orientation of Locke's theory of language, as expressed in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), is foundational to any historical explanation of radical politics and poetics in the 1790s. "Language for Locke was based on metaphorical leaps of the mind, propelled by the need to communicate, to strengthen social bonds and to increase the common fund of knowledge. He presents the creation of a powerfully effective language as a collective enterprise, with fundamental implications for the body politic, and obvious attractions for a generation of writers brought up in the wake of the American and French Revolutions" (1). Locke's view of language as a "collective enterprise" inflects his description of the social contract that underpins all legitimate political authority. Just as any vernacular language represents a collective agreement upon the meaning of conventional signs, so too, in Locke's view, any political authority depends for its legal existence upon the tacit consent of the governed. Moreover, as a logical consequence of this position, Locke affirms in his *Second Treatise of Government* (1689) that when a ruler acts unlawfully against "the Majority of the People," then the people have a right to dissolve their government and elect another (11). The right of the people to rebel against tyranny, expressed only cautiously and equivocally by Locke, was more boldly asserted by later Enlightenment philosophers and provided the essential *raison d'être* for the American and French Revolutions; it likewise became a fundamental rationale for political resistance to arbitrary power among British radical writers of the 1790s (11).

Manly's reading of John Horne Tooke calls attention to a previously neglected document, a manuscript journal of his imprisonment in the Tower of London on charges of High Treason between May 16 and November 22, 1794, a document that was written in the interleaved pages of his treatise on language, ἔπεα πτερόεντα; *or, The Diversions of Purley* (part I, 1786). Tooke uses linguistic analysis to discredit the legal terminology of the Act under which he and his fellow-radicals were being held in the Tower: "To empower his *Majesty* {i.e. the *Minister*} to secure and detain {i.e. to *rob* and *ruin* and *murder*} such persons as his *Majesty* {i.e. the *Minister*} shall *suspect* {i.e. *pretend* to suspect} are conspiring against his person and government {i.e. Who are displeased with the Minister's measures, or to whom the Minister is, for any reason, or misinformation, or mistake, or caprice, hostile}" (Tooke, cited in Manly, 13). In this eloquently agonistic prison diary, the juxtaposition of handwritten and printed text enables Tooke to present vivid proof that "the imprecise use of words and the refusal of those with power to say what they mean constitutes a system of 'imposture'" (13). The eventual acquittal of Tooke and his fellow-reformers on charges of High Treason was regarded in radical circles as vindication of the popular-assent theory of language and the social-contract theory of government, both of which ultimately derived from the philosophy of John Locke.

The second half of this study is devoted mainly to analysis of the poetry of William Wordsworth and the prose of Maria Edgeworth. Manly's reading of Wordsworth follows fairly closely in the footsteps of such New Historicists as Jerome McGann, Marjorie Levinson, and John Barrell. Manly points out the direct influence of Locke upon Wordsworth's materialist and populist conception of language, noting that "Locke too had emphasized the dependence of words upon 'common sensible ideas'" (103); but she faults Wordsworth for "the fact that he is himself alienated from the thoughts and feelings of the vast majority of the poor, and thus cannot avail himself of the language proceeding from those thought and feelings without compromising his aesthetics of nature and property" (136). To put it plainly, Wordsworth's poetry is insufferably bourgeois.

Language, Custom and Nation in the 1790s offers a keenly perceptive and highly original reading of Maria Edgeworth's novels and essays from the standpoint of a Lockean philosophy of language. Edgeworth's main contribution to the Romantic discourse on language is her attention to the language of children as exemplifying the Lockean values of sensory experience and concrete vernacular diction. In her 1798 parenting manual, *Practical Education*, Edgeworth emphasizes "the importance of attending to the unpretentious, unaffected utterances of children, and of seeking to develop their capacity to reason for themselves by guiding them towards an awareness of the words that they use and hear used around them in daily life" (140). In Edgeworth's view, children acquire language simply by acting as rational agents, open to sensory impressions of the natural world, and unspoiled by social affectation or political corruption. In *Practical Education*, "we find ourselves reading a book in which adults can learn from children as well as vice versa" (153). Manly's well-documented analysis of Edgeworth effectively demonstrates the convergence of Lockean linguistics, radical politics, and the Romantic child.