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**IMAGINING BRITAIN. THE FORMATION OF BRITISH
NATIONAL IDENTITY DURING THE EIGHTEENTH
CENTURY**

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The issue of interdisciplinarity, and the kind of work it is possible to do, became an even greater issue for me during my PhD - which is in some ways an expression of my puzzlement at being in a history department - and so I have been fortunate to be in a department, and a faculty, where such issues have been positively courted. Both the Eighteenth Century Centre and the Interdisciplinary Seminar at Warwick University have provided me with the opportunity to explore interdisciplinarity, and I have had not one, but three supervisors able to help me do so. Dror Wahrman did a superb job of tearing up my original PhD proposal and helping me find a new, and better, one; Colin Jones helped me develop that new proposal; and Carolyn Steedman has been a consistently supportive, interested, and exacting reader, even before she became my supervisor (in which role she has been exemplary, and only very slightly mocking). I would also like to thank Chris Clark for comments and criticism at an early stage of the thesis, Maxine Berg for all the opportunities and support she

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Declaration.

This thesis is all my own work, and has not been submitted for a degree at any other university. A slightly adapted version of 'The Savage Self, the Sentimental

Self' is to be published in *Literature and History*, Spring 2002, as part of my article 'A View of the Past: History, Painting and the Manipulation of Distance'.

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the supposed development of an 'imagined community' of the British during the eighteenth century. Responding in particular to Linda Colley, it aims to show that her use of Benedict Anderson's well-known definition of the nation is both inappropriate and misleading. Taking as its evidence the substantial genre of contemporary historical writing about pre-Norman Britain, it attempts to develop an account of that genre's relationship to the growing reading public in Britain, its capacity to provide the imaginative terrain in which that public might consider itself to possess a shared identity, and the limits and obstacles to such a project. In doing so, it also explores the nature of the historical genre in this period, and finds its development to be tightly bound up with developments in print culture more generally, but especially with the rise of the novel and of the newspaper (the very genres lying at the heart of Anderson's account of nationalism).

Later chapters concern themselves with developing the arguments brought out in the first half of the thesis, using different forms of evidence: histories of the common law, the debate on population, and the debate over the French Revolution. Here I deal variously with issues of custom, tradition, commerce and improvement, and their purchase upon notions of truth, as well as with the position of marginal figures - women, 'the mob' - in the supposedly national imagination. I conclude by arguing that the nation represented by Anderson is fundamentally utopian in character, that it did not and does not meet the essentially elitist 'imagined community' which my thesis uncovers, and should not be used to describe it.

Introduction - Imagining Britain.

The subject of national identity has been as exhaustively discussed in the past decade as perhaps at any time. Various features, from the apparent external threats represented by the European Union and globalisation, to the internal challenges represented by devolution and the increased awareness of the institutionalised racism lurking at the heart of British society, have conspired to make national identity a significant field of exploration.¹ And as the discussion of national identity within the wider public sphere has, almost inevitably, made constant reference to a national history supposedly able to anchor the nation in an indisputable reality, so historians have been drawn to explore that national history, and to explain its relationship to the modern experience of nationalism and national identity.

This study, although obviously indebted to the more general fascination with the subject of the British nation and especially to my own perspective as a northerner, growing up at the height of the North/South divide that rent the England of the 1980s, takes its intellectual rise from Linda Colley's *Britons*, probably the most significant historical study of the subject yet.² Her powerful account of the role of war between Britain and France as a major catalyst for Britain's development from a state, united by a commitment to Protestantism and trade, into a nation united against a foreign Other, remains fundamentally convincing despite ten years of criticism. And if the nation described by *Britons* does indeed seem at times somewhat monolithic, and often imposed over

¹ A racism perhaps made more potent by the continued internationalism of Islam, which has made the recent experiences of war so particularly traumatic and complex for many British Muslims.

previous loyalties and interests without many obvious benefits to its subjects, it nonetheless seems to retain a certain imaginative force difficult to discover in other works.

It is, however, as an attempt to make good one of the absences in Colley's text that my thesis can best be understood: in particular, I aim to follow through her under-explored and largely unexplained usage of Benedict Anderson's 'admittedly loose, but for that reason invaluable definition of a nation as "an imagined political community"³. In fact, although Colley seems to make reference to Anderson's understanding of the nation and of nationalism, the actual progress of her work seems to rely upon a very different theoretical structure; for, while Anderson is very much interested to stress the importance of developments in print culture, and in particular the rise of the novel and the newspaper, in providing mechanisms to develop and maintain a sense of identity between the individuals who make up the nation, Colley seems to largely ignore this story - essentially one about a change in consciousness produced through literary form - for what appears a more conventional exposition of institutional change driven by a century of war with France. Indeed, by completing the quote from Colley started above, it can be seen just how far she departs from Anderson's approach:

if we accept Benedict Anderson's admittedly loose, but for that reason invaluable definition of a nation as "an imagined political community", and if we accept also that, historically speaking, most

² L. Colley, *Britons. Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (London, 1992).

nations have always been culturally and ethnically diverse, problematic, protean and artificial constructs that take shape very quickly and come apart just as fast, then we can plausibly regard Great Britain as *an invented nation superimposed, if only for a while, onto much older alignments and loyalties.*⁴

Not for the first time, Anderson's notion of the 'imagined community' has been transformed into an 'invented nation' - here, in the space of just one sentence. This move effects a transition from a constructive act of identification, an identification taking place within the imaginative space which Anderson seeks to outline in his work, to a work of fiction, a fake identity temporarily distracting from older, and by implication more authentic, loyalties.

In part, this sense of the essentially unreal nature of national identity can be seen as a function of the thesis which Colley seeks to put forward as to the source of national identity. War, the major source of energy for her 'Britain', is perhaps not best known for its production of a nuanced national self-identity; and so, though Colley discusses several elements through which Britain might be imagined (Protestantism, trade, monarchs and heroes), these potentially complicating elements tend to be overshadowed by a mighty Frenchified Other, opposition to which required immediate, unconditional identification with Britain. How that identity might be maintained in times of peace, however, is not a subject which Colley can easily explore, and indeed, it appears to be one consequence of her thesis that, with the retreat of the immediate threat of war, the

³ *Ibid*, p. 5. B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York, 1991 - first published 1983).

invented nation of Britain will tend to dissolve back to reveal the 'true' primal identities over which that nation was erected.

To the extent that Colley's argument allows this kind of dissolution of the British national identity, it can be seen not so much to challenge, as to perpetuate an idealisation of those supposedly more basic national identities, England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland: natural and organic growths, understood to have been overwhelmed by the bastard creation of the eighteenth century, and only now resurgent. Thus much of the criticism levelled at Colley has aimed, not so much to challenge her representation of Britishness, and the mechanism from which it developed, as to insist upon the actual continuity of more local forms of identity, forms which were, generally, more significant than any supposedly over-arching sense of Britishness. At its best, this approach lies behind Colin Kidd's account of the failure of English and Scottish whig historiography to form an alliance capable of supporting a truly British national history.⁵ At its worst, this approach leads to the kind of position adopted in Paul Langford's *Englishness Identified*, in which the English of the late twentieth century seem to be, more or less, identical to those of the mid-nineteenth century, who seem, again, to take their identities from some pre-Union golden age.⁶ In such a representation, the development of

⁴ *Britons*, p. 5. Emphasis added.

⁵ C. Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past. Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity, 1689-c. 1830* (Cambridge, 1993).

⁶ P. Langford, *Englishness Identified. Manners and Character, 1650-1850* (Oxford etc., 2000). In his 'Conclusion. Manners and Character', pp. 313-20, Langford insists that 'the national character that had acquired a recognizable outline by the time of the Great Exhibition had a remarkable stability about it ... Even from the vantage point of a dawning new millennium it is not clear that this continuity has been permanently broken ... it would be easy to cite exceptions that might come to be seen as the rule. But it was always thus. Throughout the period with which this book has been concerned the national character was seen as vulnerable to change', pp. 316-7. Incidentally, the English of Langford's work - like the English of Simon Heffer's more populist attempt, *Nor Shall My Sword. The Reinvention of England* (London, 1999) - are in fact not all those who might consider themselves English: for both believe England to stop at Hadrian's Wall, thus cutting off my (rather large) home county, Northumberland.

Britain appears as little more than a bad dream, a perversion of the true English spirit which, fortunately, never really took hold. (It also has the convenient effect of bracketing a period in which the greatest excesses of English development - slavery, empire, and the exploitation of the proletariat - took place. They were never really *English* actions, after all).

This, again, is an approach which Colley seems to legitimate within *Britons*, when she claims that 'Identities are not like hats. Human beings can and do put on several at a time'.⁷ Sensible as this caveat sounds, it provides an easy escape from what seems the simple fact that the development and maintenance of a communal identity, over a period of some three centuries, must have had *some* significant effects upon the identities of both individuals and groups comprehended by that community. Ironically, then, for all the admitted power of *Britons* as a representation of the emergence of a national identity, and for all the many reams of print produced to dispute the accuracy of its account, it is more than able to coexist with the theoretical approaches of those seeking to disrupt it; it is merely the other side of the coin which those approaches seek to keep current.⁸

In attempting to make genuine use of Anderson's notion of the 'imagined community', then, I wish both to write a history of the British nation quite different from that provided by Colley, stressing not the external forces that went

⁷ *Britons*, p. 6.

⁸ This can be seen by comparing Colley's argument about Britishness and otherness with Gerald Newman's representation of the development of *Englishness* from the experience of otherness in *The Rise of English Nationalism. A Cultural History 1740-1830* (London, 1997 - first published 1987). The two accounts are structurally very similar, though Newman is perhaps more interested in the otherness *within* the kingdom, the Francophilia of the upper classes, which he perceives to be opposed by a developing middle-class culture of Englishness. Perhaps the most telling difference, however, is Newman's recognition of the neurosis which this kind of self-other identification produced among the English.

into the construction of 'Britain at War', but the internal structures that allowed its imagination and maintenance, and to question what I can only view as the complacent assertion of Englishness common among many academics and other commentators. Of course, this common recourse to 'Englishness' is derived from powerful sources of desire, that perhaps should not be dismissed quite so carelessly as I tend to; as Raphael Samuel wrote, 'England' and 'English', even for the radical writers associated with *History Workshop Journal*:

had all kinds of pleasant connotations. It evoked a people rather than a state, Blake's *Jerusalem* rather than Westminster, Whitehall, or Balmoral. Because of its association with the language, it was umbilically tied to English literature. Because of its subliminal association with the countryside - the "real" England - it conjured up images of rusticity, chronicles of ancient sunlight. "English" is smaller and gentler than "British", and it has the charm, for the historian, of the antiquated and the out of date. "British" was an altogether more uncomfortable term to work with⁹

But, as Samuel went on to insist, for all that 'British' remained a more appropriate term and identity to explore, not least because of its very lack of the gentle associations of 'English', compared with which 'it is formal, abstract and remote. But it allows for a more pluralistic understanding of the nation, one which sees it as a citizenry rather than a folk. It does not presuppose a common

⁹ R. Samuel (ed.), *Patriotism. The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*, vol. 1, *History and Politics* (London and New York, 1989), p. xii.

culture, and it is therefore more hospitable both to newcomers and outsiders'.¹⁰ In other words, Britishness as an identity is not, cannot be, taken for granted; does not exist in the realm of myth and tradition (or at least, has not done so since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries' thorough debunking of the Brutus myth); but rather possesses an undeniable historical character that renders it in obvious need of analysis and a constant testing and reaffirmation, while as a living political identity it has a greater potential flexibility for a multi-cultural society.

When using Anderson's theoretical approach to the nation, the most common forms to be explored are those of the novel and the newspaper. These are the forms to which Anderson paid most attention, and which he in fact suggests provided the structure of feeling and thought that underpins national identity. Such a bias is hardly surprising, perhaps, given both Anderson's concentration upon them, and that his approach has found its most fertile ground within literature and its cognate disciplines; except, of course, for the peculiar fact that the genre which is most consistently implicated in discussions of national identity, and which is regularly referred to in order to prove the truth of nationalist claims, is that of history. This peculiarity can only be heightened by the fact that nationalism and the idea of the nation can themselves be understood to function as a theory of history.

Given this, a study of the uses of history-reading and -writing would seem to be of particular value to an exploration of the development of British national identity. This is particularly so as the genre of history has been shown, in Mark Phillips's recent study, to be one undergoing quite dramatic change during the

¹⁰ *Ibid*, pp. xii-xiii.

eighteenth century.¹¹ In particular, in his account, historiography appears implicated in the developing discourses on sentiment and sensibility, seeking to incorporate the techniques of emotional stimulation and excitement more usually associated with the developing genre of the novel.

Phillips's account demonstrates the importance of concentrating upon history's function as a genre of writing, rather than following the more usual approach of considering it as a discipline, equipped with certain rules of evidence which allow historians to navigate their way through the archival and textual maze, towards the professed goal of uncovering the past "how it essentially was".¹² However, though Phillips is undoubtedly successful in uncovering the complexity of a form of writing more usually associated with an essentially bland, neutral prose, and in exploring how its development has fundamentally depended upon historical circumstances, he is unwilling to delineate the genre of history as anything other than a series of sub-genres, thus perhaps tending to perpetuate the empirical and somewhat fragmented understanding of historiography adopted by many historians. In doing so, he perhaps also neglects to explore some of the implications for historical truth of this newly affective prose.¹³ In my account of the development of historiography during the eighteenth century, therefore, I seek to discuss the broad genre of history, rather

¹¹ M. S. Phillips, *Society and Sentiment. Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740-1820* (Princeton, New Jersey, 2000).

¹² R. J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London, 1997), p. 17 - his improvement on the more usual translation of Leopold von Ranke's classic phrase as "what actually happened". See S. Bann, *The Clothing of Clio. A Study of the Representation of History in Nineteenth-Century Britain and France* (Cambridge etc., 1984), ch. 1, on the complexities not only of Ranke's original phrase, but also of the various translations attempted to 'improve' his meaning.

¹³ See M. Adams, 'A View of the Past: History, Painting, and the Manipulation of Distance', *Literature and History* (forthcoming), for a further discussion of this issue, in particular with relation to Phillips's use of a language of painting to explain the new developments in historical writing.

than its various sub-categories, hoping to gain in theoretical clarity what is lost in particular empirical detail.

In doing so, however, I have been forced to limit my sample of historical writing: the whole field is simply too vast for me to take full account of it, and so I have chosen to restrict myself *largely* to histories written of the pre-Norman period, a period of rich importance in the development both of the historical genre, and the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' search for national origins. I have also chosen not to follow one important discourse on national identity: that on Protestantism and the British religious experience. I do not do this, despite its apparent importance to Colley's thesis, and the importance of works such as John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, for several reasons.¹⁴ First, and most obviously, it does not fit especially well with the more general sample of historical writing that I have chosen to focus upon: Protestant historiography, for all the interest in the progress of religion in the islands, inevitably tends to focus upon the more modern period. Secondly, I am fundamentally unconvinced as to its ability to bear the weight of Colley's thesis (particularly given the sheer number of Protestant *factions*), or to act as a sufficient counter-weight to her understanding of Britishness as the experience of otherness. Thirdly, and most importantly, it is a subject on which I have little to say, and which has already been covered.¹⁵

In my account of the genre of history, however, I *do* take note of the dramatic changes occurring within print culture during the eighteenth century. Not only was there a vast growth in the sheer volume of printed material, this was also a period of great innovation in formal terms, with the development of a

¹⁴ J. Foxe, *Book of Martyrs, Containing an Account of the Sufferings and Death of the Protestants in the Reign of Queen Mary the First* (London, 1732 - first published 1563).

host of new genres (the novel, newspaper, and biography being just three obvious examples) and the retreat or transformation of older forms (the printed sermon, history, poetry and the romance, for example). In attempting to understand this period of transformation, I draw upon the work of literary scholars and their attempts to account for the rise of the novel in the eighteenth century, and exploit the insights developed by Michael M^cKeon and Lennard Davis in particular, both of whom stress (in their rather different accounts) the importance of an uncertainty over how to represent truth for the development of the novel.¹⁶ I do this with an eye to Anderson's account of nationalism's relationship to a structure of feeling introduced by the novel and newspaper. This, I believe, must be the ground upon which history's relationship to the novel is to be explored, as well as the basis for its generic development over the century.

In exploring this development, of course, it is crucial to recognise that it must be based upon a particular relationship to the reading public, whose desires and interests all these various literary forms sought to satisfy. How history was used by its readers, then, is a crucial question of this thesis; another, perhaps even more significant for a thesis interested in the imaginative materials available for the development of the 'imagined community' of Britain - or, more accurately, of the British - is how history sought to represent its public to itself, how it sought to position its readers in relationship to the past, and to each other. In exploring these issues, I have sought to stress the importance of history to the eighteenth-century sense of self, both as the source for a good education (intellectual,

¹⁵ See, for instance, T. Claydon and I. McBride (eds.), *Protestantism and National Identity. Britain and Ireland, c. 1650-c. 1850* (Cambridge, 1998).

¹⁶ M. M^cKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740* (Baltimore and London, 1987); L. Davis, *Factual Fictions. The Origins of the English Novel* (New York, 1983).

political, and, importantly, social education) and as the basis for the legal community which the British claimed as their finest achievement.

I have also, however, sought consistently to exploit the strange slipperiness of the idea of 'the public', whose inchoateness is well described by James Mackintosh, in his *Vindiciæ Gallicæ*:

The convictions of philosophy insinuate themselves by a slow, but certain progress, into popular sentiment. It is vain for the arrogance of learning to condemn the people to ignorance by reprobating superficial knowledge - The people cannot be profound, but the truths which regulate the moral and political relations of man, are at no great distance from the surface. The great works in which discoveries are contained cannot be read by the people; but their substance passes through a variety of minute and circuitous channels to the shop and the hamlet.¹⁷

The public, then, though possessed of a potentially exclusive tendency, especially as a description of a political body, seems also to be closely related to the more inclusive notions of the 'people' and the 'mob' when considered as a body of sentiment, or opinion.

Before I go any further, it is necessary for me both to acknowledge the dangers of and explain the reasons for my use of this language of 'the mob'.

¹⁷ J. Mackintosh, *Vindiciæ Gallicæ. Defence of the French Revolution and its English Admirers, Against the Accusations of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke; Including some Strictures on the Late Production of Mons. De Calonne* (London, 1791), p.123.

Much work has been done to counter the derogatory force of this term, which, as George Rudé claimed, presents a 'mob' with:

no ideas or honorable impulses of its own ... liable to be presented as the "passive" instrument of outside agents - "demagogues" or "foreigners" - and as being prompted by motives of loot, lucre, free drinks, bloodlust, or merely the need to satisfy some lurking criminal instinct.¹⁸

In order to recover the ideas, the honourable impulses, indeed, the real human beings which lay behind the actions of 'the mob', historians after Rudé have sought to move away from the language of 'the mob', to that of 'the crowd', and to delineate both the general and particular conditions that underlie crowd behaviour.¹⁹ Their efforts have led to a much fuller and richer, indeed, a more historical understanding of the crowd, and crowd action, and in abandoning that terminology, I certainly do not seek to abandon that analysis.

However, my interest in this thesis is not so much in the *actual* crowds that throng together at so many points in the history of the eighteenth century, as in the *imaginative* usage of the crowd, or the mob, in defining the limits and constitution of the eighteenth-century public, both political and critical. In doing so, I want to draw attention to the fact that 'the mob', for all its commonly

¹⁸ G. Rudé, *The Crowd in History. A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England, 1730-1848* (London, 1981 - first published 1964), p. 8.

¹⁹ As well as Rudé, see also E. J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels. Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Manchester, 1971 - first published 1959) and E. P. Thompson, 'The Patricians and the Plebs' and 'The Moral Economy of the Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', in *Customs in Common* (London, 1991), pp. 16-96, pp. 185-258.

pejorative connotations, would seem still, with the ambiguity which appears to be typical of the discursive formation of 'the public', to have possessed a *legitimacy*, a right of action *in extremis*. This, then, is the other side of 'the mob', a side clearly also present to Rudé in his study, when he expresses his dissatisfaction with analyses in which 'the writer shows his sympathy for the objects of a movement by labelling its participants "the people"'.²⁰ The mob, though it may be viewed in some lights as the great vandal of history, might also be understood as the source of a possible redemption.²¹ I argue, in fact, that much of the eighteenth-century idea of the public is worked out in the presence of that mob, which functions both as its greatest threat and as the guarantor of its existence. It is the power of the mob to dissolve the currently constituted public which ensures both that public's continued legitimacy and its maintenance of proper forms.

The position of the mob within history, then, is inevitably of great importance to my account of eighteenth-century historiography, and I seek throughout this thesis to pay attention to the representation of the mob, and the largely plebeian constituency from which it is derived, within histories of the nation. In particular, I aim to discuss the extent to which such a plebeian constituency might be imagined to be active within history, and thus within the nation that history sought to produce.

²⁰ *The Crowd in History*, p. 7.

²¹ Certainly this is how this twenty-first-century historian experiences reading a text such as Gentleman of the Inner Temple, *Laws Concerning Masters and Servants* (London, 1785), which fulminates against 'Negroe Slaves ... brought into this Kingdom ... as cheap Servants, having no Right to Wages ... [who yet] become intoxicated with Liberty, grow refractory, and either by Persuasion of others, or from their own Inclinations, begin to expect Wages', and records that the unconstitutional intervention of 'the Mob' 'makes it not only difficult but dangerous to the Proprietor of these Slaves to recover the Possession of them, when once they are spirited away', pp. 28-9.

Several recent studies have sought to uncover the relationship of a somewhat different constituency to the developing nation, as part of a more general re-articulation of women's position within the public sphere.²² In this thesis, I am especially interested in the ways in which women, crucially involved in the reproduction of the nation, figure in the writing of its history; above all, I explore the use of a narrative of miscegenation which lies behind many accounts of Britain's development as a nation, a narrative which obviously places a lineage of *women*, not men, at the heart of the nation. This, however, must obviously be complicated not only by the potential consequences of such a narrative for national pride, but also by the issue of women's relationship to history, particularly given the development of a genre - the novel - generally understood to be a predominantly feminine one, better able to respond to the interests and desires of women than the history.

With both these constituencies, the crucial issue to address must be the extent to which their relationship to the imagined nation could be an authentic one: are they allowed a genuine subject position within that nation, or are they merely figures in the national imaginary, without agency of their own? A similar issue raises itself with regard to the relationship between Englishness, Scottishness, and Britishness: how far can we understand the British nation imagined in this period to be one involving a genuine negotiation between these two prior national identities? Such questions are of particular importance as, though the notion of the imagined community would seem to leave space for any act of imaginative identification to be understood as legitimate, I would argue

²² H. Guest, *Small Change. Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1810* (Chicago and London, 2000); A. Keane, *Women Writers and the English Nation in the 1790s. Romantic Belongings* →

that in fact, Anderson's is a *necessarily* utopian account. The nation, in his formulation, is to be understood primarily as one in which sovereign selves learn to recognise each other as possessing an essential identity, an identity which does not threaten selfhood. For this to be possible, it must be evident that not just any act of imagination can be accepted as the basis for political community.

Exploring the 'imagined community' of Britain produced during the eighteenth century - discovering it to exist there - though it might make use of Anderson's insights, need not imply that that community is indeed the imagined community which he describes; it may, rather, be the decrepit and increasingly incoherent Britain of which Colley has given so powerful a representation.

Before I go on to outline the structure of my thesis, however, it is necessary to give a brief account of the method which lies behind my approach to the histories and other texts explored here. In essence, I apply a fairly basic tool of literary analysis - close reading, supported by a theoretical conviction as to the relationship between language and reality - to texts not normally so read. In doing so, I aim to treat them as *historical texts*, as traces estranged from a material reality that are, nevertheless, bound to and inform upon that reality. In doing so, however, I do not attempt to short-circuit readings of that text, either through biographical readings (except when I explicitly aim at biography, as in my treatment of Gibbon), or other ploys commonly adopted by historians. Rather, I seek to understand them *as texts*, with their own proper, internal system of rules, norms, formal conventions - what I refer to, perhaps not entirely accurately, as genre.

That language and art do not simply reflect reality is fairly generally recognised; but the precise nature of their relationship is obviously rather more difficult to comprehend. Nor is much light likely to be shed on this issue by analyses derived from Ferdinand de Saussure, through structuralism and post-structuralism, as the relatively enclosed world of signs which such approaches concentrate upon does not appear to allow historical events to break through into the realm of language, or does so only through the transformation of those events themselves into signs, thus undermining the difference between representation and reality which seems to be the most productive element of historical enquiry.

A more fruitful point of departure would seem to be that which Raymond Williams began to develop with *Keywords*, his exploration of the shifting meanings of more than a hundred words central to the experience and understanding of modern culture and society; and, indeed, of *Culture and Society*, the work from which *Keywords* grew (it had originally been intended to function as, essentially, a glossary for that work).²³ Williams was himself indebted to the insights of Valentin Vološinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, which insisted upon the fundamentally dialogic nature of all utterances:

Any monologic utterance, the written monument included, is an inseverable element of verbal communication. Any utterance - the finished, written utterance not excepted - makes response to something and is calculated to be responded to in turn. It is but one

²³ R. Williams, *Keywords. A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London, 1983; first published 1976); *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (London, 1959).

link in a continuous chain of speech performances. Each monument carries on the work of its predecessors, polemicizing with them, expecting active, responsive understanding, and anticipating such understanding in return.²⁴

Vološinov, then, insisted upon the text's fundamental materiality, its being of the world, not separated from it by some magical incantation of 'culture'. This should not be understood, however, as the reduction of words to objects, or the identification, commonly made by historians, of evidence with the reality to which that evidence is supposed to testify; rather, it is the claim that language must be understood as the estrangement of one portion of material reality from that reality, as a result of conflict. Vološinov therefore provided a means to consider the relationship between language and reality, based upon the identification of written and spoken utterances, through a programme of exploration and of the recovery of meanings within particular historical circumstances, and their organisation into networks of meaning.

This is clearly the inspiration behind *Keywords*; and if my thesis does not follow Williams's predilection for word lists, it does make use of one important feature of his comprehension of Vološinov: the *strangeness* of language. Thus, on the very first page of *Keywords*' introduction, Williams records the origin of that work in a discussion with an old friend:

²⁴ V. N. Vološinov, trans. L. Matejka and I. R. Titunik, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (New York and London, 1973), p. 72.

We talked eagerly, but not about the past. We were too much preoccupied with this new and strange world around us. Then we both said, in effect simultaneously: “the fact is, they just don’t speak the same language”.²⁵

The language Williams investigates in *Keywords* fascinates not simply because of its significance to British culture in the second half of the twentieth century, a significance that might seem to render it familiar and unchallenging, but because of its sheer strangeness, its bizarre evolution away from quite different linguistic origins. This experience of the strangeness of language, and of the past, seems to me at the heart of historical enquiry, and is certainly central to my thesis, which can perhaps best be understood as an attempt to make sense out of the bizarre odds and ends I have happened upon in the progress of what I had thought was a relatively rational project of research. For me, the question has always been: how could this thing have been thought, believed, written, particularly given what is known and understood to be the mainstream of historical discourse? In attempting to make sense of the historical flotsam and jetsam which forms the bulk of my evidence, I have sought to produce new understandings of the broader discourse in which they are or were situated, the conversations to which they seem to make so peculiar a contribution.

The first half of my thesis can be seen to concern itself primarily with the issues first of representing the nature of the genre of history in the eighteenth century, and then of relating that genre to Anderson’s theoretical approach through the exploitation of various accounts of the rise of the novel. Chapter 1

²⁵ *Keywords*, p. 11.

discusses the broad field of historical representation in the eighteenth century, its boundaries and its social functions. Interspersed with this general account are several more particular studies of individual readers, writers, and viewers of history, and their various relationships to the genre. In particular, I aim to show the importance of history as a site for the mediation of individual and group identities in this period. Chapter 2 focuses upon Defoe's writing of history in the wake of the 1707 Act of Union, and seeks to develop several of the themes or figures which dominate the rest of my thesis: the narrative of miscegenation, the role of the mob and of women, and the problematic nature of truthful representation in eighteenth-century historiography. Chapter 3 attempts to describe history as a genre of writing, and to theorise the relationship of that genre to Anderson's account of the 'imagined community', while chapter 4 provides further discussion of the figures discussed in chapter 2, paying particular attention to a potential 'other Britain' imagined within a largely plebeian literature.

Chapters 5 and 6 seek to 'thicken' my account of the imagined community by paying attention to two important controversies over the nature and direction of the British nation. The first discusses the demography debates of the later eighteenth century, seeking to relate this panic over the health of the national body to ongoing arguments about development, 'improvement' and enclosure, and to examine the new kind of vision of the poor, and the poor's relationship to the nation, to which these debates contributed. I also discuss the importance of the developing discourses of scientific truth, of empiricism and political economy, both in relation to the changes occurring within the historical genre, and to the English 'idiom' which E. P. Thompson identified in 'The

Peculiarities of the English'.²⁶ Chapter 6, meanwhile, explores what is generally recognised to be one of the most significant elements of English and of British national identity: the common law. It not only examines the understanding of history which the common law perpetuated, and the relationships between subjects of all classes to the law which it sought to produce, but also the challenges to the authority of the common law which began to trouble it in the later part of the eighteenth century. Most importantly, perhaps, chapters 5 and 6 discuss two different, and increasingly conflicting elements of the discourse on truth: that which stressed the possibility of improvement through a scientific rationality, and that which stressed the importance of the long-standing empirical wisdom represented by custom.

This conflict, I suggest, plays an important part in the destabilising of the broader field of representational truth in which the genre of history was based, the effects of which I explore in chapter 7, my final and concluding chapter. Here I concentrate upon the usage of history during the French Revolutionary debates, looking at the ways in which not only the incidents of both recent and more distant history were related in order to support both radical and conservative positions, but also at how history itself was represented as a form of knowledge and a genre of writing. Such a discussion is given particular point by the fact that this decade also saw the greatest *quantitative* growth in novel production during the eighteenth century, a growth not wholly explained by the general growth of printed material in the 1790s.²⁷ I will suggest in this chapter that the novel begins to displace the history as the grounding genre for discourses

²⁶ E. P. Thompson, 'The Peculiarities of the English' in *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London, 1978), pp. 245-301.

on political justice and liberty, and that this period can therefore be understood not only as the foundation of a certain, Burkean mythic history of the nation, but also as a period of radical readjustment for history-writing, away from its previously dominant political role.

Over one hundred years ago, Ernest Renan, in his famous lecture 'What is a Nation?', drew attention to the complex and contradictory relationship between history and the nation. 'Forgetting', he claimed, 'historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle of] nationality.'²⁸ In fact, it seems difficult to credit the idea that historical study itself has the power to disrupt the very powerful national myths that have developed since the early eighteenth century - historical contingency appears to be a rather more likely candidate for that role. Nevertheless, a critical appreciation of historiography's role in the development of national identity, both as the source of memory and of forgetfulness, must remain a crucial element of the historian's inquiry into the nation, not least so that the medium in which the historian works is not assumed to open a neutral window through which the development of nationalism may be perceived, but is instead recognised to be already tightly bound up with - constitutive of, even - the process it seeks to describe.

²⁷ See C. Siskin, *The Work of Writing. Literature and Social Change in Britain, 1700-1830* (Baltimore and London, 1998), ch. 6 esp.

²⁸ E. Renan, 'What is a Nation?' in H. K. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (London and New York, 1990 - lecture first given 11 March 1882), ch. 1, trans. and annotated M. Thom; p. 11.

1 - History-writing in the Eighteenth Century.

Before studying the usage of history by eighteenth-century writers and readers to construct new national identities, it is obviously necessary to examine the state and nature of the field of historical production during the eighteenth century.²⁹

Although there have been several accounts of history-writing in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, most seem to concentrate, rather Whiggishly, upon its failure to achieve a historical understanding similar to that of the modern period, or, at best, treat it as no more than a staging-post on the way to such an understanding.³⁰ J. G. A. Pocock's *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law* can be seen as one venerable instance of this approach: however valuable its description of the limitation of historical vision produced by seventeenth-century Britain's fixation upon the idea of the ancient constitution (and failure to comprehend feudalism as a single, united, *social* system), it must nevertheless be written from a position that understands the historical understanding it describes as, somehow, inadequate.³¹ This is clear even (particularly) in Pocock's attempt to balance the thrust of his own work:

The history of historiography is not only the history of the rise and perfection of a particular manner of thought ... it is the history of all

²⁹ I use this phrase despite, not because of, its proximity to that of Pierre Bourdieu in his exploration of *The Field of Cultural Production. Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. and introduced by R. Johnson (London, 1993). Although my representation of eighteenth-century history-writing may not be a million miles from Bourdieu's approach, it is not consciously modelled upon it, and should not be understood through that lens.

³⁰ M. S. Phillips's *Society and Sentiment*, as noted above, is a rare exception to this tendency.

³¹ J. G. A. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law. A Study of English Historical Thought in the Seventeenth Century. A Reissue with a Retrospect* (Cambridge etc., 1987 - first published 1957).

the ways in which men have felt committed to their past and bound to find out what it was and how they are related to it, and all the attempts they have made to deal seriously with the problems in which this inquiry involves them.³²

It would seem that part of the problem behind such an approach is its insistence upon understanding history primarily as a discipline. This discipline, practised and judged within the academy, is organised about a set of rules to do with the handling of evidence, that guarantees 'true' history. If only the eighteenth century (or seventeenth, or sixteenth - the horizon is, of course, ever-receding); if only the eighteenth century had understood these rules, its histories would remain valid today, commentaries upon, rather than evidences of, history, or at least, though superseded by more recent accounts, would remain part of the canon of modern history.

Instead of this approach, I wish to suggest, it would be best to understand history as a genre, as a form of writing oriented towards an audience that possesses certain expectations as to what, precisely, a history should contain. In reading the histories produced during the eighteenth century, then, it must be necessary to consider them in three different lights. First, they should be considered as the products of individuals existing in the world, seeking to

³² *Ibid*, p. 251. Precisely what a 'serious' attempt to address the problems of historical inquiry might be is left undefined. See also J. R. Hale (ed.), *The Evolution of British Historiography. From Bacon to Namier* (Cleveland and New York, 1964), and J. Kenyon, *The History Men. The Historical Profession in England since the Renaissance* (London, 1983), which, despite their different approaches to the historical canon, are no more successful in avoiding the basic problem of understanding the past in terms of failure, or incompleteness. Then there is Richard Evans's recent *In Defence of History*, which, with the most extreme disregard for a fundamentally different historical tradition, covers the entire historical tradition up to Ranke in two bare paragraphs.

negotiate the various requirements, both discursive and extra-discursive, of that world. Secondly, they must be considered as texts with lives independent of both their authors and their individual readers, lives that must be inserted into the more general discursive and material context of a changing society. Finally, they should be understood as the materials with which readers seek to operate within the discursive realm, and to negotiate between that realm's demands and those of their own experience. Throughout such an exploration, it will be necessary to avoid a biographical determinism, recognising that (except in very rare, and particular circumstances) it is not possible, or necessarily desirable, to understand a work through its writer's or reader's life alone.³³

These are difficult demands to meet, and I have probably erred towards an excessive concentration upon the second element of this trinity: I have done so in the belief that it is perhaps the element which gives most indication of its complementary elements, one which necessarily indicates both an authorial position and an implied reader. It is also, of course, that element which is indispensably necessary in an enquiry based largely upon texts. In this chapter I have, however, sought to balance this concentration upon historical texts with several short case studies of historical practice, studies that should, hopefully, make clearer the relationships between writers, readers, and texts.

³³ There have, of course, been several studies that do this, or similar things to it: J. M. Levine, *Humanism and History. Origins of Modern English Historiography* (Ithaca and London, 1987); R. Mayer, *History and the Early English Novel. Matters of Fact from Bacon to Defoe*, (Cambridge, 1997); M. S. Phillips, *Society and Sentiment*, and "If Mrs Mure be not sorry for poor King Charles": History, the Novel, and the Sentimental Reader', *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 43 (1997), pp. 111-31. See also M. M'Keon, *The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740* (Baltimore and London, 1987), and C. Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past, and British Identities before Nationalism. Ethnicities and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600-1800* (Cambridge, 1999), which, despite (because of?) not being specifically interested in defining the genre of eighteenth-century historical writing, seem to succeed in characterising it in that century's own terms.

Perhaps the most important division discussed in most histories of historiography, a division commonly invested with an explanatory power sufficient to justify the development of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century history into its modern form, is that of the ancients and the moderns (humanist/antiquarian, eloquent/erudite).³⁴ Each equally the result of Renaissance learning, of a desire to recapture the knowledge of classical Greece and Rome that then produced a desire to know precisely which works genuinely were from that classical canon, these traditions had become sufficiently divided by the end of the seventeenth century for them to be understood as fundamentally opposed. The moderns (or antiquarians) were ridiculed for their pedantic, useless knowledge, and their ridiculous self-importance in patrolling the boundaries of the classical canon, while the ancients (or humanists) faced counter-claims of gullibility, and even conscious duplicity, for their perpetuation of long-exploded fabrications; it is this intellectual quarrel that Jonathan Swift (himself firmly of the ‘ancients’ camp) satirised in his *Battle of the Books*.³⁵ At this point, and through much of the eighteenth-century, it appeared that the ancients had had the better of the argument; but the controversy was to rumble on, and humanist historians were gradually to incorporate elements of antiquarian learning and method into their works, even as the antiquarian enterprise itself went into slow decline over the century.

For many historians, this slow *rapprochement* of these two apparently contradictory traditions, this process by which ‘narrative and scholarship lost their independence’ would seem itself sufficient to explain the production of

³⁴ In Levine, *Humanism and History*, Pocock, *Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*, and S. Piggott, *Ruins in a Landscape. Essays in Antiquarianism* (Edinburgh, 1976), for example.

modern forms of history.³⁶ There is good reason to be sceptical of this assumption, however. It has, as its basic premise, the belief that one element of a divided historical understanding was able to import a ballast of scepticism to the more polished and theoretically dominant, but grossly self-deceiving, other element, and that in doing so, modern historiography was born. It neglects, however, that element of the supposedly sceptical antiquarian tradition that was in fact wholly credulous, capable of producing myths of its own equal to any provided by the classical canon: William Stukeley's fantastical accounts of the Druids of ancient Briton, for example.³⁷ It would seem that any account of modern history's formation through some uncomplicated compromise between twin elements of a discipline, wrongly separated shortly after their renaissance, is not truly adequate.

Moreover, even if it could be shown that the antiquarian enterprise not only possessed the evidential methods, but also the level of scepticism in applying them that modern historians deem necessary to the historical enterprise, it seems unlikely that its mere addition to humanist historians' writing skills could produce the radical shift in the perception of the past that the transition from eighteenth-century to modern historiography demands, for one crucial element, identical to both traditions, would first have to be transformed. This is the belief in a trans-historical human subject. Most, if not all, eighteenth-century

³⁵ J. Swift, *A Tale of a Tub, the Battle of the Books and other Satires* (London, 1909 - first published 1704).

³⁶ *Humanism and History*, p. 177.

³⁷ *Ruins in a Landscape*, pp. 116-7. That eighteenth-century historians were themselves less than impressed by antiquarian's claims to objective knowledge can be seen in W. Robertson's *History of Scotland* (London, 1759), Vol. 1, p. 5, where he insists that 'The history of Scotland ... from the origin of the monarchy, to the reign of Kenneth II ... is the region of pure fable and conjecture, and ought to be neglected, or abandoned to the industry and credulity of the antiquaries.'

historians had no understanding of any form of subjectivity other than their own, had no sense that the material conditions of society might produce not just manners, but selves specifically appropriate to those conditions.

It was this belief in an universal and uniform human nature that allowed historians to use history as a straightforward resource for the teaching of moral precepts, and thus to censure the ancient Britons for failing to meet the standards of eighteenth-century London. It was this belief, as yet largely untroubled by coherent notions of racial difference, that lay behind the common representation of nations undergoing a standard narrative of development, from savage, to barbarous, to civilised, akin to that of a person moving from infancy, through childhood, to man's estate.³⁸ It would seem to be this belief, this back-projection of a modern self into human pre-history, that enabled the conjectural histories of Adam Ferguson, Lord Kames, Adam Smith and John Millar to be written, as the assumption that all men are everywhere the same, apart from the material conditions in which they must live, enabled straightforward comparisons of (for example) Native Americans to Ancient Britons to be made.³⁹ It would seem also to lie behind the positing, by Rousseau and others, of a state of nature, of a natural man (that natural man being accessible, of course, to all men), to explain

³⁸ Robertson, *History of Scotland*, Vol. 1, p. 1: 'Nations, as well as men, arrive at maturity by degrees, and the events, which happen during their infancy or early youth, cannot be recollected, and deserve not to be remembered'; A. Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ed. with an introduction by D. Forbes ([Edinburgh?], 1767 - 1966 rpt.), p. 5: 'in the human kind, the species has a progress as well as the individual'. This general approach gets an interesting twist in W. Alexander's *The History of Women* (London, 1779), which is constructed somewhat after the manner of a woman's life: education; employments/amusements; dress; courtship; marriage; widowhood. This structure is itself interwoven with the bigger themes of History (which also seems to follow a model of development): antediluvian history; the difference between the savage and the civil; female 'influence', 'ceremonies and customs', and concluding with the fulfilment of all women's needs in Great Britain.

³⁹ A. Ferguson, *Essay on the History of Civil Society*; [Henry Home, Lord Kames], *Sketches of the History of Man. In Two Volumes* (Edinburgh, 1774); A. Smith, *Lectures on Jurisprudence. Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith*, Vol. 5, R. L. Meek, D. D.

the development of language and of society.⁴⁰ It seems difficult, if not impossible, to explain the subversion of an assumption so central to the ideological projects of so many forms of history by the simple reunification of humanism with antiquarianism.

If an attempt is to be made to approach an answer to this conundrum, without recourse to a presumption of the necessary unfolding of a 'correct' historical method, it must begin with an account of the *whole* field of historical production, not merely that of the academy, and it must seek the answer to any changes in the theory of history in the changing requirements (material and discursive) of that field. So what does an eighteenth-century history look like?

First, then, it is necessary to recognise that as well as those narrative histories that it is common to associate with the eighteenth century, and the conjectural and language histories already discussed, the field of eighteenth-century history-writing can be seen to include genealogies and heraldic tables, annals, chronological tables of events, 'catechisms' of the past, local histories, works on the common law, ballads, narrative poems, chapbooks and memoirs. The aims and methods of these histories differed widely from those of the more canonical works, and should alert us to the fact that if narrative was the usual mode of representation in eighteenth-century history, that narrative was by no means uniform in style. Thus, while the question and answer techniques of the 'catechisms', or the extensive lineages provided by the genealogical tables, can certainly be seen as pushing the reader towards certain narratives of history, those

Raphael, P. G. Stein eds (Oxford, 1978 - lectures delivered 1762-66); J. Millar, *Observations Concerning the Distinction of Ranks in Society* (London, 1771).

⁴⁰ J. J. Rousseau and J. Herder, *Essays on the Origins of Languages* (Chicago and London, 1966 - 1986 rpt., Herder first published 1772; Rousseau written c. 1749-55, not published in his

narratives must be recognised as the result of an active, rather than passive, form of reading; this point applies even more powerfully to the chronologies and annals, which, if they are productive of historical narrative, are so only through the active understanding of their readers.

It is worth considering these forms of historical writing as narrative for two reasons. First, because it seems evident that the facts, or evidences, presented by them are intended to be realised in narrative structures external to the text (the only non-narrative analyses seem, ironically, to come in such canonical narratives as David Hume's *History*, where they function as retrospective interludes to the main narrative).⁴¹ Secondly, it seems useful to dispel one consistent understanding of narrative form as an imposition of structure upon the reader. Including these less obvious forms within the rubric of narrative should remind us of the importance, and relative autonomy, of the reader in constructing any narrative; and it should point to the *particular* importance of the reader to eighteenth-century historical writing.

This was, quite definitely, history written to involve its reader. Not only did it seek to convince the reader of its arguments, it sought to implicate the reader in the writing of those arguments, in the construction of the historical narratives from which its lessons were to be learnt, a practice perhaps most clearly seen in George Berkeley's *The Querist*:

512 Whether our natural Irish are not partly Spaniards and partly Tartars [i.e., Scythians]; and whether they do not bear signatures of

lifetime); A. Smith, 'Considerations concerning the First Formation of Languages', first published 1761, in *The Early Writings of Adam Smith*, ed. J. R. Lindgren (New York, 1967).

their descent from both these nations, which is also confirmed by all their histories?

513 Whether the Tartar progeny is not numerous in this land?

And whether there is an idler occupation under the sun than to attend flocks and herds of cattle?

514 Whether the wisdom of the State should not wrestle with this hereditary disposition of our Tartars, and with a high hand introduce agriculture?⁴²

History must thus be understood as involved in a project of developing the growing reading public into an informed and critical public, somewhat similar to that described by Jürgen Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, or that imagined community of readers described by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*.⁴³

It is a crucial assumption of virtually all works on eighteenth-century literature that that century saw a very rapid growth in the reading public.⁴⁴ Despite continued uncertainty as to literacy rates, there can be little doubt of the reality of this growth: the proliferation of both provincial and national newspapers ('by mid-century ... most of England, much of Wales and the Scottish Lowlands were served by at least one provincial news sheet'), the

⁴¹ D. Hume, *The History of England, From the Invasion of Julius Cæsar to the End of the Reign of James II* (London, 1847 - first published 1754-62).

⁴² G. Berkeley, *The Works of George Berkeley Bishop of Cloyne. Vol. 6.*, eds A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop (London, 1953, 1964 rpt.), p. 147.

⁴³ J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. T. Burger (London, 1992 - first published 1962).

⁴⁴ It is a crucial element of Ian Watt's argument about the middling classes' responsibility for *The Rise of the Novel. Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (London, 1987 - first published 1957), for example.

expansion of the book trade, and the development of related institutions (the critics, writing in newly founded reviewing magazines, so hated in mid- to late-century works; the circulating and subscription libraries and book clubs developing over the second half of the century): all point to a huge change, and a huge growth, in the reading culture during the century.⁴⁵

History was at the heart of this development. Although the novel is commonly regarded as *the* motor behind the burgeoning print culture (alongside the newspaper, of course), an interesting piece of evidence suggests that, in fact, other forms might, more usefully, be studied. This is the record of borrowing left by the Bristol Library for the years 1773-84. Of more than thirteen thousand borrowings made in that period, works of history make up almost 45 per cent of the total, and almost twice the number of borrowings recorded for *belles-lettres* (which category included novels).⁴⁶ It would seem that the good citizens of Bristol, though certainly interested in the novels modern scholars so want to put into their hands, were in fact far more a history-reading public.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ J. Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination. English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1997), p. 132; J. Raven, H. Small and N. Tadmor eds., *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 5: 'by comparison with the 400 or so surviving books known to have been published in the first decade of the sixteenth century, about 6,000 were published during the 1630s, almost 21,000 during the 1710s, and more than 56,000 in the 1790s.'; F. Donoghue, 'Colonizing readers. Review criticism and the formation of a reading public', ch. 4 in A. Bermingham and J. Brewer eds, *The Consumption of Culture 1600-1800. Image, Object, Text* (London and New York, 1995); *Pleasures of the Imagination*, pp. 176-84.

⁴⁶ *Pleasures of the Imagination*, p. 181. Brewer actually breaks the category of 'history' down into 'history, travel and geography' - but, as I will discuss below with regard to *The Death of General Wolfe*, spatial and temporal distance might easily be viewed as broadly identical to each other.

⁴⁷ But also see J. Feather, 'British Publishing in the Eighteenth Century: a preliminary subject analysis', *The Library. A Quarterly Journal of Bibliography*, 6th series, vol. 8 (1986), pp. 32-46, which finds 'History and Geography' to be the fourth most common category of published material (behind 'Religion,' 'Social Sciences', and 'Literature' - 'Fiction', including French fiction, making up only 11% of the total of 'Literature'). Of the more than 16,000 histories published, 60% (9,645) were on British history - across the century, then, and even in the periods of most intense novel-reading (after 1750, and especially in the 1790s), histories remained far more popular with publishers.

As for who was actually *doing* this reading - that is obviously a far more difficult point. The usual response is that, certainly, the aristocracy and upper middling classes had relatively easy access to such texts; that the lower middling sorts had some access to them, and that it was this group that formed by far the most significant part of the new reading public; and that it would be possible, if difficult, for workers as low down the social scale as skilled artisans to obtain entry to the circulating libraries.⁴⁸ Women as well as men were reading (though the symbol of the woman reader was perhaps more powerful than the actual levels of female borrowing suggest it should have been); and Margaret Spufford has reminded us that although the vulgar, the plebeian reader, may not have subscribed to many quarto volumes, nevertheless such a reader would have been able to access print culture, modern as well as traditional, through cheap abridgements published in chapbook form.⁴⁹ More recently, Adam Fox's work on the oral culture of the early modern period has sought to stress the importance of the interpenetration of oral and literary culture.⁵⁰ In the end, it is only possible to indicate the possible parameters of the reading public (and perhaps, in doing this, to recognise one of the reasons contemporaries found it so difficult to define 'the public', 'the people' and 'the mob').

Very large claims have been made about the capacity for developments in literacy and in print culture to change the nature of society. Though it may seem excessive to claim, with Elizabeth Eisenstein, that 'Basic changes in book format might well lead to changes in thought patterns', nevertheless, the growing

⁴⁸ *Pleasures of the Imagination*, pp. 177-8.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 179; M. Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories. Popular Fiction and its Readership in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge etc., 1981 - 1989 rpt.).

⁵⁰ A. Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England 1500-1700* (Oxford, 2000).

reading public powerfully affected the nature of both reading and writing.⁵¹ Its effect upon readers will be discussed in greater detail in chapter four; as for writers, perhaps the most obvious and significant development is a fuller conceptualisation of 'the author'. As it became increasingly possible for writers to live by their pen without reference to just a single, or several, patrons, so a new ideal (however negatively 'writing for the mob' may be viewed) of authorial independence, and of property over text, could be articulated.⁵² It should cause no surprise that the writer commonly credited (with whatever justice) as the first novelist, Daniel Defoe, has perhaps the most ill-defined canon of writings ascribed to him; though this was, no doubt, in part at least due to his immense involvement in the writing of political pamphlets, an area in which anonymity was virtually a prerequisite, it must also have had some relation to the very limited understanding of textual ownership available to the eighteenth-century reader or writer.⁵³ Only with the shift to a broad market of readers, incapable of personally knowing an author, could the need to identify the particular writer of a text through association with a particular name be fully realised.⁵⁴

⁵¹ E. L. Eisenstein, 'Some conjectures about the impact of printing on western society and thought: a preliminary report', ch. 3 in H. J. Graff ed., *Literacy and Social Development in the West: A Reader* (Cambridge etc., 1981), p. 58.

⁵² See L. J. Rosenthal, '(Re) Writing Lear. Literary property and Dramatic Authorship', ch. 16 in J. Brewer and S. Staves, eds, *Early Modern Conceptions of Property* (London and New York, 1995).

⁵³ Samuel Richardson - hardly a writer associated with political scandal - was similarly afflicted: L. Davis, *Factual Fictions*, ch. 10, discusses this.

⁵⁴ Of course, this shift was also enabled by changes in the law on censorship (with the shift from pre- to post-publication censorship after the lapse of the Licensing Act in 1695) and on copyright.

Edward Gibbon, Family Historian.

Edward Gibbon's *Memoirs*, first published two years after his death, were never wholly completed.⁵⁵ Having begun to write at the end of 1788, or early 1789, Gibbon produced six different drafts, not all of which were complete and none of which satisfied him.⁵⁶ The first edition of his memoirs to be published (by his friend and executor, John Holroyd, the first Earl of Sheffield), sought to coax these fragmented memories into an appropriately elegant narrative; the more recent edition to which I refer, however, makes no attempt to disguise the disjointed nature of Gibbon's original texts, and indeed proves itself as unafraid of repetition as the historian himself.

The *Memoirs* provide us with a powerful insight into some of the desires that structure this historian's performance of history. Perhaps their most striking and unexpected element is their display of Gibbon's fascination with genealogy, and particularly, of course, his own family tree. It is now not unusual for professional historians to sneer at the many amateur genealogists silting up record offices up and down the country; so it is perhaps salutary to discover that Gibbon, that epitome of elegance and enlightenment, the philosophic historian *par excellence*, seems to have been first motivated to write his memoirs by reading John Gibbon's work on Heraldry, the *Introductio ad Latinam Blasoniam*, which included an appendix upon the Gibbon family's history.⁵⁷

In fact, the entire first chapter of the *Memoirs* is taken up with Gibbon's exploration of the meaning and value of genealogy for human beings; somewhere

⁵⁵ E. Gibbon, *Edward Gibbon. Memoirs of My Life*, ed. from the manuscripts by G. A. Bernard (London, 1966 - first published 1796).

between an ode and an apologia, this chapter insists that the ‘lively desire of knowing and recording our ancestors so generally prevails, that it must depend on the influence of some common principle in the minds of men’, that an interest in genealogy is part - and not a small part - of a universal humanity.⁵⁸ Genealogy, in Gibbon’s formulation, is to be understood as part of an imaginative attempt to link the individual human life to a wider history; indeed, it can even be seen as a socialising desire:

Our imagination is always active to enlarge the narrow circle in which Nature has confined us. Fifty or an hundred years may be allotted to an individual; but we stretch forwards beyond death with such hopes as Religion and Philosophy will suggest, and we fill up the silent vacancy that precedes our birth by associating ourselves to the authors of our existence If we read of some illustrious line, so ancient that it has no beginning, so worthy that it ought to have no end, we sympathize in its various fortunes; nor can we blame the generous enthusiasm, or even the harmless vanity of those who are associated to the honours of its name⁵⁹

Yet even as he claims this, Gibbon recognises that though the desire for a great lineage may be an universal desire, it is not one that may be universally indulged: ‘it can never be promiscuously enjoyed ... the longest series of peasants and

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. xiii.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. xxii; J. Gibbon, *Introductio ad Latinam Blasoniam* (London, 1682).

⁵⁸ *Memoirs*, p. 3.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 3-6.

mechanics would not afford much gratification to their descendant.’⁶⁰ Moreover, it is uncertain whether even the apparently democratic sympathy for great families is of universal application, for ‘A Philosopher may reasonably despise the pride of ancestry; and if the philosopher himself be a plebeian, his own pride will be gratified by the indulgence of such contempt.’⁶¹ Thus a desire common to all is also a mark of distinction; thus some people can imagine themselves actors ‘in’ history, while others are mere spectators of it.⁶²

Given Gibbon’s lengthy exposition of the fascination of genealogy, and its ability to involve the individual in both history and society, it is hardly surprising to discover that Gibbon’s own family tree possessed honours sufficient to justify his publication of it; in particular, Gibbon identified with Lord Say, who was murdered during Cade’s rebellion (1450) for his learning:

of some of these meritorious crimes [erecting a grammar school, causing printing, building a paper mill, speaking French etc.] I should hope to find my ancestor guilty; and a man of letters may be proud of his descent from a Patron and martyr of learning.⁶³

Gibbon’s performance of history, therefore, does not display his unique genius, but allows him to imagine himself within history, connected to his great and noble ancestor; it also allows him to imagine a position for himself in posterity, one which, given his own childless state, would not otherwise be possible. In

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 3.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 5.

⁶² This can be seen as an interesting, and perhaps unusual, example of ‘the limits of sympathy’, as explored by V. A. C. Gattrell in *The Hanging Tree. Execution and the English People 1770-1868* (Oxford etc., 1994), part III esp.

fact, this was indeed a very great imagining on Gibbon's part; for it is an ironic fact that the family tree to which Gibbon attaches himself was not actually his own.⁶⁴

But Gibbon's *Memoirs* uncover more than just their own genesis; Gibbon also uses them to discuss his own formation as a historian. And if he does this explicitly, in representations of his childish 'vague and multifarious reading [that] could not teach me to think, to write or to act', leaving as 'the only principle that darted a ray of light into the indigested Chaos ... an early and rational application to the order of time and place'; and in disconnected comments about the nature of personal identity and of genius that appear to reveal a knowledge of Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*; nevertheless, the most interesting aspect of Gibbon's account of the creative historical process would seem to be its implication in his relationship with his father.⁶⁵

It is in Gibbon's discussion of the writing of the *Decline and Fall* that the essentially morbid nature of this relationship can be uncovered. Though long financially independent of his father - in fact, by the time Gibbon had begun to research the *Decline and Fall*, it was his impecunious father and step-mother who were dependent upon him - it appears that Gibbon's emotional and psychological attachments to his father prevented him from writing, or indeed, from working properly. Thus, though Gibbon worried 'that I might be left in my old age without the fruits either of industry or inheritance', he was unable to break free from a routine domestic life that shackled his creativity:

⁶³ *Memoirs*, p. 10.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. xxii.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 43. On genius, see p. 119; on personal identity, see p. 27 and Gibbon's claim that 'according to a just computation we should begin to reckon our life from the age of puberty.' D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford, 1978 - first published 1748).

in the hurry of London I was destitute of books; in the solitude of Hampshire [with his father and step-mother] I was not master of my time ... the family hours of breakfast and dinner, of tea and supper were regular and tedious: after breakfast Mrs Gibbon expected my company in her dressing room; after tea my father claimed my conversation and the perusal of the Newspapers.⁶⁶

Gibbon expresses a palpable fear of meaninglessness, of having lived 'an hopeless life of obscurity and indigence', and it becomes clear that the only event capable of freeing him to achieve his great history is his father's death.⁶⁷ Thus it is that only in late 1770, or early 1771 - some six years after his first decision to write the *Decline and Fall*, but a few bare months after his father's death - did Gibbon actually begin to write. He is surprisingly candid about the liberating effect his father's death had for him:

Few, perhaps, are the children who, after the expiration of some months or years, would sincerely rejoyce in the resurrection of their parents; and it is a melancholy truth, that my father's death, not unhappy for himself, was the only event that could save me from an hopeless life of obscurity and indigence.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ *Memoirs*, p. 140, p. 148. And see also A. Pope, ed. P. Rogers, *Alexander Pope* (Oxford and New York, 1993), 'Epistle to Miss Blount on her leaving the Town after the Coronation', pp. 122-3, on the tedium of the country life.

⁶⁷ *Memoirs*, p. 150.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Gibbon's *Memoirs* thus display both the social importance of the performance of history, its apparent ability to carry the individual historian out of his immediate and particular circumstances into a sympathy with the wider world, and its significance as an aspect of the creative individual self, its absolute implication in the particular psychic life of the historian. They appear to demonstrate a performance aimed both outwards, to an audience, and inwards, to a needy self; they suggest that history, or at least, its writing, can be seen as one site in which the struggle to unite those two apparently divergent impulses may be negotiated.

Education and History.

Perhaps the most crucial, and commonly-stated, function of history during the eighteenth century was its ability to educate. Bolingbroke expresses this attitude as clearly as any when, having insisted (as Gibbon was later to with genealogy) that history 'seems inseparable from human nature, because it seems inseparable from self-love ... [carrying] us forward, and backward, to future and to past ages', he stresses the importance of:

Example ... [which] sets passion on the side of judgment, and makes the whole man of a piece The force of examples is not confined to those alone that pass immediately under our sight; the examples, that memory suggests, have the same effect in their degree, and an habit of recalling them will soon produce the habit of imitating them

... . The school of example, my Lord, is the world: and the masters of this school are history and experience.⁶⁹

Thus history, which offers to the student more or less complete examples of behaviour (the ancient being more complete than the modern, but the modern being more closely related to events in which the student may become an actor), may be drawn upon to inform correct behaviour in the modern world. Moreover, it is not merely a passive field of examples, but a manner of thought that is itself likely to produce virtue: thinking of the past leads, inescapably, to acting according to its lights.

This should not, however, be mistaken for a pure and unreflective imitation of the past, however:

History is the ancient author: experience is the modern language. We form our taste on the first; we translate the sense and reason, we transfuse the spirit and force: but we imitate only the particular graces of the original; we imitate them according to the idiom of our own tongue, that is, we substitute often equivalents in the lieu of them, and are far from affecting to copy them servilely.⁷⁰

This ^{at} quotation makes quite clear the origin of Bolingbroke's interest in history as having developed from the learning of the classical languages, which he, like most eighteenth-century gentlemen, would have learned through his reading of

⁶⁹ H. St. John, Lord Bolingbroke, *Letters on the Study and Use of History* (Edinburgh, 1777 - first published 1752), p. 23, pp. 27-8; I. Kramnick (ed.), *Lord Bolingbroke. Historical Writings* (Chicago and London, 1972), Letters on the Study and Use of History pp. 1-149, p. 7, pp. 9-10.

classical histories such as Tacitus's *Germania*.⁷¹ History, at least history as taught for elite male readers, was often approached less as a subject in itself than as the means to understand the language and learning of the past; this, perhaps, can be seen as part of the reason for the eighteenth-century reader's tendency to approach it as a finished text, ready for translation. But if this approach evidently limited possible understandings of history, by assuming a level of completion to history that has since been thoroughly discredited, it also provided readers with a means to approach that completed history without sacrificing their own independence of interpretation.

This independence can be found in the same metaphor that implies the constraints brought about through a mimetic reading of history; for if the historian is to be a translator of the past, he (and in this instance, 'he' is almost certainly the correct pronoun to use) is assumed not to be making a literal translation, but to be translating 'in his own words' (the phrase rings disturbingly true for modern educational practice).⁷² Reading the past is formative of the reader's self, is productive of that all-important political quality, virtue, as well as of a cast of mind that seeks to emulate the best elements of human nature, but the reader is understood to exist within a particular social system (and, of course, linguistic system), and so, in order to operate with the virtue and learning

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 57; I. Kramnick (ed), p. 29.

⁷¹ Written c. AD 98. Jane Rendall has an interesting discussion on the usage of the *Germania*'s representation of German women, and of 'Gothic feminism', in eighteenth-century national histories - J. Rendall, 'Tacitus engendered: "Gothic feminism" and British histories, c. 1750-1800', ch. 4 in G. Cubitt ed., *Imagining Nations* (Manchester and New York, 1998).

⁷² For a discussion of the modern schoolchild's usage of the history she (and in this instance, the pronoun is quite accurate) is presented with - a usage which included (and should perhaps have warned us to be sceptical about) the notion of 'in your own words' - see Carolyn Steedman's somewhat pessimistic account: 'True Romances', ch. 4 in R. Samuel ed., *Patriotism. The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*.

revealed through a study of history, must be able to re-articulate that learning in manners (or words, or form) appropriate to the modern world.⁷³

Of course, what is being assumed here is that the reader of history is a 'good' reader, capable both of taking the correct lessons from history, and of applying them coherently to the modern world. There does not seem to be much attempt to explicitly represent what a *bad* reader might look like - in particular, there is not the condemnation of the female reader that is to be found in so much eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writing on novels - instead, perhaps, there is a sense that it is the bad writer (whether politically malevolent or pedantically credulous), liable to mislead the best-intentioned reader, who is most to be feared. If there is a bad reader implied, it is that reader who trespasses upon knowledge not designed for him (or her; this time, the ambiguity is more appropriate).

It is the need to negotiate this sense that there are some for whom the knowledge of history might be inappropriate, that leads Joseph Priestley, in his *Essay on Education*, and his *Lectures on History and General Policy*, to defend 'the sentiments of the lowest vulgar in England' as 'not wholly insignificant'.⁷⁴ Having associated the strange paradox 'that gives our common soldiers and seamen more of the genuine spirit of patriotism than is felt by any other order of men in the community, notwithstanding they have the least interest in it', with the experience of those 'obstinate patriots', the Greeks and Romans, whose 'constant wars ... kept the idea of their country perpetually in view', Priestley sought to

⁷³ Implicit in this understanding of the relationship between reader and text, of course, is an understanding that the past is different to the present - but that the reader, though he may have to adapt to fit the manners of the time, is not changed through that difference.

achieve a similar, though less bloody patriotism, in the characters of his students.⁷⁵ Like Bolingbroke, Priestley sought to produce this patriotism through:

an acquaintance with the subjects of these lectures [the study of history in general, the history of England, its constitution and laws] ... why should not the practice of thinking, reading, conversing, and writing about the interest of our country, answer the same purpose with the moderns, that fighting for it did among the ancients?⁷⁶

History, then, was to provide the more polite classes (specifically, ‘the statesman, the military commander, the lawyer, the merchant, and the accomplished country gentleman’) with an opportunity for the vicarious exercise of patriotism without the dangers of war, ‘of all luxuries ... the dearest.’⁷⁷

This argument, however, with its inversion of the usual hierarchies of political vision (for polite citizens, and gentlemen, to emulate the disinterested soldier or sailor? - a strange vision indeed!), must have unnerved Priestley somewhat, for he went on to insist that:

This is not teaching politics to low mechanics and manufacturers, or encouraging the study of it among persons with whom it could be of

⁷⁴ J. Priestley, *Lectures on History and General Policy; To Which is Prefixed, an Essay on a Course of Liberal Education For Civil and Active Life* (Dublin, 1788 - Essay first published 1764), p. xxxvii.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, pp. xxxv-xxxvi.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, pp. xxiv-xxxvi.

no service to their country, and often a real detriment to themselves; though we may see in those persons, how possible it is for the public passions to swallow up all the private ones, when the objects of them are kept frequently in view, and are much dwelt upon in the mind ...

... it ought to be considered, that how ridiculous so ever some may make themselves by pretensions to politics, a true friend of liberty will be cautious how he discourages a fondness for that kind of knowledge, which has ever been the favourite subject of writing and conversation in all free states ... in a free country, where even private persons have much at stake, every man is nearly interested in the conduct of his superiors, and cannot be an unconcerned spectator of what is transacted by them.⁷⁸

Priestley was caught in a tight place here. Wishing to defend his educational scheme, and (in an admittedly limited way) the aspirations of even 'the lowest vulgar' to political interest, he had also, in that defence, to avoid implying that the British state might be a less than free country. In the end, Priestley simply had to hope that 'a wise minister will ever pay some attention' to the history-reading, politically interested, vulgar, who were after all (consoling thought, this), the most naturally patriotic element of the nation.⁷⁹

History, then, and particularly British history, was a subject integral to the education of all members of society - even the lowest. This led to dangers, not

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. xxiv, p. 407. Here it would seem that Priestley is taking a polite gentleman's revenge upon the whole discourse that associated luxury, and a standing army, with a loss of martial spirit and public virtue in the citizenry.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, pp. xxxvi-xxxvii.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. xxxvii.

least the political education of the lower classes, and the risk that weak readings of history 'may induce us to form wrong judgements, and lead us into the most fatal errors in public and private life - it may make us bad subjects, bad citizens, and bad men'. Nonetheless, it would seem that to neglect that historical education would be an even more certain route to disaster, for 'the man who is unacquainted with the history of his country will neither prove a loyal subject or a good citizen'.⁸⁰ Indeed, so significant was history felt to be for the free nation of Great Britain, that Mr. Beaufoy, a Whig MP with a dissenting background, sought to ensure the security of the British political establishment through the institutionalised teaching of one particular portion of British history, the Glorious Revolution:

Those, he observed, who had marked the history of free states, had uniformly thought, that the danger to the liberties of the people is not so great from external violence as it is from the silent progress of internal decay ... when the spirit of the people was decayed ... the constitution itself became but a powerless form, a treacherous show of seeming good ... that brief but comprehensive abstract of the rights and privileges of the people, which is exhibited in the Bill of Rights ... should be annually read in our churches as a part of the service of the day [to commemorate the Revolution]. Thus, he observed, the people would be instructed in the nature of their rights

⁸⁰ T. Mortimer, *A New History of England, From the Earliest Accounts of Britain, to the Ratification of the Peace of Versailles, 1763. Humbly Inscribed to the Queen* (London, 1764-6), p. 2, p. 1.

... thus ... the constitution [would] be rendered as independent as possible of time and chance.⁸¹

A nation made thus aware of its history, and of its particular blessing in maintaining its freedoms, might therefore be able to escape the history of decline and fall that seemed to have overtaken all other states; thus inoculated with history, the people of Britain might live outside it.

History, then, was an education in power. Not only was it the demonstration of liberty's development (or maintenance) over the almost two thousand years since Caesar's arrival in Britain, but also the grounds for political argument over what that liberty actually meant. In fact, behind the political arguments of Defoe in the early-eighteenth century, of Bolingbroke in the twenties, thirties and forties, of Edmund Burke through the mid- to late-eighteenth century, and of Tom Paine during the French Revolution, there lay a variety of historical understandings. Moreover, many of the crucial debates of the eighteenth century - over luxury; liberty; the legitimate monarchical succession; religion; race and national identity - all can be understood as, largely, arguments about history.

Given all this, it is necessary to recognise two important elements of the eighteenth-century historical project. First, that history was *not*, was not even *imagined to be*, an independent or autonomous realm of knowledge. It was, rather, a highly contested terrain, consistently disfigured by the 'rage of party', from which lessons about contemporary politics and manners could nevertheless

⁸¹ *The Parliamentary History of England, From the Earliest Period to the Year 1803. From which Last-Mentioned Epoch it is Continued Downwards in the Work Entitled 'The*

- at least according to the rhetorical ideal - be directly learned. The purpose of performing history was always assumed to be to assert the writer's self, and view of society, and to educate and inspire the reader's self into a proper understanding of society (this, no doubt, is at least part of the reason for the already-mentioned dialogic nature of so many eighteenth-century histories).

Secondly, however, history was felt to bestow upon ideas, or institutions, a special kind of authority, one claimed to be independent of the frailties of human reason. The practice of ages, it was felt, gave clear evidence as to what worked in human societies, and was infinitely more wise in its teachings than any one individual could ever aspire to be. This understanding of history as custom - a notion with deep roots in English accounts of the past - appears to conflict with the polemical history I have just described. Certainly, contemporaries understood this customary reading to be above and beyond the cunning and deceitful arguments provided by independent human reasoning. However, as ought to be clear, this notion of custom can only truly be understood as one (admittedly powerful) rhetorical position that could be adopted in relation to history: part of the politicisation of history, not above it.

Rule, Britannia!

On the first of August, 1740, the Prince and Princess of Wales sat down to watch a strange theatrical performance that was to change the cultural life of Britain.

Though less famous than the song, 'Rule, Britannia!', which was to be its prime gift to the British nation, *Alfred: a Masque* must surely have struck their royal highnesses as, at the very least, a little odd.⁸² Acted before them was a play, almost without action, that nevertheless sought to reveal the history of England and its meaning to the royal audience before it.

Its 'Argument' was simple.⁸³ Wessex, overrun by Danes, had abandoned its monarch, who had retreated to the Isle of Athelney, in Somerset, where he was likely to escape the Danish fury. There he remained, unknown, in a shepherd's cottage; never quite burning the cakes, but waiting, inactive, until discovered by his friend, the Earl of Devon, whose nearby castle just happened to be under siege by the Danes. Alfred and the Earl fire one another's patriotism once more, and the Earl decides to attempt to lift the siege of his castle, and revitalise his monarch's fortunes. Alfred, far too valuable to be risked, will remain behind on the isle, awaiting his friend's return. As he waits, he is joined by his wife (Eltruda), and, most importantly, by a hermit, whose prophetic visions make up most of the interest of the piece.

At first, though the hermit is certain of 'the virtue/The great, the glorious passions that will fire/Distant posterity', he can tell Alfred little of his personal

⁸² D. Mallet and J. Thomson, *Alfred: a Masque. Represented before Their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Wales at Cliffden, on the First of August, 1740* (London, 1740).

⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 5.

future: 'o'er thy fortunes/Lay cloud impenetrable.'⁸⁴ However, before long, a further vision comes upon the hermit:

And now the cloud that o'er thy future fate,
 Like total night, lay heavy and obscure,
 Fades into air: and all the brightening scene
 Dawns gay before me!⁸⁵

Thus suddenly, in this scene abstracted from all action, all history, a vision of the great heroes of English history that will descend from Alfred comes upon the watching monarchs and their prophet. This vision makes up almost a fifth of the entire play, and displays to Alfred and his royal audience first the family group of Edward III, Philippa (his wife) and the Black Prince, his son; then Elizabeth; then William III.⁸⁶ The sight of the Black Prince leads Alfred and the hermit to reflect upon the importance of an adequate posterity and good education:

Alfred: A son so rich in virtues, and so grac'd
 With all that gives those virtues fair to shine,
 When I would ask of heaven some mighty boon,
 Should claim the foremost place.

Hermit: Remember then,
 What to thy infant sons from thee is due,

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 17-18.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 28.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 29-36; Edward III appears at p. 29, Elizabeth at p. 32, and William III at p. 34.

As parent and as prince.⁸⁷

But there is not much time for further reflection, for at the fading of this vision the Earl of Devon returns ‘bright with *Danish* spoils!’, having effectively won Alfred’s kingdom back for him.⁸⁸

So what, precisely, is happening here? A moment out of time - certainly this is how we should understand Alfred’s retreat to the isolated Isle of Athelney - is being represented to produce an obviously edited version of English history as futurity, as a projection of what will be. Such a use of prophecy has the effect of:

“foretelling” the past, “foretelling” the present, foretelling a future from a single unifying temporal perspective; past, present and future are all combined into a pseudo-future, foretold in a fictitious prophecy that is itself retrojected back into pre-Conquest days.⁸⁹

And if, in Irish prophecies, ‘the future foretold often seems more a return to the past’, there can be little doubt that *Alfred*, working within the ‘Country’ ideology that had developed in opposition to Robert Walpole, certainly saw the future as having to be a *return* to liberty. Or else, to *Liberty*, James Thomson’s poem of 1735-6, which, again set in a vision (this time, like Gibbon, inspired by the ruins of ancient Rome), traces Liberty’s progress from Greece, to Rome, to Britain,

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 31-2.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p. 36. All emphasis is in the original unless otherwise stated.

⁸⁹ J. T. Leerssen, *Mere Irish and Fíor-Ghael. Studies in the Idea of Irish Nationality, its Development and Literary Expression Prior to the Nineteenth Century* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, 1986), p. 237.

before the vision breaks 'and on my waking eye/Rushed the still ruins of dejected Rome.'⁹⁰ The price of failing to make that correct return to liberty would be high indeed.

So *Alfred: A Masque* should be understood, primarily, as a lesson in history and politics, one which seeks to elide the difference between past and future at the same time as it insists upon a method - the education of children in those principles inspired by Anglo-British history/futurity - that may produce a great future. Almost inevitably, however, there would seem to be an ambivalence in this representation of a past and future that is to be forged in the education of children (and monarchs-to-be!), for, of the heroes represented to Alfred, and to his watching descendants, two left no posterity of their own, while the Black Prince, one of the great if-onyms of English history, died before reaching the throne.⁹¹ One further irony, of course, would be that Frederick, Prince of Wales, was himself never to reach the throne, but (not predicted by this vision) to die in 1751, almost a decade before his father.

But perhaps the most interesting feature of this performance of history is the strange relationship it establishes between audience and players. Both a story of the past and a prediction of the future, how this history is to be read depends largely upon the trajectory adopted in reading it, upon whether the audience remains fixed within an historical perspective that looks back upon the past, or is capable of identifying with Alfred's perspective looking forward to history.

As has already been suggested, Alfred's separation from the historical action going on about him, his retreat to this isolated island, implies his own

⁹⁰ *Mere Irish*, p. 238; J. Thomson, *The Complete Poetical Works of James Thomson*, ed. J. L. Robertson (London etc., 1908), p. 413.

separation from history. This is evidently, in part at least, a device to enable his vision of the future, absolute retreat being seemingly necessary for spectatorship and enlightenment. It also, however, would seem to mimic the audience's distance from the action, and perhaps to imply a continuity of audience: Alfred's descendants might see themselves invited to join him in this vision of history as the future, a future which their actions (like his) both must and will produce.

The Limits of History.

It is necessary to recognise, in approaching eighteenth-century histories, the boundaries set to learning, and the (to modern eyes) slightly peculiar ways in which those boundaries could be (and frequently were) exceeded in practice. There are, in fact, three different, and competing, ways of formulating these boundaries during the period, none of which, however, were able to maintain their integrity in the face of the needs of historians. These boundaries, as well as being of obvious importance both in defining the useful limits of their genre and in providing a space for speculation, even fabrication, in which historians could work, are of particular significance for this study, for it is in part as an attempt to redefine them that the modern discourse of race can be seen to develop. I do not, of course, mean to suggest that the entire discourse of race arose out of an academic (or even a popular) discussion about the limits of history; such a discussion (and such a discourse) could only come about in a changing political,

⁹¹ The throne instead fell to his son, Richard II, who was eventually removed from it by Henry IV.

social, and economic situation in which those limits needed to be changed in order to continue making sense. However, it is only with regard to the (very limited) field that I am exploring, the field of historical production, and the circumstances of *its* change, that I mean to treat this (otherwise unwieldy) subject.

The three boundaries I have mentioned can be summarised as, first, that of sacred or biblical history; secondly, that of reliable sources; and thirdly, that of philosophical utility (and/or good taste, which can be seen to share some territory with the second boundary). With regard to national histories, the evidence of the bible was crucial, and somewhat difficult to gainsay.⁹² In particular, it provided a myth of origins that saw all the world peopled by the issue of Noah. Perhaps the most important usage of this myth came with the Abbé Pezron's *The Antiquities of Nations*, which, as well as inventing a history for the 'Titans' making use of heathen deities such as Saturn, Chronus [*sic*] and Jupiter (apparently, only major rulers of this invented people), sought to derive the origin of the Europeans from Gomer, eldest son of Japhet, eldest son of Noah.⁹³ These 'Comarians, or rather Gomarians', or 'Cimbrians [or Cimmerians - the title changes as necessary to include as many peoples as possible] ... were without Dispute the true *Celtæ*', from whom Pezron drew all virtue, and which he found in every people in Europe, from the Spartans to the Danes.⁹⁴

Nor was Pezron alone in this association of the Celts with virtually every European nation; there seems to be very little sense of a distinction to be made

⁹² Kidd's recent work on *British Identities Before Nationalism* begins with the biblical myth of origins, and puts it to good use in disentangling the developing histories of Goths and Celts. Much of what follows is indebted to that work.

⁹³ P. Pezron, *The Antiquities of Nations; More Particularly of the Celtæ or Gauls*, trans. D. Jones (London, 1706).

between Celts and Goths (and Scythians, Phrygians, Celtiberians, Sarmatians and so on) until late in the century, when a more general redefinition of the peoples of Europe upon racial lines begins to produce such a distinction. This confusion makes it somewhat difficult to ascertain what was meant by the notion of ‘Gothic liberty’, for there would appear to be an interchangeability of attributes between the (usually described as ‘Gothic’) Germans described by Tacitus, and the (usually described as ‘Celtic’) Britons faced by Caesar and Agricola. Moreover, this confusion was only exacerbated by English historians of the eighteenth century, who sought to appropriate the history of the Caledonians (who, uniquely, maintained their liberty against Roman arms) in order to prove the longevity of the English/British love for liberty.

Pezron’s formulation of the Celtic past, which was to prove highly popular through much of the eighteenth century, was designed to serve the needs of a Christian historiography, as he makes clear in his claim that:

*I have intirely overthrown the Notions entertained of the false
Heathenish Divinities by discovering their true Origin; and thereby I
hope I have done no small Service to True Religion, which is firmly
built up by a Detection of Fables, and Overthrowing of Error⁹⁵*

As should be obvious, however, a history that insists upon the actual historical existence of individuals such as Saturn and Jupiter is perhaps not so inimical to myth-making as the Abbé suggests. After all, if the only way to explain Greek

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 10, p. 43.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. xiii.

and Roman (and later, Scandinavian) deities was to assume that they once were great kings, what was to prevent the various British peoples from asserting their nation's descent from Brutus, grandson of Aeneas (if English or Welsh), or from Scota of Egypt (if Scottish), or from the Fir-Bolg and the Tuatha-Dé-Danaan (if Old Irish)?⁹⁶ The existence of these folk memories, it could reasonably be argued, must prove the original historical existence of these individuals felt to personify the national origins.

There were, however, at least two major arguments that could be brought against these mythic pasts. The first involved an insistence that, however true the biblical story might be, the actual histories of nations must be based upon contemporary documents, which, for Britain, meant the Roman accounts of ancient Britain, beginning with Julius Caesar. This is an attitude to be discovered in almost all the canonical historians of the eighteenth century; but it is perhaps easy to overstate its significance. As long as the sacred history remained unchallenged, a gap in the historical record remained that was all too tempting to fill with arguments based upon what was believed of Celtic peoples on the continent prior to Caesar's invasion of Britain (it being natural enough to assume that all the Celts were more or less alike), and upon the names of places and geographical features believed to derive from pre-Roman language. Moreover, however much historians may have denounced the old myths of origin, they kept on writing about them and reproducing them in their new, document based, histories. Thus it is that the author of *Royal Genealogies* both dismissed Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* (the source for the Brutus myth) as 'Fabulous', and published the genealogy of those kings, claiming

⁹⁶ For the Fir-Bolg and Tuatha-Dé-Danaan, see *British Identities Before Nationalism*, p. 147.

the last thirty-four were 'not fabulous, [but] they could not succeed one another in such a short Time as a 100 Years ... and therefore must only be a Parcel of petty *Kings*, or *Chiefs of Clans*.'⁹⁷

A perhaps more significant challenge to the mythic histories came with the more generally destabilising effects of the discovery of other nations' histories, and a growing dissatisfaction with the biblical account of racial difference. The extreme antiquity of Egyptian and Chinese history threatened biblical chronology with civilisations that appeared to stretch back almost to (if not beyond) the flood; then, the discovery of the New World made the biblical genealogy seem somewhat suspect. However much eighteenth-century historians might want to discover, in Native Americans, the lost tribes of Israel, the question remained: how did they get there? This may not have been a wholly insuperable problem; but it provided an opportunity for new ideas about racial difference, and the grounds of national character, to be aired.

Prior to the eighteenth century, there would not seem to be any very coherent notion of race as we now understand the term. In most circumstances of its usage, the word 'race' would seem more likely to refer to individual families' lineages - the race of the Stuarts, the race of the Saxe-Coburgs. Given the biblical myth of creation, with all mankind descended from but one couple (monogenesis), the concept of mankind as composed of fundamentally different and separate types of people (polygenesis) was, at most, a marginal idea:

⁹⁷ J. Anderson, *Royal Genealogies: or, the Genealogical Tables of Emperors, Kings and Princes, From Adam to these Times* (London, 1732), p. 728; Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain* (London, 1966 - written c. 1136). W. Camden, also, in *Camden's Britannia 1695. A Facsimile Edition of the 1695 Edition Published by Edmund Gibson*, revised and enlarged by E. Gibson, introduced by S. Piggott (London, 1971; Gibson's rpt 1695; Camden's original, 1586), shows himself more interested in assimilating the old myths to new methods than in tearing them up altogether - see p. ix.

It appeared on the heterodox frontier of the Scottish Enlightenment in a footnote to one of Hume's essays, half-heartedly in the work of Kames ... and, more prominently, in the work of the late Enlightenment racist John Pinkerton⁹⁸

It was, however, an increasingly important one, and though writers such as Hume did a rather better job at demolishing the older understanding of national characters and physical types as, fundamentally, the result of climatic influences, than they did at erecting the new ideas of race, nonetheless by the end of the century, such ideas were beginning to cohere.⁹⁹ In doing so, they helped destabilise sacred history as a source of knowledge about the nature of human beings; but until they did so, it remained possible for readers and writers of history to understand all human beings as existing upon fundamentally the same developmental path, and so to view other, 'savage' peoples not as different (or Other), but as examples of how we once lived.

Finally, then (and with a clear association to the last point) there was a boundary set to historical learning by the demands of the philosophical and sociological historians such as Hume and Ferguson. Rejecting as irrelevant to the modern world, and (in particular) to modern liberty, the 'traditions, or rather

⁹⁸ *British Identities Before Nationalism*, p. 56. D. Hume, *The Philosophical Works*, T. H. Green and T. H. Grose eds (London, 1882 - 1964 rpt.), 'Of National Characters'; - first published in the third edition of *Essays Moral and Political* (London, 1748); H. Home, Lord Kames, *Sketches of the History of Man*; J. Pinkerton, *An Enquiry into the History of Scotland ... In Two Volumes* (London, 1789), appends *A Dissertation on the Origin and Progress of the Scythians or Goths*, first published 1787.

⁹⁹ For a much fuller discussion of the history of racial classification, see *British Identities Before Nationalism*; I. Hannaford, *Race. The History of an Idea in the West* (Baltimore and London, 1996); R. H. Popkin, *The High Road to Pyrrhonism* (San Diego, 1980); and N. Hudson, 'From

tales, concerning the more early history of Britain', these historians sought instead to study 'the character of man, as he now exists ... the laws of this animal and intellectual system, on which his happiness now depends'.¹⁰⁰ If scholars were to explore the origins of human civilisation (Hume does not appear to have any particular interest in this), they should do so through the study of contemporary savages (the Native Americans, the noble savages of Tahiti, the Old Irish) rather than through the study of discredited ancient histories which, 'even if they were recorded, could afford little or no entertainment to men born in a more cultivated age'.¹⁰¹

This, of course, suggests that there is operating in eighteenth-century history an evidential qualification quite other to that of utility: one of taste. Much history was of no use to the eighteenth-century reader or writer not only because of its dryness, its lack of connection with the modern world, but also because of its barbarous subject matter, which could only disgust. This attitude to the usage of evidence could also affect the gathering of evidence, for, as was claimed long before:

since the Original of Words depends not on the Judgment of the wiser Sort, but on the Pleasure of the Vulgar; who for the most part, are rude and unpolish'd ... anxiously to inquire after their Judgments, is a piece of needless Curiosity ... not worth your Labour.¹⁰²

'Nation' to 'Race': The Origin of Racial Classification in Eighteenth-Century Thought', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 29, no. 3 (1996), pp. 247-64.

¹⁰⁰ Hume, *History of England*, p. 1; *Essay on the History of Civil Society*, p. 3.

¹⁰¹ Hume, *History of England*, p. 1. *and trans.*

¹⁰² G. Buchanan, *Buchanan's History*, ed. W. Bond (London, 1722; first published 1582), p. 7.

Though this clearly was not an universal attitude, as the researches of antiquarians and folklorists (the study of and interest in folklore being one significant development of eighteenth-century antiquarianism) show, nonetheless it remained a significant one within the philosophical and humanistic traditions of history-writing.¹⁰³

But it not being necessary to take account of the historical knowledge or the evidences provided by vulgar or plebeian culture was not the limit of this taste-and-philosophy-driven approach to evidence. In fact, at times it led to a quite perverse approach to the nature of historical truth. Perhaps the clearest example of this comes from the *Ossian* controversy of the 1760s and 1770s.¹⁰⁴

Although *Ossian* itself was a fabrication (though it can, perhaps, in some ways be viewed as deriving from the same back-projecting tendency that produced Ferguson's *Essay*), it is the approach of the historians scandalised by *Ossian*'s evident fraud that appears most interesting, as they seem to operate with a concept of truth more closely allied to 'that which is fit' than to 'that which is'.

Hume, for example, wrote in a letter to Gibbon: 'Where a supposition is so contrary to common sense, any positive evidence for it ought never to be regarded.'¹⁰⁵ *Ossian*, a work that could only be credible if scholars were to accept the oral transmission of poetry over a period of more than a thousand years, by Highlanders still viewed with great suspicion by Lowland Scots such as Hume (not to mention the English Gibbon), could under no circumstances be accepted by the very enlightenment project that produced it.

¹⁰³ See P. Morgan, 'From a Death to a View: The Hunt for the Welsh Past in the Romantic Period' in E. Hobsbawm & T. Ranger, (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), ch. 3.

¹⁰⁴ J. Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian and Related Works*, ed. H. Gaskill (Edinburgh, 1996 - first published 1760-65).

Thus eighteenth-century historians faced several competing boundaries to their possible enquiries into the past, none of which was capable of asserting itself as definitive, or as able to provide a reasonably coherent definition of true and correct historical practice. Within each - within sacred, documented, and philosophical history - there remained the possibility of (at times, it almost seems like a requirement for) fabrication, myth-making. In this competition, one area of human classification came under particular scrutiny: that of racial difference (though more often sameness), which yet remained only very incoherently defined, its function being rather more a means to assault sacred history, and to defend the interests of slave-owning planters, than to describe, pseudo-scientifically, the human race.¹⁰⁶

The Savage Self, the Sentimental Self.

Benjamin West's *The Death of General Wolfe* (fig. 1), celebrating the British victory over the French at Quebec on 13 September 1759, was one of the most successful and widely viewed images produced in eighteenth-century Britain. As well as the audiences who crowded into the Royal Academy to see the painting itself, Emily Neff suggests enough prints of the painting were sold to make West 'the extraordinary sum of approximately £23,000'.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Letter from D. Hume to E. Gibbon, in E. Gibbon, *Memoirs*, p. 168.

¹⁰⁶ For such racist apologias, see E. Long, *The History of Jamaica* (London, 1774).

¹⁰⁷ E. B. Neff, *John Singleton Copley in England* (Houston, Texas, 1995), p. 67, fn. 23.

The delicate young hero reclines in the arms of his friends and comrades (of all ranks), his eyes cast upwards towards the breaking light to the left of the painting, as a messenger approaches with the news of the day's great victory. Embroidering upon the actually-known events of the day to produce a far grander painting than Edward Penny's effort seven years earlier (fig. 2), West added ten figures to the group surrounding Wolfe, both heightening, through repetition, the emotional drama of the general's death, and inviting the viewer to consider themselves as closing the circle about Wolfe. Essentially a sentimental image, then, *The Death of General Wolfe* sought to produce in the viewer an emotional identification with the dying hero, and thus strengthen the emotional bonds that theories of sensibility promoted as the moral cement of society.¹⁰⁸

In doing so, West broke with the dominant theory of history painting of the time on three fronts. First, he made use of modern dress, breaking with the convention that insisted that history painting, in its attempt to represent the timeless virtues of public life, should avoid the distracting, particular detail to be found in lower genres of painting such as portraiture. It has frequently been suggested that this abandonment of temporal distance between the viewer and the action represented was partly responsible for West's decision to include a Native American in the throng about Wolfe, to make clear that there remained a *spatial* distance between viewer and action. Secondly, in depicting Wolfe's death as a scene of lamentation, of the private virtues of sympathy and friendship between fighting men, West overturned the basic claim made by history painting for its superiority to other genres of painting, its ability to inculcate *public* virtues in its

¹⁰⁸ This reading is broadly derived from D. H. Solkin, *Painting For Money. The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven and London, 1992), pp. 209-13.

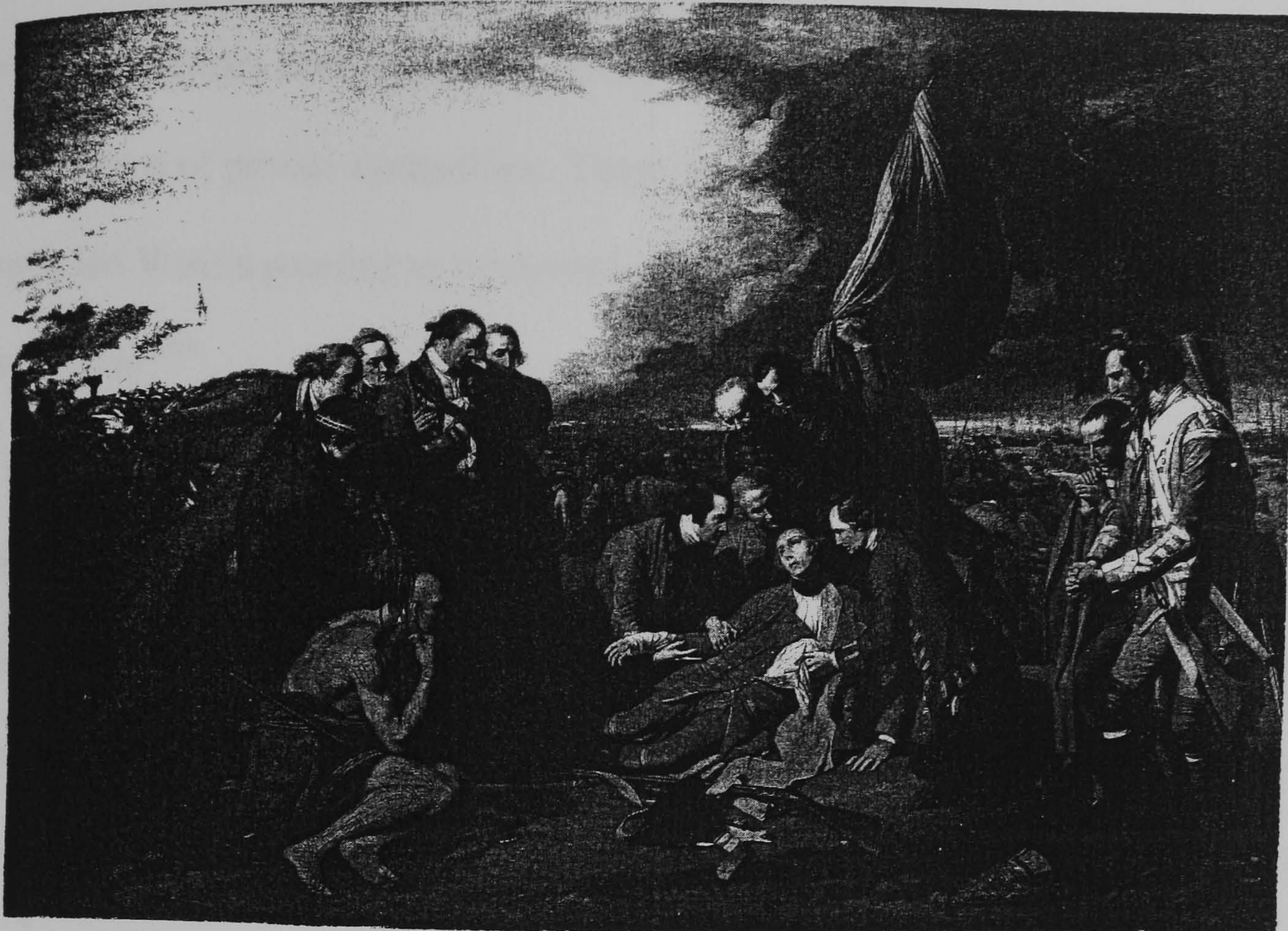


Figure 1. B. West, *The Death of General Wolfe*, dated 1770, exhibited Royal Academy 1771.



Figure 2. E. Penny, *The Death of General Wolfe*, exhibited Society of Artists 1764.

See also G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility. Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago and London, 1992).

audience, virtues not compatible (during time of war, at least) with the indulgence of private sympathies. These contraventions of established practice have led West's painting to be viewed as causing a revolution in history painting in Britain.¹⁰⁹

Finally, however, and perhaps most interestingly, West's painting broke with the demand for unity of action in the representation of events. The painting is essentially divided in two: in the foreground lies Wolfe, with his sympathetic crowd about him; in the background, however, there is represented the narrative of the day's battle, from the British troops landing at the far right of the painting, to the messenger bringing the news of the victory at the far left. Thus a particular moment of the narrative that is represented in the background has been plucked out of time, in a manner similar to *Alfred: A Masque*. As with that other example of a hero's escape or abstraction from history, this moment is used to allow the audience to comprehend the meaning of that history, and to enter into it almost as if a participant. In this performance of history, however, there is a risk that this particular moment will overwhelm the history from which it is taken: it is actually quite difficult to see beyond the group in the foreground, after all. It would seem that it is the attempt to make meaningful this division of time within the painting, without disrupting the unity of the whole, that leads to a series of divisions and ambiguities both within the painting, and in its audience's various responses.

The first division to note, then, is that between the two most important figures within the painting: Wolfe himself, and the Native American. Wolfe, soft

¹⁰⁹ E. Wind, *Hume and the Heroic Portrait*, ed. J. Anderson (Oxford, 1986), ch. 9, 'The Revolution of History Painting'.

and civilised, feminine, deathly pale yet immaculately presented, his two wounds showing no more than the faintest drizzles of blood (the third wound, to the groin, is, of course, not represented here), seemingly oblivious to the world about him as he achieves his apotheosis, is in stark contrast to the hard, exotically savage, masculine, semi-naked Native American who watches the hero's death with a keen gaze. The two clearly operate as a binary, the identity of the one informing upon the identity of the other; however, the actual nature of this binary relationship has been the subject of some controversy. David Solkin, in *Painting for Money*, has claimed that the Native American's 'expressionless gaze serves to define an otherness which is both un-British and uncivilised', an otherness that thus defines Britishness and civilisation through absolute opposition; Neff, however, insists that 'West's meticulous rendering of the wrinkled brow of the American Indian's forehead, a gesture of concern, refutes this'.¹¹⁰ She considers the Native American instead to function as a 'touchstone for characters throughout who act properly', to be a

Rousseau-like noble savage whose foreign status provides a cultural innocence that allows him to receive the painting's messages of courage, loyalty, and patriotism. His wrinkled brow suggests his compassion, but his expression is more complex than those of the other mourners who merely express sympathy. An outsider looking in, he becomes the equivalent of the spectator: much like the mid-

¹¹⁰ *Painting for Money*, p. 212; *John Singleton Copley in England*, p. 79, fn. 81.

ground figure, who links past to present, he joins painting to audience¹¹¹

Although Neff has, I think, seen somewhat further than Solkin, I want to suggest that in fact both critics can be understood to be right.

The reason for this is to be found in the implication of West's image in the eighteenth-century discourse upon sensibility and sentiment, which valorised the spontaneous expression of emotional identification with suffering others. A large body of cultural works - novels, drama, paintings - rapidly developed to both display the correct ways to feel, and to produce those delicate sentiments of identification in their consumers: this was, then, a discourse explicitly interested in educating its users in its correct usage. In order to produce works of art that exploited this discourse, however, it was necessary to codify the correct physical representations of emotion (thus Neff makes reference to both painting and dramatic manuals showing artists and actors the correct postures and facial expressions to assume) which then leads to the possibility, indeed, the suspicion, that the 'spontaneously generated' emotion described the discourse of sensibility is, in fact, a wholly learned set of public attitudes that describe not the internal emotional state of the individual, but that individual's sense, at any given moment, of the socially expected sentiment.¹¹² There was, then, a contradiction internal to the discourse of sensibility - and it is my contention that this contradiction can be found in *The Death of General Wolfe*, in the split between the savage American and the civilised hero.

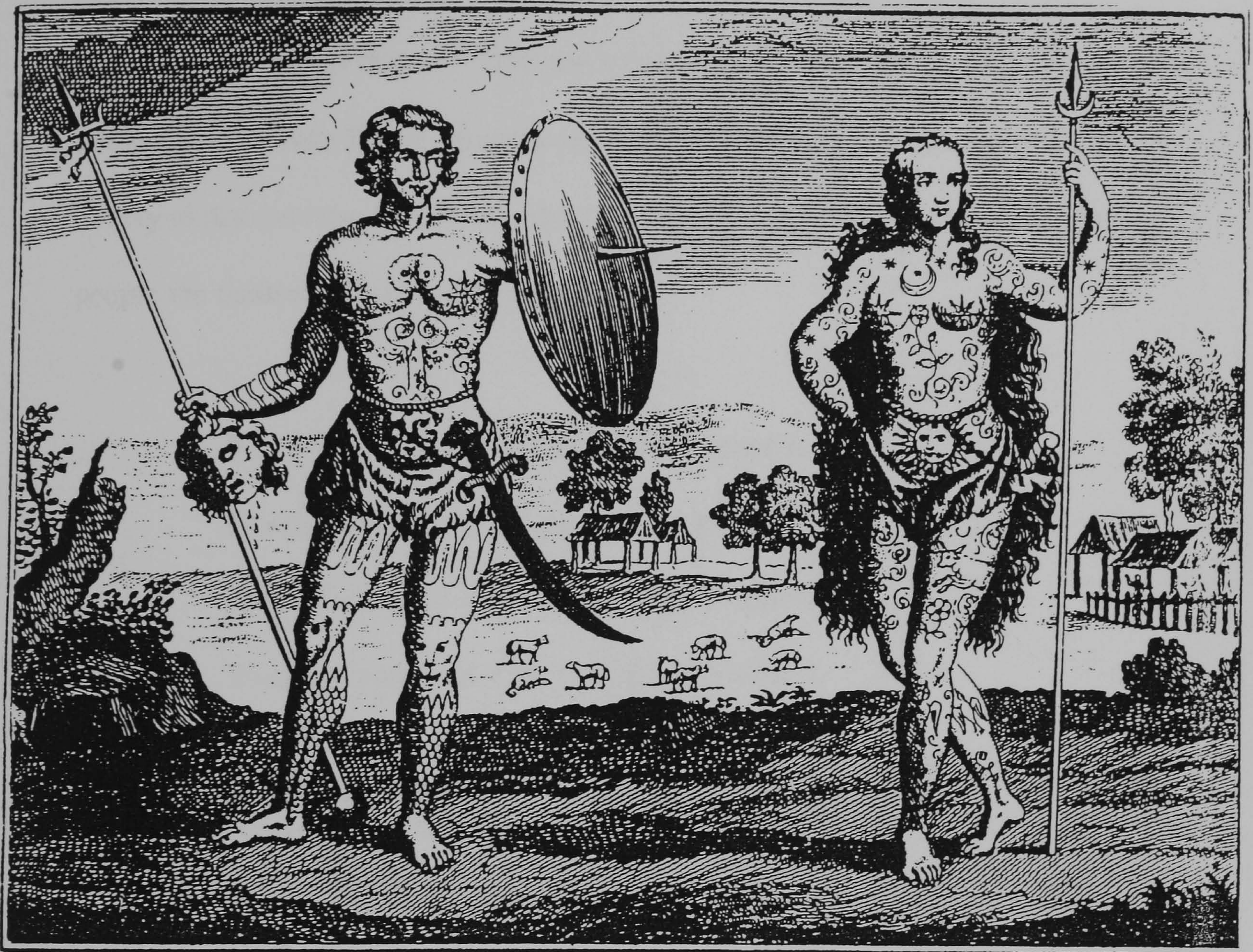
¹¹¹ John Singleton Copley in England, p. 89, p. 79.

¹¹² John Singleton Copley in England, pp. 81-4.

This suspicion may well be generated through the tattooing upon the body of the Native American. This tattooing, this turning of the human body into a canvas, would seem to refer to the act of painting itself, drawing attention to the constructed nature of all expressions upon the canvas, thus rendering them, and the responses to them, all suspicious, though perhaps none so much as that of the Native American. When the difference between a wrinkled brow and a piece of body art is so slight, there can hardly be any surprise that modern critics have difficulty in understanding the Native American's gaze.

Oddly, however, it is Wolfe, not the Native American, who seems to pose the major problems for the eighteenth-century viewer. We can understand the reason for this more clearly, perhaps, if we consider the sources that allowed such an audience to understand the Native American. One such source may well have been the engravings produced in John Robinson's *Compleat and Impartial History of England* of 'The Antient Britons' (fig. 3), engravings that would seem to be derived from illustrations appearing in John Speed's *History of Great Britaine* (first published in 1611, with at least three editions and a total of seven reissues by 1650), and which were themselves later to appear in a *Compleat and Impartial History of the Ancient Britons*.¹¹³ These illustrations show the ancient Britons to be as savage and as lavishly tattooed as any Native American, and should remind us of the eighteenth century's insistence upon the existence of an universal, trans-historical human subject. The Native American, far from existing as an absolute Other to the civilised self of General Wolfe and his

¹¹³ J. Robinson, *A Compleat and Impartial History of England* (London, 1739), facing p. 4; J. Speed, *The History of Great Britaine Under the Conquests of ye Romans, Saxons, Danes and Normans* (London, 1611); J. Owen, *A Compleat and Impartial History of the Ancient Britons* (London, 1743).



The Antient BRITONS.

Figure 3. *The Ancient Britons*, in J. Robinson, *A Compleat and Impartial History of England* (London, 1739), facing p. 4.

sympathetic witnesses, could be viewed quite simply as the savage stage of that modern self.

If there are any doubts about this, it may be useful to glance at *The Aboriginal Britons, a Poem*.¹¹⁴ The poem begins with an address to the adventurous modern British, regressing them through seventeen hundred years of history to discover the eponymous aboriginal Britons, who were as savage as any people the modern sailor might discover:

Ye sons of Albion, who with venturous sails
 In unknown oceans caught Atlantic gales ...
 View'd on the coast the wondering Savage stand,
 Uncouth, and fresh from his Creator's hand ...
 A form like this, illustrious souls, of yore
 Your own Britannia's sea-girt island wore:
 Ere Danish lances blushed with Ælla's blood;
 Or blue-ey'd Saxons sail'd on Medway's flood;
 Or Dover's towering cliff from high descried
 Cæsar's bold barks, which stemm'd a deep untried.¹¹⁵

The poem moves on to describe an ancient Briton more fully:

His scarr'd and rudely-painted limbs around
 Fantastic horror-striking figures frown'd

¹¹⁴ G. Richards, *The Aboriginal Britons, a Poem* (Oxford, 1791).

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 9-10.

Which, monster-like, ev'n to the confines ran
 Of nature's work, and left him hardly man.¹¹⁶

Here it seems clear that the poet is thinking of, describing even, the illustrations provided by the earlier histories. These illustrations, then, provided a means for this writer (and, surely, for other viewers of the illustrations) to comprehend the encounter with the savage other as, in fact, an encounter with the savage self; a self as yet untamed by history, as yet untrammelled by defeat at the hands of invading peoples.

Wolfe and the Native American, then, can be understood to exist both as binary opposites, as the Self and Other of the classic post-colonialist paradigm, and as the beginning and end of a single process of historical development.¹¹⁷

This is a divide that recalls the prime divide of the painting itself, that between the exemplary moment and the explanatory narrative, and which also relates to the Native American's function as a distancing mechanism, as the reminder to the audience that it is a *history* painting that is before them.

And it is this knowledge of the generic conventions that the painting breaks (the audience only being able to recognise that these conventions have been broken through the Native American's distancing function) that lead several viewers (including, most eminently, Pitt the Elder, the Earl of Chatham) to

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 11.

¹¹⁷ This latter reading is half-suggested by V. G. Fryd in 'Rereading the Indian in Benjamin West's *Death of General Wolfe*', *American Art*, vol. 9 (1995), pp. 73-85, where she suggests that West's use of the Native American 'contributed to the development of a topos in American art in which a seated Indian chief, with chin resting on the fist of his bent arm, became codified as the Vanishing American lamenting the demise of his race.', p. 81. However, Fryd takes this understanding rather too far, and fails to recognise both the complementary nature of the relationship between Wolfe and the Native American, and the extent to which Wolfe's identity is undermined by the Native American's presence.

criticise the representation of Wolfe and his mourners as wholly unsuitable.

Indeed, one group of viewers went so far as to perform the history anew:

One young woman felt the hero should be depicted responding rapturously to the news that the enemy fled, rather than enduring his private pain, and the famous actor David Garrick, in front of the painting and a small audience, reenacted [*sic*] the role of Wolfe according to the “correction” she offered.¹¹⁸

Evidently, West’s sentimental representation of Wolfe appeared to some viewers to be inappropriate to the genre in which it appeared, and to fail to provide an adequate entry to the ‘correct’ meaning of the image, which had to be re-enacted in order to be rendered fully meaningful and usable.

If all the figures around Wolfe were incapable of realising the true patriotic meaning of Wolfe’s death because of their private, spontaneous sympathies for him, then the only entry to be made is through the gaze of the Native American. It is he, as Robert Bromley suggested, who

gives a new tone to the feelings, a tone to which the human race is every where a stranger, except among his tribes. It is not consternation on the view of death, it is not distress for the loss of a great leader; these he knows nothing of, for he is a savage, and a savage-warrior. Those who sustain that character in his country are

¹¹⁸ John Singleton Copley in England, p. 82; referencing W. T. Whitley, *Artists and their Friends in England* (London and Boston, 1928), I, p. 282.

*known to feel an unique of composure [sic] He therefore sits
contemplative over the event; he sits, as if he watched the awful
close, that it be great*¹¹⁹

This recognition that the Native American is the only figure in the painting capable of understanding the full public significance of Wolfe's victorious death would seem to further undermine West's representation of Wolfe and his mourners, as it implies a loss of public virtue as a result of the process of civilisation, here associated with the discourse of sensibility that the Native American's body has already rendered uncertain. It also, however, divides the point of entry provided by the Native American yet further, for it is not only as a savage, however noble, representing the history of all civilised peoples, that he views this scene (the suggestion in the quote from Bromley that Wolfe's death should be perceived as a Christian drama, as '*the awful close*', a reading supported by Wolfe's posture, evidently derived from scenes of Christ taken down from the cross, is not easily reconcilable to the view of the savage-as-heathen). Instead, he can be seen to operate in an entirely different tradition, that which would align him with Albrecht Dürer's *Melencolia I* (fig. 4), or with the figure of the thinker more generally (fig. 5). As such, he possesses an intelligence, a privileged point of view, that can not easily be appropriated to the viewer's own personal history.¹²⁰ Thus the figure of the Native American can be

¹¹⁹ Fryd, p. 83, quoting R. A. Bromley, *A Philosophical and Critical History of the Fine Arts* (New York, 1971 rpt. - first published 1793), I, p. 59. Emphasis in Fryd's article.

¹²⁰ J. Barrell, *English Literature in History, 1730-80. An Equal, Wide Survey* (London etc., 1983) argues that the progressive division of labour during the eighteenth century produced a crisis of confidence over who, precisely, could possess an adequate, disinterested view of an entire society. He also points to the development of the discourse of sensibility as an attempt (however

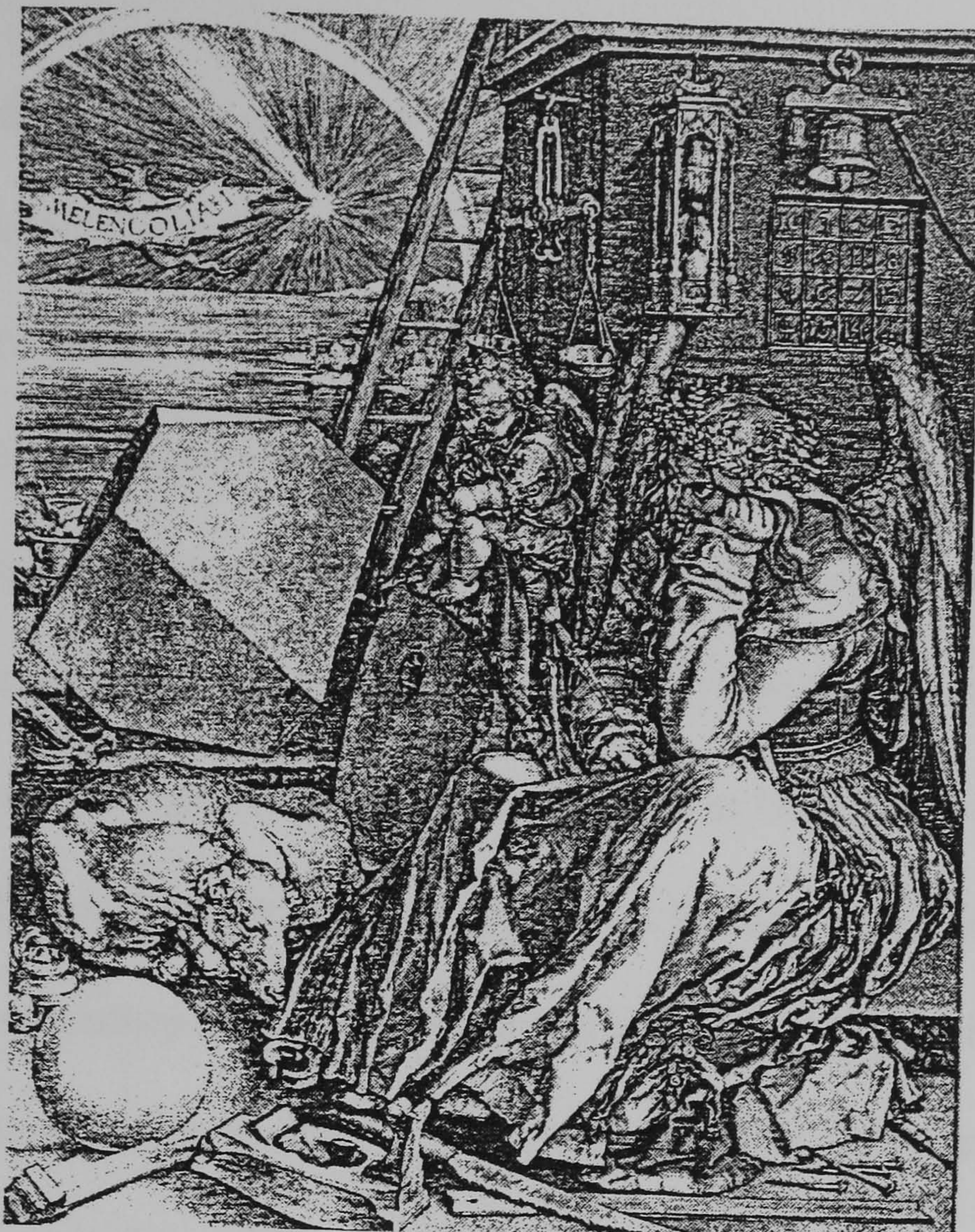


Figure 4. A. Dürer, *Melencolia I*, 1514.



Figure 5. A. Rodin, *The Thinker*, bronze 1880. Photo Lynn Diane de Marco.

successful) to overcome the divisions of society, thus rendering such a privileged view unnecessary.

seen to embody the many divisions and contradictions of West's painting, disrupting attempts to make use of the lessons in sympathy and its unifying capacity for the nation that the painting sought to provide its audience. The Native American was to be understood as a sign of the painting's distance, both spatial and temporal, from its viewers, even as it formed part of the circle that invited the audience to participate in a lamentation scene; as both the stuff of history and the privileged observer of that history; as both the savage Other, and the savage self out of which we have developed, bearing on his body the signs of the artificial sensibility developed by the civilised in order to replace the true public spirit, and the comprehensive view of history that it enabled, and that commercial society has rendered impossible. He is, then, a profoundly overdetermined figure, whose presence can only be accommodated by either ignoring the historical background of the painting, concentrating instead upon the moment out of time that forms the foreground, or by wholly re-writing the history that is being viewed.

*'odd that it should be so dull, for a great deal of it must be invention.'*¹²¹

It is not difficult, after having read numerous eighteenth-century histories, to sympathise with Catherine Morland's complaint. Eighteenth-century history, though willing to invent (and, seemingly, to believe) quite incredible stories, and though a field in which an almost constant discussion upon the correct style and form to adopt in so important a genre was maintained, remained nonetheless a fairly dismal series of repetitions, plagiarisms, and controversies based upon the slightest variation from the standard story, or character analysis. There are, perhaps, several reasons for this strange mixture of fabrication and predictability: first, historians were often motivated by a desire similar to that expressed by Swift and other 'ancients' to pay proper homage to previous authors and, believing that there could be no improvements made upon the writings of the past, made no attempt to do so, but merely repeated its tales in all their purity. Secondly, it must have been quicker, easier, and cheaper, for a printer (or author) to put together blocks of other people's text, than have to compose his own. Thirdly, I would suggest that these histories can in many ways be seen as affirmations of the society which produces them; as such, it is not their actual truth value, nor their originality, which is of prime importance to their writers and readers. Rather, it is that they are read, and believed (or at least made use of), and reproduced, along with the society which produced them, that makes them useful texts.

A feature of eighteenth-century history associated with this constant repetition of already-known 'truths' is (paradoxically) a tendency to make claims

¹²¹ J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (London, 1993 - first published 1818, written 1798/9), p. 69.

about the originality of the historian's method. As with Rousseau's *Confessions*, and many other forms of prose writing of the eighteenth century, many historians sought to claim that their history was performed according to a method wholly new; others, meanwhile, claimed to have absolutely no input into their history, but to be merely exhibiting the bare truth for the reader to judge.¹²² Both these approaches would seem to relate to that feature described by Lennard Davis, in *Factual Fictions*, of all prose narratives at that time: their need to deal with the question of their 'newness and treweness'.¹²³ It is Davis's claim that the insistence that a work is 'newe' (he uses this spelling to differentiate it from the modern understanding) should be understood as wholly conventional, and a sign to the reader that the tale to be related to them - however hackneyed it may be - possesses a special status or value as a piece of good 'newes', 'newes' too good to be true. Thus, when historians made claims as to the originality, or otherwise, of their histories, they were in fact engaging in a discussion over the ability of prose narratives to deliver both truth and entertainment to their audience.

This discussion over the relationship between prose narrative as a form, and truth, was one which occurred over a very wide range of genres, and will be more closely discussed in my third chapter. Here, however, it should be sufficient to state only that there does not seem to be any very firmly grounded sense of 'the truth' and how to obtain it in eighteenth-century historiography. As I have already suggested in my discussion of the limits of history, several

¹²² J.-J. Rousseau, *The Confessions*, trans. J. M. Cohen (London, 1953 - first English publication 1783). Compare, for example, J. Pointer, *A Chronological History of England ... Being a History of Bare Matters of Fact ... Carefully and Faithfully Collected from the Best and Most Authentick Authors, Without the least Reflections or Remarks Throughout the Whole Work*, Vol. 1 (Oxford, 1714), and the claim made by T. Whitaker, in *The History of Manchester*, Vol. 1 (London, 1773), that the author 'By a new test that seems to be decisive ... will attempt to investigate the first faint beginning of our present towns' (p. vi).

competing claims as to the proper boundaries of historical study existed in the eighteenth century, none of which seemed capable to prevent (in fact, all seemed to *encourage*) the invention of new mythic histories by historians. Meanwhile, I hope I have shown in my three brief case-studies that history itself was perceived more as a space for the education, assertion and re-formation of personal and social identities, belonging to both readers and writers of history, designed for action in the modern world, than as a field of independent intellectual enquiry.

Perhaps the last word on eighteenth-century historiography, however, should go to a sixteen-year-old girl, writing in 1791. In her one attempt at history, Jane Austen wrote a brief *History of England* that burlesqued most, if not all, the traditions of the histories of the previous century.¹²⁴ Christopher Kent has already asserted that Austen's history 'brashly inverts the Whig view of history ... [in which] the present determines what past developments deserve emphasis'; whilst there can be no doubt of this, however (see Austen's suggestion that the Duke of Somerset, briefly the Protector of Edward VI, 'might with reason have been proud' to be beheaded 'had he known that such was the death of Mary Queen of Scotland'), it seems that Austen goes rather further than this.¹²⁵ Rather than being a mere reversal of that history, and an opportunity for Austen to display a 'full-blooded Stuart partisanship', the *History of England* is surely a satire of the *entire* historical project of the eighteenth century - it is difficult to see how a historian who suggests that 'it may ... be affirmed that he [Richard III]

¹²³ *Factual Fictions*, ch. 3 esp.

¹²⁴ J. Austen, 'The History of England from the Reign of Henry the 4th to the Death of Charles the 1st', pp. 134-44 in *Catharine and Other Writings*, M. A. Doody and D. Murray eds (Oxford and New York, 1993). See S. M. Gilbert and S. Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic. The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London, 1984), ch. 4, and, particularly, C. Kent, 'Learning History with, and from, Jane Austen' in J. D. Grey (ed.), *Jane Austen's Beginnings. The Juvenilia and Lady Susan* (London, 1989), pp. 59-72.

did not kill his Wife, for if Perkin Warbeck was really the Duke of York, why might not Lambert Simnel be the Widow of Richard', among many similar infelicities, can be taken seriously.¹²⁶ More generally, it would seem that Austen's entire view of English history, and the ways in which it had previously been written, leaves no space for useful lessons to be learnt. Beginning and ending with usurpation, moving from Henry IV taking the crown 'much to his own satisfaction in the year 1399, after having prevailed on his cousin and predecessor Richard the 2d, to resign it to him, and to retire for the rest of his Life to Pomfret Castle, where he happened to be murdered', to the death of Charles I, passing along the way 'the Duke of Northumberland [who, after the unfortunate Duke of Somerset] had the care of the King and Kingdom, and performed his trust of both so well that the King died and the Kingdom was left to his daughter in law the Lady Jane Grey', it would seem that the urge to usurpation was the one constant in Austen's *History of England*; an interesting take on a national history associated, by all political groupings, with liberty.¹²⁷

Her history, which was modelled upon Oliver Goldsmith's popular abridgement of his own *History of England*, was itself a masterpiece of brevity, packing two hundred and fifty years into ten pages, while still managing to find space for gossip and for a brief 'Sharade' - 'My first is what my second was to King James the 1st, and you tread on my whole' - and, showing the same disregard for the truth value of her sources as any other work, more inclined to rely upon the evidence of plays, particularly those of Shakespeare, than upon any

¹²⁵ *Jane Austen's Beginnings*, p. 64; *Catharine*, p. 138.

¹²⁶ *Jane Austen's Beginnings*, p. 65; *Catharine*, p. 136. One reason why Lambert Simnel might not be the widow of Richard III is, quite simply, that he was a man.

¹²⁷ *Catharine*, p. 134, p. 139.

more conventional source.¹²⁸ The clear importance of the historian, and insignificance of evidence, in the construction of the history is finally signalled by the fact that one of its two complete dates (Goldsmith's *History* itself only managed two) is that of its own completion. This, however, only comes after Austen's triumphant peroration in defence of Charles I:

The Events of this Monarch's reign are too numerous for my pen, and indeed the recital of any Events (except what I make myself) is uninteresting to me As therefore it is not my intention to give any particular account of the distresses into which this King was involved through the misconduct and Cruelty of his Parliament, I shall satisfy myself with vindicating him from the Reproach of Arbitrary and tyrannical Government with which he has often been Charged. This, I feel, is not difficult to be done, for with one argument I am certain of satisfying every sensible and well disposed person whose opinions have been properly guided by a good Education - and this Argument is that he was a Stuart.¹²⁹

Eighteenth-century historiography, then, was perceived by Austen as a field not of independent knowledge, but of conflicting political claims; not as a narrative determined by certain inescapable facts, but by the personal needs and desires of the historian; not as the source for a 'good Education', but an arena in which such an education in the prejudices (it is, after all, a history written by '*a partial*,

¹²⁸ O. Goldsmith, *An Abridgement of the History of England. From the Invasion of Julius Cæsar, to the Death of George II* (London 1774); *Catharine*, p. 143. The answer to the 'Sharade' is

prejudiced, and ignorant Historian') of the reader's and writer's social milieu was to be displayed, and the personal and social attachments of reader and writer celebrated.¹³⁰ It was into such a field - though, admittedly, one by now beginning to develop some of the characteristics of modern historiography - that historians and their readers entered in order to comprehend the history (and thus, I will suggest, the nature) of their nation.

Carpet (Carr, pet, or favourite, of James I).

¹²⁹ *Catharine*, p. 144.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 134.

2 - Defoe and the Blooding of Britain.

The early years of the eighteenth century provided a series of powerful challenges to the order established in England and Scotland at the Glorious Revolution. The death of William III and the failure of the Protestant Stuart line ensured an ongoing crisis as to the proper line of succession: should England and Scotland, and later Britain, look to Protestant Hanover, or to the exiled (and Catholic) James III, to provide the new monarch upon Anne's death? Nor did the implications of the succession crisis stop there, for it also raised the possibility of the separation of the English and Scottish crowns. What, then, was to be the proper relationship between the two monarchies: an incorporating or federal union, or total independence? Both these questions were undoubtedly made more pressing by the growing intolerance of the High Church to Dissent, and its seeming sympathy (whether actual, or merely apparent), towards Catholicism, and by the consistent conflict between monarch and parliament, and between parties. Finally, all these essentially internal conflicts were exacerbated by conflict with France in Europe, and in the failed rebellion of 1715. The question of whether the English political order could withstand not only its own internal divisions, but also the threat of external force, thus became a crucial point of debate in both nations for at least the first three decades of the new century, in the context of an unprecedented growth in print culture and the development of the two new genres of the novel and newspaper.

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson has stressed the significance of the development of these new genres for the formation of the modern nation. In Anderson's account of nationalism, it is people's ability to

imagine other people whom they have never met and can never meet, but who are *just like them*, that is productive of nationalism and thus of the modern nation.

This imagining, he claims, was made possible by the development of the new literary forms, the novel and the newspaper, which allowed the expression of an equally new understanding of time, as empty and homogenous, as containing simultaneous, and not only consecutive actions.¹³¹ Reading itself thus became constitutive of national identity in two quite separate ways: it enabled a growing constituency to participate in the debates over national policy, and so to feel themselves to have a stake in the outcome of those debates; and it provided a language that expressed this new experience of belonging to a print community.

In this chapter, I will explore the attempts made to balance these arguments over policy with this developing sense of community, of national belonging, through an examination of Daniel Defoe's writings on the nation.

Defoe was in many ways a pioneer of the new public space opened up by print culture. As not only one of the most important political journalists (and political actors) of his period, but also an historian and the author responsible for what is generally considered the first novel, *Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe seems to figure as an archetypal (in both senses of the word, both wholly original and absolutely typical) genre-bender, in a period in which the genres in which he worked began to develop their own boundaries of method and of meaning. His works, his particular responses to the circumstances of the British nations in the early eighteenth century, provided both new formal methods, and a newly powerful statement of a more or less developed previous understanding of nationhood. I wish, therefore, to attempt to uncover the essential features of Defoe's

¹³¹ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, ch. 2 esp.

understanding of the modern English, Scottish, and ultimately British nations, as expressed in a series of texts written in the early eighteenth century, in order to place the further development of thought about British national identity against a relatively coherent background.¹³²

Defoe's works are, of course, essentially a miscellany, the product of a series of controversies over a period of twenty years, of political events in which he is not a disinterested observer but an active (and sometimes a paid) disputant: his thinking is, therefore, somewhat less than systematic, and his writing must always be examined with due regard to the circumstances of its production.

What is more, the miscellaneous nature of his work is, as has recently been made clear, aggravated by the presence within the Defoe canon of many works that simply were not by him.¹³³ Nevertheless, it is possible to identify a number of issues consistently present in his work relating to national identity, though perhaps most clearly in *The True-Born Englishman* (which will be the prime reference point of my discussion): these include his idiosyncratic usage of genealogy; his understanding of women's role in the reproduction (both literal and representational) of the nation; his approach to the writing of national history; and his representation of the relationship, his blurring of the usual

¹³² These texts include: *The True-Born Englishman*, in *The Works of Daniel Defoe*, ed. J. S. Keltie (Edinburgh, 1903); *Legion's Memorial* (London, [1701]); *Caledonia, a Poem &c.* (Edinburgh, 1706); the *Essay[s] at Removing National Prejudices* (Edinburgh, 1706-7); *The History of the Union of Great Britain* (Edinburgh, 1709); *Reasons Against the Succession of the House of Hanover* (London, 1713); *And What if the Pretender Should Come?* (London, 1713); 'An Answer to a Question That Nobody Thinks of, viz., *But What If the Queen Should Die?*' in *The Novels and Miscellaneous Works of Daniel Defoe*, Vol. VI (London, 1882 - text first published 1713), pp. 479-501; and *The Scots Nation and Union Vindicated* (London, 1714). Of course, this 'background' must also be understood as at least part of the process by which further thought on British national identity is formed.

¹³³ P. N. Furbank and W. R. Owens: *The Canonisation of Daniel Defoe* (New Haven and London, 1988); *Defoe De-Attributions. A Critique of J. R. Moore's Checklist* (London and Rio Grande, 1994); *A Critical Bibliography of Daniel Defoe* (London, 1998). They have cut the Defoe canon from a list of over five hundred to just (!) over two hundred and seventy books and pamphlets,

boundaries, between the nation and the mob. The work of this chapter, then, shall be to explore these themes of Defoe's writing upon the British nation, and their relationship to one another, and in doing so, to provide a point of departure for discussion of the mutations of British national identity in the later eighteenth century.

Genealogy and the True-Born Englishman.

Any study of Defoe's writing could reasonably begin with *The True-Born Englishman*. Though not his first work to be published (that honour goes to *A Letter to a Dissenter*), *The True-Born Englishman* was an immediate, and quite dramatic success, and was to serve as a major foundation of Defoe's future authorial identity.¹³⁴ Not only it did go through at least twenty-two editions or impressions (five of which were piracies) during his lifetime, of which 'no less than 80,000 were disposed of in the streets of London', it also became the legitimising origin for a number of texts 'by the Author of The True-Born Englishman'.¹³⁵ Defoe was later to bury this persona, after having spent time in

plus innumerable journal articles. All works in this chapter referred to as being by Defoe have been checked against (and are supported by) their revisions.

¹³⁴ D. Defoe, *A Letter to a Dissenter From His Friend at the Hague* ([London?], 1688).

¹³⁵ *Critical Bibliography*, p. 20; *Works of Daniel Defoe*, p. 591 - though the figure quoted is disputable, it certainly gives a sense of the perceived reach of Defoe's poem, if nothing else; see also *Ye True-Born Englishmen Proceed* ([London], [1701]); *The Mock Mourners. A Satyr, By Way of Elegy on King William. By the Author of The True-born Englishman* (London, 1702); and, with a slight twist, *An Elegy on the Author of the True-Born-English-Man. With an Essay on the Late Storm. By the Author of the Hymn to the Pillory* (London, 1704).

the pillory for his publication of *The Shortest Way With the Dissenters*; yet even in the text that announced his death as a satirist, he threatened that:

If no new Genius rises up to show
 And let the injur'd Nation know
 By whom they're thus betray'd, and how;
 I fear, in spite of all that has been said,
 I shall be forc'd to speak, altho' I'm Dead.¹³⁶

Defoe thus proved tenacious in the maintenance of an authorial identity that had already been, and would remain, highly successful in terms both of notoriety and of recompense.

The True-Born Englishman was written in response to a number of anti-Dutch texts printed in 1700, and in particular John Tutchin's pamphlet *The Foreigners*, which sought to attack William III through his countrymen.¹³⁷

Figuring England as an Israel preyed upon by the 'Gibeonites' (the Dutch who followed William to England), Tutchin claimed England was weakened martially, culturally, and linguistically by the association, and that the modern English had become a satire upon their forefathers.¹³⁸ Insisting upon the need for the English to return to a glorious and independent past by rejecting encroaching foreigners, Tutchin united in his polemic a variety of features that served to differentiate between the English/Hebrews and Dutch/Gibeonites: genealogy,

¹³⁶ *The Shortest Way With the Dissenters and Other Pamphlets*. By Daniel Defoe (Oxford, 1927 - first published 1702); *An Elegy on the Author*, p. 13.

¹³⁷ J. Tutchin, *The Foreigners* ([London?], 1700), pp. 1-6 in *Poems on Affairs of State*. Vol. II, compiler anonymous ([London], 1703).

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 4, p. 5, p. 6.

religion, national character (determined by climate), political and legal heritage, and history (these last two being fundamentally intertwined, forming the construct described by John Pocock and many others as the ancient constitution).¹³⁹ What is particularly interesting here is his insistence upon genealogy as the foundation of right for political involvement, his insistence that:

Ye *Jewish* Nobles, boast no more your Race ...

In Vain is Blood, or Parentages, when

Ribbons and Garters can ennoble Men

No more, no more your Antient Honours own,

By slavish *Gibeonites* you are outdone: ...

From off their Heads your ravish'd Lawrels tear,

And let them know what *Jewish* Nobles are.¹⁴⁰

Defoe's response to Tutchin maintained two essential arguments: first, he attempted to describe the English national character, or at least, England's characteristic national vice (ingratitude, which Defoe opposed to Spanish pride, Scottish fraud, and Chinese wit); secondly, he sought to undermine Tutchin's representation of England as a nation whose pure lineage (genealogical and political) was defiled by the Dutch presence. These arguments are, in fact, crucially linked, for it is the English ingratitude to the Dutch for their liberation at the Glorious Revolution that is the clearest example Defoe can give of the English national character, and yet also the cause and justification for Defoe's

¹³⁹ J. G. A. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*.

¹⁴⁰ *Poems on Affairs of State*. Vol. II, p. 6.

investigation into the nation's lineage, undertaken to prove the futility of contemporary appeals to a notionally pure (and free) past.

This displays a crucial tension at the heart of *The True-Born Englishman*, one which can be discovered in much of Defoe's writing about the past: a tension between recent history, the facts of which should determine current policy, and the processes through which that recent history developed, processes which explain, and perhaps determine, the character of the contemporary world.¹⁴¹ By stressing the significance of the Glorious Revolution, and of William III's essential betrayal by the English, Defoe sought to privilege recent history over and above a more distant history that Englishmen might write in defence of their liberties. Such a history (which can be seen to underpin Tutchin's pamphlet) might invoke a number of distant events felt to represent all that was special about English liberty; it might, for example, refer to an early Britain never wholly conquered by the Romans, or to the rejection of Rome by the Tudors, events that could be (and often were) viewed as proofs of that rare, almost unique love of liberty consistently displayed by Englishmen throughout history.

This way of representing the past tends to convert it into a possession, to be passed down in hereditary succession from one generation to the next (and in texts such as Tutchin's, it acts in a similar manner as any inheritance, falling into the hands only of the few); it tends also, however, to take that past out of the realm of scrutiny, so that neither content nor means of transmission may be easily examined. It asserts that the discords of the present are the result of an illegitimate abandonment of the values of the past, and yet that past can only be

¹⁴¹ See pp. 105-114 below for more on this.

described in terms of how the present ought to be; it is, in short, beautifully circular.

It is this use of genealogy that Defoe seeks to disrupt in *The True-Born Englishman*. Having stressed the modern nature of the English political settlement, the fact that its roots lie not in Magna Charta, but in 1688, Defoe nevertheless turns to an examination of the genetic sources of the English nation in order to ridicule the notion of the 'true-born Englishman'; far from being in possession of a pure lineage, he claims, all are descended from a primal scene of miscegenation, all the English were 'In eager rapes and furious lust begot,/Betwixt a painted Briton and a Scot'.¹⁴² What was more, this was not to be a single fall from propriety on the part of the nation; rather, having received the taste for adulterous, illegal passion, 'their rank daughters, to their parents just,/Received all nations with promiscuous lust'.¹⁴³

Thus in the blood of the supposedly 'true-born' Englishman there swam not only a variety of Celtic and Scottish, but also Roman, Danish, Norman, and a whole host of Germanic bloods. A claim to racial purity (whether by that we understand the specific familial 'races' of certain politically active nobles, or a more general national unity of origin) therefore appeared laughable.¹⁴⁴ All the English were bastards, and should abandon any attempt to raise themselves above their neighbours on the grounds of origin. Indeed, Defoe went so far as to claim that the nation's very sexual incontinence was the source of her strength - in his introduction to the poem, he pointed to England's immediate neighbours, the

¹⁴² *Works of Daniel Defoe*, p. 597.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ It is, of course, necessary to be cautious in talking of 'race'; as has been made clear in recent work on the origins of modern thought about 'race', the standard eighteenth century usage of the

Welsh, Scottish and Irish, as being three of the purest-blooded nations to be found; and who could envy them?¹⁴⁵

Rather than insist upon the purity of the English national lineage and its present threat of debasement by less glorious nations, then, rather than dwell upon great deeds of the past going rusty in the dirty modern world, Defoe insists that the present-day English should look to their own resources, for:

... fame of families is all a cheat,

It's personal virtue only makes us great.¹⁴⁶

Thus Defoe undertakes an extensive piece of work, tracing the English national lineage from the earliest periods of myth, only to declare its irrelevance to his audience - within the terms set up by Tutchin, at any rate. It would be wrong to assume, however, that Defoe claims *no* lessons can be learned from the study of the national lineage; for though no rights to political authority can be discovered from genealogy, the English tendency towards miscegenation can in fact be understood as the justification for a policy upon immigration and the encouragement of population.

Defoe's cataloguing of the miscellaneous origins of the English nation remains a celebration of that past, however much it may be written in the satirical mode. This might be understood, at least in part, as the result of Defoe's involvement in the contemporary debate over population. As Daniel Statt has

term is more likely to apply to kinship groups, to direct lines of descent, than to peoples of any large extent. See pp. 52-60 above, and I. Hannaford, *Race. The History of an Idea in the West*.

¹⁴⁵ '... we have three nations about us as clear from mixtures of blood as any in the world, and I know not which of them I could wish us to be like'; *Works of Daniel Defoe*, pp. 591-2.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 603.

detailed in *Foreigners and Englishman*, this developed out of the efflux of economic writings at the Restoration, fuelled by fears (not provable at the time, but probably correct) that the English population had, at best, stagnated, at worst declined. Given that it was widely believed that wealth was the direct product of ‘populousness’, the possession of a dense population, and that ‘one nation could grow wealthier only at the expense of another’, this produced a sense of genuine concern amongst economic writers that unless the English population could be rapidly expanded, the nation would soon come to grief.¹⁴⁷ In seeking out a quick fix for the broken English population, then, a variety of different writers (Defoe not least among them), sought to encourage immigration to England through schemes for the cheap and easy naturalisation of foreign Protestants. In particular, they pointed to the extremely liberal naturalisation laws of Holland (and, of course, to Dutch prosperity) as a model to follow, and to the experience of the Huguenot refugees from France (and their importation of new skills) as an example of the end result of the encouragement of immigration.

It seems likely that *The True-Born Englishman* was developed within the general arena of this debate over populousness. Portions of it were written prior to the publication of *The Foreigners*; thus it may well have been intended to address not only that poem’s assault upon the King through his natal country, but also, and perhaps originally, the broader economic debate about the role and presence of foreigners in the nation.¹⁴⁸ If this is the case, then it is evident that Defoe considers the effect and purpose of foreigners and of parliament within a somewhat different framework to Tutchin. Rather than be confined within a

¹⁴⁷ D. Statt, *Foreigners and Englishmen. The Controversy over Immigration and Population, 1660-1760* (Newark, London and Toronto, 1995), p. 45.

narrowly political conception of the nation, in which it is the duty of an elite to preserve the national liberty written centuries ago, and maintained down the generations only through the expense of much aristocratic blood, Defoe would appear to consider the nation as a body whose function, in large part, is to acquire wealth. Without wishing to suppress that (clearly hugely important) element of Defoe which looks back to the Glorious Revolution and the guarantee of political and religious liberty that it conferred, it is nevertheless crucial to recognise here the Defoe for whom the great purpose of the English nation is, simply, to trade.

The function of genealogy in Defoe's text, then, would seem to be more than a simple assault upon the values expressed by Tutchin: it is also an expression of a nation that is present in and produced through the blood of the entire productive (and reproductive) part of the population. There are, therefore, two opposing usages made of genealogy in the conflict between Tutchin and Defoe. The first is essentially static and exclusive, concerned only with the defence of national liberties by certain families whose blood-lines tied them personally to those liberties, so giving them an authority, a right of possession, not available to other blood-lines. The second is essentially mutable and inclusive (perhaps to excess), insisting that Englishness is the property not of a particular blood-line, but of the entire population that supports and reproduces the institutions and liberties by which the English nation is to be recognised. Genealogy, then, a supposedly neutral matter of record, acted as a field in which conflicting notions about nationhood could be contested, in which a nation founded upon Law, upon rules of behaviour laid down long before (as that nation

¹⁴⁸ *Critical Bibliography*, pp. 19-21.

defended by Tutchin could perhaps be summarised), came up against a nation sited in the population.

The reception of Tutchin's and Defoe's pamphlets tends to show readers' awareness of this conflict, and of the need to attempt to reconcile the two notions of nationhood expressed there. Interestingly, few respondents to this controversy chose to defend the national lineage. This should not be taken, as Linda Colley has in *Britons*, to imply that Defoe's satire displays only the felt strength of the English, that the nation which would soon be the leading player in Great Britain had no need to cosset itself with a perfect past. Such a reading requires an erasure of the context in which Defoe was operating, and fails to take account of the many responses to *The True-Born Englishman* that sought to pour odium upon Defoe: from *The English Gentleman Justified*, to *English Men No Bastards*, Defoe's apparent slander of the English genealogy was not taken with the self-deprecating confidence that Colley asserts.¹⁴⁹ Thus, although it would appear that the national lineage was too notoriously dubious to allow a defence of it as it had been expressed by Tutchin, and although many accepted Defoe's essential position that nationhood is located not 'in a Name, but in the *Acts* annex'd to it', none were willing to accept either that this signified much for the current national identity ('A True-born English man's *a Contradiction*. What! Because he cannot prove Two thousand years descent?') or that it justified Defoe's exposure of the shabby English past.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ L. Colley, *Britons*, pp. 15-16; Anon, *The English Gentleman Justified. A Poem. Written on the Occasion of a Late Scurrilous Satyr, Intituled, The True-Born Englishman* (London, 1701); Anon, *English Men No Bastards: or, a Satyr Against the Author of The True-born English-man* (London, 1701).

¹⁵⁰ S. M., *The Female Critick: or Letters in Drollery From Ladies to their Humble Servants. With a Letter to the Author of a Satyr Call'd, The True-born Englishman* (London, 1701), pp. 114-5;

This last element of the response to Defoe became easily the most important, and can be seen to reveal an approach to nationhood that is similar to that of Defoe's, though perhaps less radically mutable. If Englishness was to be located not 'in a Name, but in the *Acts* annex'd to it', if it was to be a property not of blood-line but of perception and understanding, it would seem that the individual whose actions failed to live up to what was expected of an Englishman might be excluded from that nation. This was to be precisely Defoe's fate, for, as *The Female Critick* asserted, 'had you been *English*, you had not certainly (how true soever) publish'd your own Parents to have descended of *Rakes*'.¹⁵¹ Defoe was consistently attacked as 'the Ill Bird that defiled his own Nest', an action proving his own unworthiness of an English identity, and in the most extreme example of this response was left to hang himself:

Where Ancient *Thames*, with crooked winding glides,
 Repletes and Ebbs, with her alternate Tides,
 A forlorn spot, called *Execution-Dock* ...
 'Tis neither *England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales*;
 Nor any other Land we know of else¹⁵²

see also [W. Pittis?], *The True-Born Englishman: a Satyr, Answer'd, Paragraph by Paragraph* (London, 1701), and *The English Gentleman Justified*.

¹⁵¹ *The Female Critick*, p. 114. But see also True-Born-Englishman, *The True=Born=Hugonot: or, Daniel de Foe. A Satyr. By a True-Born-Englishman* (London, 1703); *The English Gentleman Justified*, and *The True-Born Englishman ... Answer'd* for similar attempts to place Defoe's nationality through a reading of his satire.

¹⁵² Anon, *The Fable of the Cuckoo: or, the Sentence on the Ill Bird that Defiled his Own Nest* (London, 1701), pp. 92-3. See also *The Female Critick*, p. 122.

Defoe's implication of bastardy in the national lineage thus tends to beg the question of his own legitimacy, and to show an ill-nature unworthy of a subject that may well deprive him of *any* national identity.

It would seem that Defoe's respondents, then, possess an idea of the nation that is to be sited in each individual's adherence to a set of beliefs that are held to be representative of that nation. National identity, in this understanding, cannot be determined by reference to the already compromised genealogical charts, but must be shown through the acknowledgement and embodiment of certain norms by the individual, and can be revoked should that individual prove (like Defoe) to be disruptive of those norms. This understanding is thus somewhat similar to Defoe's, in its essentially open character; yet it does not possess the highly volatile element that is present in Defoe's representation, due to the stress he places upon procreation. By not concerning themselves with the question of the relationship between immigrant and native populations, or the likelihood of miscegenation, but only the maintenance of respect for past generations and for the traditions of the community, their representation negotiates the two poles presented by Tutchin and Defoe. It maintains a sense of a core tradition, of acts annexed to a name, that is to be found in Tutchin; but it abandons the claim to blood-purity and exclusivity present in Tutchin's text, without reaching Defoe's extreme position of constant addition, dilution, change, a position that can only with difficulty maintain a sense of any tradition that can define the community. For Tutchin, the originating point of the nation is determining of the national character; for Defoe, the process of change, of miscegenation, is determining; for the writers who respond to these opposing

views, it is the capacity of the individual to internalise the community's imperatives that determines the composition of the nation.

The question of the relationship between genealogy and the nation was hardly to recede in the years following this controversy; indeed, Defoe felt it appropriate to re-issue *The True-Born Englishman* in 1716, with only minimal alterations, to welcome George I to the throne, for '*a foreign Prince being establish'd on the Throne, the same True-Born English Spirit seems to rise among us*'.¹⁵³ With the death in 1700 of Anne's only child to survive beyond infancy, a debate was to open as to the correct disposition of the English and Scottish crowns that was to continue, on and off, right up to the failed rebellion of 1745, and which was to be at least one of the motors behind the push for Union that was to come to fruition in 1707. Much of this debate was to take place over the body of the last Stuart queen, and was to be powerfully inflected by a language of gender which, already present in *The True-Born Englishman*, was to gain significance during Anne's reign through the various intellectual contortions required to accommodate the idea of a powerful woman.

¹⁵³ D. Defoe, *The True-Born Englishman: a Satyr. Correct'd and Enlarg'd by the Author* (London, 1716); first page of the unpaginated 'Preface by the Author'.

Engendering the Nation.

If, for Defoe, it is in the act of miscegenation, of mixing, that the English identity is to be found (though not founded - it is a process by which identity is produced, not maintained), then two things would seem to follow: first (and as already discussed), that the English identity is fundamentally mutable, this mutability being its dominant characteristic; and second, that the Englishman can not only not be true-born, he cannot be a man. In a model of identity that is centred about change produced through miscegenation, a process never completed, only *Englishwomen* can be certain of their position within the national lineage; men are too far distant from the reproduction of the nation to be certain of their participation in it, particularly given the propensity of the English nation to seek an adulterous pleasure.

This is perhaps a too-strong reading of Defoe; but it would seem to answer his representation of the coming of the modern English population as a series of rapes or seductions:

England, unknown, as yet unpeopled lay, -
 Happy, had she remain'd so to this day,
 And still to ev'ry nation been a prey.
 Her open harbours, and her fertile plains,
 The merchant's glory these, and those the swain's,
 To ev'ry barbarous nation have betray'd her.
 Who conquer her as oft as they invade her,
 So beauty, guarded out by innocence,

That ruins her which should be her defence.¹⁵⁴

Of course, it is scarcely unusual for the nation to ^{be} represented as feminine; but though Defoe is absolutely typical in his representation of Britannia, he is less so in his tendency to associate the conquering of the motherland (represented as sexual conquest) with the actions of Englishwomen: 'And still the ladies loved the conquerors.'¹⁵⁵ There is, then, a slurring of the representational and the actual, by which the domestic population would seem to be aligned with the feminine role in a trans-historical seduction scene, and in which masculine potency, the capacity for fathering, would appear to lie wholly with the conquerors and, latterly, immigrants less powerful but more 'fruitful' than their hosts.¹⁵⁶

Englishness as an identity would therefore seem to require a perpetual openness to the influence of other nations, new populations, that tends to exclude men from its operation, its process. As a genetic identity, Englishness is to be seen as sited upon the bodies of women: it is fundamentally matrilineal. However much men may be responsible for the actions and works that form the national memory (and even this terrain is not immune from the encroachments of women, as the reigns of good Queen Bess and Bloody Mary, and the persistent image of sacrifice provided by Mary, Queen of Scots, might suggest), it is through the bodies of women that that memory is to be enabled and augmented.

It was the body of Queen Anne in particular, however, that most consistently raised the issue of Defoe's gendered understanding of English

¹⁵⁴ *Works of Daniel Defoe*, pp. 595-6.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 597.

national identity. In two works produced during her reign (*The History of the Union of Great Britain*, and ‘An Answer to a Question That Nobody Thinks of, viz., *But what if the Queen should die?*’), Defoe explicitly figures Queen Anne as the embodiment of the nation, last genetic inheritor of the Glorious Revolution and Protestant Succession, and begetter of the Union between England and Scotland.

It would, perhaps, be no surprise if Anne, childless despite her many pregnancies, were to be represented as the mother of the Union, ‘this mighty *Embrio*’ being the only child she has to offer to her subjects when she should finally die; in fact, however, her role in this birth is figured as fundamentally masculine:

Your wise and faithful Counsellors Assisted, Managed, and Form’d this mighty *Embrio* - But the Conception, the Thought of *Union*, the Passion for its compleating, the vehement *Desires* of *Finishing* it NOW, were originally Your *Majesties* Own, and to these we owe all the Vigour and Application of your able Ministers¹⁵⁷

Other models of union proposed (such as the notion of a Federal Union) all ‘appear’d to me as imperfect *Embrios*, false Conceptions, and Births that must end in Abortions and Disappointments’; only ‘that Monster, as they call’d the Union’ proved to be ‘a most Beautiful creature, Admirable in its Contexture,

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.* Here Defoe refers particularly to the Huguenots.

¹⁵⁷ *History of the Union*, unpaginated first dedication (to the Queen); ninth page.

Agreeable in its Figure'.¹⁵⁸ Here, and indeed throughout his *History of the Union*, Defoe would seem to ^{be}figuring the process of producing the Union as equivalent to a pregnancy and birth; it was certainly not unusual to represent the Union itself as a marriage, although Defoe would seem to go further than most in his insisting upon the Union's efficacy as a balm for 'the Ancient Animosities between Neighbour and Neighbour...which formerly crept, *not into Society only*, but even into our Families, and our very Beds'.¹⁵⁹ Once again, then, Defoe would appear to slur between the national and the personal, the representational and the actual; once again he would seem to imply the intimate involvement of the entire population of Britain in the question of the establishment of the nation.

I wish to take this further, however, as it would seem that Defoe not only makes use of a metaphorical relationship between the generation of the Union and the generation of a child; he would also seem to adopt the language of foetal development current at the time, a language of passion, vigour and desire, of 'Embrios', conceptions, monsters and abortions. If this is the case, it would seem that the larger structure of this language may well be derived from an Aristotelian model of reproduction, which makes 'a radical distinction between the male and female contributions, asserting that the female provides only the passive material (menstrual blood) which the male semen, so sole carrier of the soul, forms into the fetus.'¹⁶⁰ This model stood in opposition to that of Galen, in which 'both

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, section 3, p. 9.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, section 2, p. 57; see also *The Scots Nation and Union Vindicated*, pp. 13-14; D. Defoe, *Defoe's Review*, introduction by A. W. Secord (New York, 1965 - first published February 19, 1704 - June 11, 1713), III, iii, p. 609 (24 December, 1706), V, i, p. 14 (6 April, 1708), VI, iii, pp. 510-11 (31 January, 1710); and [W. Wright], *The Comical History of the Marriage-Union Betwixt Fergusia and Heptarchus* ([London?], 1706).

¹⁶⁰ B. Musallam, 'The Human Embryo in Arabic Scientific and Religious Thought', in G. R. Dunstan (ed.), *The Human Embryo. Aristotle and the Arabic and European Traditions* (London, 1990), pp. 32-46; p. 32.

male and female semina contributed equally to the “form” as well as to the “matter” of the fetus.’¹⁶¹ Queen Anne, whose ‘Conception’ the Union was held wholly to be, and whose ‘Passion’ gave that Union life, thus becomes the father of the Union, conception in the Aristotelian model being ‘for the male to have an idea’.¹⁶² Her male advisors, meanwhile, become distinctly feminised, revealing ‘*the most passive Resolution*’ to reconciling the nations to the Queen’s desires.¹⁶³

Though this language can be explained, in part at least, by the Queen’s unique position as not only the current monarch of England (who happens to be a woman), with a particular relationship to her people (most commonly that of a mother), but also as the embodiment of the general idea of the monarchy (which retains a trace of masculinity, no matter the sex of the current possessor of the crown), this is not a sufficient explanation of this apparent role reversal. An answer is perhaps to be found in Anne’s position as the last Stuart to possess the English/British crown, a fact which forces her into a position of temporality, of long-term irrelevance to the posterity of the English nation, however crucial she might be while she yet lives. The Act of Union being a political production, rather than an expression of Anne’s dynasty (which will die with her), it must be seen to be borne not by the monarch, but by the nation; her role, then, must be that of a father necessarily concerned for the life and health of his charges, but fundamentally estranged from their future.

This reading is strengthened by Defoe’s insistence upon a desire for union running through the history of Britain. Ever since Edward I’s attempt to unite the nations by force fell through the vicissitudes of inheritance, ‘all his Victories ...

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 33.

Unravelling in his *Effeminate Luxuriant Son*, Defoe considers England and Scotland to have been groping towards Union, though never quite able to achieve it until the glorious reign of good Queen Anne.¹⁶⁴ Defoe, therefore, stresses Anne's involvement in the birth of the nation as an energising force giving life to a form already present in the nation: as the father of the Union, which will, however, remain the posterity of its mother, the British nation.

In doing so, Defoe not only allied Anne with the invigorating waves of immigrants and conquerors that have formed the English nation into an 'amphibious, ill-born mob', and denied Englishmen a secure place in the national lineage, he also maintained his slurring of the boundaries between the national and the personal.¹⁶⁵ His association of the Union, and the longing for Union throughout British history, with the personal history of the foetus's development - both processes that if pursued incorrectly, can only result in 'false Conceptions, and Births that must end in Abortions and Disappointments' - represents perhaps the most complete internalisation of the nation, its past and its potential future existence, in the (female) population at large.¹⁶⁶

This personal history of the development of the foetus became an area of great speculation in Defoe's lifetime as the ancient Galenic and Aristotelian accounts of epigenesis, of the growth and development of the foetus out of (apparently) nothing, came under assault from the newly popular concept of

¹⁶² T. Laqueur, *Making Sex. Body and Gender From the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1990), p. 42.

¹⁶³ *History of the Union*, unpaginated second dedication (to the Duke of Queensbury), third page.

¹⁶⁴ *History of the Union*, section 1, p. 4.

¹⁶⁵ *Works of Daniel Defoe*, p. 596.

¹⁶⁶ *History of the Union*, section 3, p. 9.

preformationism.¹⁶⁷ The discovery of, first, the existence of eggs in the ovaries, prior to sex, and later of the presence of sperm in the semen, led scientists to propose either that ‘God had created every egg at the beginning of time and implanted them, in an infinite series of Chinese boxes, in the eggs of the first female of the species’, or that ‘God had created all *animalcula* [sperm] from the beginning and embedded them in the spermatozoa of the first man.’¹⁶⁸ Most tended to the first position, ovism, for the second made a holocaust of every orgasm, made God responsible for an act of gross waste not easily reconcilable for any Christian notion of the deity.

It is difficult to say how far Defoe might be influenced by these debates over foetal development; but it would seem that the ovist account of the preformed egg’s energising by the male sperm bears a striking resemblance to Defoe’s account of the energising of a latent desire for Union by the masculine Queen Anne. If this is indeed the case, then Defoe’s representation of the formation of the Union can be seen to add to his already powerful embodiment of the nation in a female body, a God-given past and future (though one which requires the achievement of virtue by the modern population to ensure its fulfilment).

If, in *The History of the Union*, Defoe insisted upon Queen Anne’s importance as the political father of the Union of 1707, and thus of the British nation, in ‘An Answer to a Question that Nobody Thinks of’ he goes yet further. The last of a trio of pamphlets aiming to swing the British population behind the

¹⁶⁷ See L. W. B. Brockliss, ‘The Embryological Revolution in the France of Louis XIV: the Dominance of Ideology’ in *The Human Embryo*, pp. 158-79; and S. A. Roe, *Matter, Life And Generation. Eighteenth-Century Embryology and the Haller-Wolff debate* (Cambridge etc., 1981).

Hanoverian succession (pamphlets for which Defoe, his satirical intentions being ignored for the second time in his life, was prosecuted), the title of 'An Answer' proves somewhat misleading, for at no point in the pamphlet does Defoe seek to answer the question he has put; his intention instead is to raise that question most insistently, 'rather to put the question into your thought, than to put an answer into your mouths.'¹⁶⁹ His constant interest in the pamphlet is to associate Anne, whose possession of the crown could only be justified with reference to the Glorious Revolution, with every aspect of the nation's security: her life is to be seen as the guarantee of every British liberty, from religious toleration to the Protestant Succession, from peace in Europe to the union at home; but with every statement of security made by Defoe there comes the same question, 'What if the queen should die?'¹⁷⁰

One obvious answer to this question would be the return of the Pretender, an answer perhaps made more likely by Scottish fears at the dilution, by the new British parliament, of guarantees laid down at the Union. As Colin Kidd has shown, the English post-Union had proven less than solicitous of Scottish privileges, preferring to view Scotland as an errant province returned to its true master, than as an ancient and equal kingdom choosing to enter into an egalitarian union. If, for the English, Anne came as the glorious full-stop to a line of succession, for the Scots her loss threatened the end of an hereditary line supposedly stretching back for two thousand years and 114 monarchs.¹⁷¹ This made the threat of a reversion to a blood-line that bore no allegiance to the

¹⁶⁸ *The Human Embryo*, p. 159 - describing the positions of Swammerdam (an ovist, writing in 1669 and 1672) and Hartsoeker (a spermatozoist, working in the mid-1670s) respectively.

¹⁶⁹ *Novels and Miscellaneous Works*, p. 501; see also *Reasons Against the Succession and And What if the Pretender Should Come?*.

¹⁷⁰ Only two paragraphs in this eighteen-paragraph pamphlet do not end with this question.

Revolution, and whose right was based not upon an interest in and identification with the new British nation, but upon a better birth claim and the restoration of the ancient Scottish monarchy, an ever-present one, despite the objections of the punctilious reader:

today it may come, while the cavilling reader is objecting against our putting this question, and calling it unreasonable and needless; while the word is in thy very mouth, mayest thou hear the fatal melancholy news, the queen is dead. News that must one time or other be heard; the word will certainly come some time or other, to be spoken in the present sense, and to be sure in the time they are spoken in.¹⁷²

Perhaps the most intriguing feature of this passage is its evocation of a reading public immediately present to Defoe, a public enjoined to consider its position, indeed its existence, in some yet to be realised future in which the yoking of the nation to the royal blood must necessarily be dissolved by the death of a queen without heirs. Most importantly, however, this is a public which Defoe projects as competent to answer the question he has set: 'if the nation be sufficiently awakened but to ask the question among themselves; they will be brought by thinking of the thing to answer it one to another in a short space.'¹⁷³ This evocation of the nation, as a reading, thinking, questioning public - a public that can be seen here as being largely produced through the act of reading Defoe's pamphlet, with its constant direct questioning of the reader, its constant

¹⁷¹ C. Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past*, ch. 5 especially.

¹⁷² *Novels and Miscellaneous Works*, p. 499.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 501.

insistence that all is at stake now, immediately - would seem to conform with Anderson's claim that a new form of narrative time, one which allows (and even promotes) simultaneity in the text, and an awareness of simultaneous existence amongst its readers, is a crucial element in the formation of the modern nation.¹⁷⁴

Defoe's representation of the modern English (and later British) nation can be summarised thus: the product of a specific historical event, of the Glorious Revolution and the coming of the saviour-king William III, this new nation's purpose is to trade and to defend the Protestant cause, both of which require a growing population, and thus a more liberal policy upon immigration. To oppose such liberalism would be little more than hypocrisy, as even the most 'true-born' Englishman was originally a foreigner, a fact which leads back to the specific inauguration of the English nation at the Glorious Revolution (and the British nation at the Act of Union), for it points to the reproduction of the nation with every new generation.

The actual mechanics that maintain the nation are declared, by the public responding to *The True-Born Englishman*, to be the internalisation by the individual of certain community norms, and an attitude of respectful silence towards the past; these will allow the individual to continue to participate in the national community without too close an examination of his right to do so. These structures are, however, slight, and not to be examined into too closely; the individual who does challenge them (as it is suggested Defoe does) is liable to suffer exclusion from all communities as a result.

¹⁷⁴ But this would also seem to be a property of the nexus of works that cluster around Defoe's *True-Born Englishman*, which seem quite clear about their right to respond to, and use Defoe's text to their own ends; and that in doing so, they are merely behaving as responsible members of a collectivity. 'An Answer to a Question' is certainly unusual in its incitement of simultaneity; but

Finally, Defoe produces a particular figure - the female body - upon and through which the national community is to be mediated, and associated with the wider productive and reproductive population. If it is to the totem of William III's coming that Defoe looks for the origin of the English nation, it is through women's fecundity that the nation is to be reconciled to a history of conquest and miscegenation, and a future of expansion and wealth.¹⁷⁵

Writing History.

Perhaps one of the few areas upon which historians of the nation have agreed is the significance of the possession of a usable history in the construction of a nation, to the extent that a nation lacking such a history is recommended to manufacture one.¹⁷⁶ This is not merely the vanity of a discipline with only limited (or no) access to the levers of power in the modern state, but a reflection of the importance of history's ability to produce a sense of shared experience; history is a particularly fertile arena for the production of narratives of national growth, prosperity, betrayal and vindication. As should be evident from the analysis of previous sections, history is clearly present in Defoe's representation

it is not unique, and could only in any case have been thought of within the context of such a responsive and creative reading public.

¹⁷⁵ I have used, and will continue to use the word 'miscegenation', rather than the more modern and theoretically elaborated 'hybridity', for two main reasons: first, because 'hybridity' is modern, anachronistic; secondly, 'miscegenation' carries with it the very sense of uncertainty, doubt, and even revulsion which remained present even in laudatory accounts such as Defoe's. It is to us a dirty word, and it describes a dirty sentiment.

¹⁷⁶ A. D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford and Cambridge, USA, 1986), chs. 8-9 especially.

of the nation; indeed, his usage of history is perhaps one of the most complex elements of that representation. Complicated, in *The True-Born Englishman*, by its interaction with the adjacent discipline of genealogy, it proves to be structured by powerful contradictions between intent and method throughout his writing career.

Robert Mayer, in his study of the relationship between Defoe's historical and novelistic practice, has described 'his commitment to what I shall call the genetic method', in which 'Defoe repeatedly insists upon the need to trace the development of a problem, an institution, an idea, or a person from its beginning'.¹⁷⁷ This method can certainly be viewed in *The True-Born Englishman*, with its insistent recounting of the generations of miscegenation that have produced the modern Englishman; it is also present in *The History of the Union* and *An Essay at Removing National Prejudices*, both of which sought to place the Union of 1707 within the proper national histories of England and Scotland, and (more distantly related to his vision of the nation) in his *General History of Trade*.¹⁷⁸

Mayer's description, however, fails to recognise the tensions present in this method; for, though Defoe insists upon the need to recount the past, he does so in order to prove its general *irrelevance* to the present. Thus, in *The True-Born Englishman*, Defoe's explosion of the English nation's supposedly pure blood-line is designed to lead him to the final, killer couplet:

¹⁷⁷ *History and the Early English Novel*, p. 163. Mayer's account of Defoe's historical writing is severely weakened, however, by his failure to adequately deal with Furbank and Owens's assault upon the Defoe canon; taking refuge in the Foucauldian critique of the author would seem to disconnect the very lines of influence he attempts to trace between Defoe-as-historian and Defoe-as-novelist.

... fame of families is all a cheat,

It's personal virtue only makes us great.¹⁷⁹

That the past must be known, and properly understood, in order to better manage the present is certainly a sentiment with which Defoe would concur. It would appear that he also understands the past to be capable of offering lessons to the student of history (only through a study of the past can one avoid relying upon the false fame of one's parentage). In his formulation of history, however, that past has no claim on, or responsibility for the present, which must take care of itself.

This tension between the past's apparent irrelevance and actual significance, however, would seem to be more critical in Defoe's first *Essay At Removing National Prejudices*. Here, he begins by acknowledging that:

Hitherto all the Tracts I have seen upon the Subject of the Union

Historically ... relate what has been done towards an Union ...

The several Authors have done so much on the first of these, that nothing is wanting to be added to their Work.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ *An Essay at Removing National Prejudices Against A Union With Scotland. To be continued. Part I* [also includes Part II] (Edinburgh, 1706); *A General History of Trade* (London, 1713 - in four parts).

¹⁷⁹ *Works of Daniel Defoe*, p. 603.

¹⁸⁰ *Essay at Removing National Prejudices* [I], p. 1. Nor had this need disappeared by the time E. Marshal wrote his *History of the Union* (Edinburgh and London, 1799) - ch. 1 details all the attempts made to achieve the union of Scotland and England prior to Anne's reign.

Rather than ignore that history of ‘what has been done towards an Union’, however, Defoe goes on to recite the recent history of attempts to unite the two nations; it would seem that he has no choice, that in order to create the Union he *must* rehearse this history, regardless of its redundancy to not only the current political order, but also to current intellectual needs.

What is to be recounted, however, remains, to a certain extent, within Defoe’s control. Thus, although in *The History of the Union* Defoe performs the self-same exploration of past attempts to unite England and Scotland, the starting point of this history changes. In the *History*, Defoe begins with Edward I’s attempt to subdue the Scots by arms; in *An Essay*, however, Defoe begins with the far more politic attempt of Edward VI to marry Mary, Queen of Scots. His reason for doing so is quite explicit: he has no desire ‘to enter so far upon the ungratefull task of examining our forefathers miscarriages’; indeed, he goes so far as to suggest that ‘Time should now race out the Remembrance of these Things ... it seems Strange the Seeds of that antient Strife should remain, now the Generations concern’d are remov’d out of the way’.¹⁸¹

History, then, is to be made subservient to the needs of the present, even at the cost of its (temporary) suppression. The history of conflict, restored to Defoe’s *History of the Union*, is perhaps more palatable after the fact of Union, when that Union may be viewed as a deliverance from the past, than it is while the nations are still fumbling towards an accommodation.

This is not sufficient to explain Defoe’s oscillation between different usages of history, however. If *An Essay* aims to challenge the coercive power of the past in order to inaugurate the new order, *The History of the Union* finds in

that past a tendency towards Union that would appear to have a momentum that may not be resisted; finds, indeed, that the Union should be understood as the animation of a presence latent in the nation, rather than a wholly new invention:

when People began to look to it with but a Transient View, it appeared a perfect *Chaos* ... but, when Abler Heads began to look into it ... the Parts all appear'd capable of Reduction into Form ... the Mass began to move, and every thing retiring to its proper place, guided by the Temper, Moderation, and Application of the Commissioners, the Beautiful Thing, called Union, began to show it self¹⁸²

This is a distinctly odd kind of process, then: ever-present, and with a logic so complete it would convince even Robert the Bruce '*Could he have seen what these Ages have been brought to know*'; but apparently only capable of succeeding in this one, particular conjuncture.¹⁸³ This is, perhaps, the result of Defoe's negotiation of Queen Anne's role in the birth of the nation, in which she is figured, somewhat unexpectedly, as the *father* of the Union; Defoe seeks to balance the fact that Anne comes as the final Stuart to possess the English/British crown, with the continuation of the political state she will leave at her death.¹⁸⁴ In other words, the new political order of Britain has only been enabled by Anne's pacific reign, but must be seen to exist independently from her blood-

¹⁸¹ *Essay at Removing National Prejudices* [I], p. 11.

¹⁸² *History of the Union*, section 3, pp. 29-30.

¹⁸³ *Ibid*, section 1, p. 4.

¹⁸⁴ See pp. 97-100 above.

right; thus it must have a latent past prior to Stuart possession, and the capacity to be projected into futurity without a Stuart monarch.

It must here be stressed that Defoe's usage of history, particularly with regard to the relationship between England and Scotland, is atypical. In the debates that were carried on in the early years of the eighteenth century, a variety of political positions were adopted that consistently relied upon the usage of history as a coercive force. Thus *The Rights and Interests of the Two British Monarchies* mentions Robert the Bruce's 'last Advice ... never to enter into any Truce or Agreement of Peace with the *English* ... least otherways they [the Scots] might degenerate'; thus William Atwood insists:

That the *Scots*, from within the *British times* downwards, were not only under the Crown of *England*, by reason of *Allegiance* to the persons of our *Monarchs*, but to the Laws of the *Kingdom*.

... That the Subjection evidenced by *Liege Homage*, is still due to the *Crown* of England.¹⁸⁵

Finally, in one example of the healthy tradition of Scottish mockery of England's less than glorious ancestry (genetic and political), the English are rejected as overlords (but also, it would seem, as partners):

... For our Heretage was ever Free,
Since *Scota* of *Ægypt* tuik the Sea,

Whilst ye have ever Conquered been:

... Thus four times thirld and overharld

You're the great refuse of all the Warld¹⁸⁶

For these writers, then, the past must determine the present, and so disallow the union of England and Scotland as equal sister nations; they must either remain separate, and in a state of conflict, or the weaker must be subordinated to the stronger.

This understanding of the national past is profoundly challenged by Defoe's formulation. Rather than viewing history as a coercive force, Defoe uses history to challenge any prior national settlements; and even when he discovers in the past a powerful tendency to Union, thwarted thus far by negative external agents ('Popery, *French-Interest*, Home-Tyranny or Court-Intrigue; These were the only Enemies of Union ... *AND SO IT IS NOW*'), the fact that this tendency *has* previously been thwarted suggests that it is by no means an inevitable process, but that it relies upon the actions of great men in particular, favourable circumstances to succeed.¹⁸⁷

This vision of the relationship between modern Britain and the histories of its founding nations is further refined in *The Scots Nation and Union Vindicated*, in which Defoe stresses the value (and valour) of the Scots as fighting men. This is an insistence that obviously relates it to the Scottish self-

¹⁸⁵ [J. Hodges], *The Rights and Interests of the Two British Monarchies* (Edinburgh, 1703), p. 20; W. Atwood, *The Superiority and Direct Dominion of the Imperial Crown of England, Over the Crown and Kingdom of Scotland* (London, 1704), p. 17.

¹⁸⁶ [G. Steel], *Robert the III King of Scotland, His Answer to a Summonds ... To do Homage* (Edinburgh, 1700), pp. 4-6. The *Scota* myth is akin to the Brutus myth of England.

¹⁸⁷ *The History of the Union*, section 1, pp. 30-1.

image as a martial nation, and Defoe goes so far as to compare the English and Scotch gentlemen's relative contribution to their nations:

Among the great Men who have appear'd in Arms Abroad, let him shew us any Nation in the World where so many have raised themselves to the highest Dignities and Employments by their proper Merit

The *English* Noblemen and Gentlemen are not supposed by this to want Courage and Bravery. But it is apparent, whether Wealth, Sloth, or Luxury are the Occasion . . . there has been fewer of the Men of Quality and Honour of this Age seen in the Field this War, than was known on such an Occasion in this Nation

If other Noblemen Enjoy Wealth IN their own Country, these [Scots] are a Wealth TO their Country¹⁸⁸

This may seem an unambiguous endorsement of the Scottish national image; but it becomes distinctly more problematic when placed alongside Defoe's comment in his first *Essay*, that:

Scotland is an inexhaustible Treasure of Men . . . *what might not England now do*, had she in her Pay all the *Scots*, actually in the Service of these Princes [of foreign, and warring, lands], where they are daily cutting one anothers Throats; and at the Expence of their

¹⁸⁸ *The Scots Nation and Union Vindicated*, pp. 24-5.

Countrey's Improvement, gain the empty Reputation of being the best Soldiers in the World.¹⁸⁹

Defoe makes use of Scotland's national self-identity in order to undermine it as it currently stands, and to push for the necessity of Union for its (paradoxical) maintenance. Scotland's independence, in Defoe's configuration, is the cause of her poverty, a poverty that, however much it may maintain Scottish vigour, does so through a profligate, almost luxurious wasting of her population on the battlefields of Europe; thus undoing the reality of the nation even as it maintains and promotes the nation's central symbol. This raises the question of whether the Scottish masculine vigour is in fact nothing more than an unfortunate mixture of brutality and stupidity (for only such stupidity, surely, could account for the Scottish failure to improve agriculture and - a topic close to Defoe's heart - the fisheries).¹⁹⁰ Only through the development of both wealth and trade, which will allow the protection of the population, can Scotland hope to maintain herself as a nation; and Defoe insists throughout his writings upon Union that the only, or at least the surest means by which Scotland may do this, is to join in Union with England.

Thus the national identity of the Scots, apparently so firmly embedded in a particular national history, is shown by Defoe to require an abandonment of that particular history, that particular nation, in order to maintain a Scottish identity in the modern world. Scottishness, then, proves to be less a matter of a particular

¹⁸⁹ *Essay at Removing National Prejudices* [I], p. 25.

¹⁹⁰ See *Caledonia, A Poem &c.*, in which Defoe laments the Scottish failure to improve the land, and gives to the herring an (unintentionally comic) apostrophe addressing the Scots on their failure to take advantage of the opportunities offered them by God.

church, state, and land, than a personal quality of the people who make up the Scottish nation.

The *true* Scottish identity, then, would seem to be as free from the determinations of lineage as that of the English nation. Though the Scottish nation certainly possesses a more consistent history and a more secure lineage than the English (as Defoe had already suggested in his 'Explanatory Preface' to *The True-Born Englishman*), that history and lineage is shown to be largely irrelevant to the modern circumstances in which the Scots find themselves; indeed, it would seem that by maintaining antique notions of the nation, the Scots had created for themselves a false idol, a motherland that must expose her own children to Europe's wars in order to stay alive in the modern world.¹⁹¹

The Nation's All a Mob.

I have already stressed the importance, for Defoe, of understanding the nation to extend far beyond the nation of parliament, of the gentry, represented by writers such as Tutchin. Through his interaction with debates upon the importance of, and best methods to maintain, the English/British population, debates that, as we have seen, can disrupt traditional notions of the constitutional imperatives of the nation if those imperatives lead to the decay of the population (as in Scotland), Defoe dissolved the boundaries between the national and the personal spheres, and produced a nation that was to be replicated in every economically productive

family. Supplementing this understanding of the nation, as ‘a Trading Nation’ whose business is to trade promiscuously with the entire world so long as ‘[we] get by that Trade’, with a complicated take on history and its role in the construction of the nation and its institutions, Defoe embodies this historically placed nation both in a generic female body active in a process of miscegenation, and a particular female body (Queen Anne) representative of the specific historic circumstances in which the British nation found itself in the years immediately after the 1707 Act of Union.¹⁹² Finally, Defoe would seem to show, in texts such as ‘An Answer to a Question’, an awareness of his involvement in the creation of a reading public capable of the rational discussion of national affairs, and indeed, a desire to propagate such a public.

I wish here to examine further two issues: the nature of the population making up the nation (for this is more complex than I have previously implied); and Defoe’s involvement in the nascent print culture so important to Anderson’s representation of the nature of modern nations and nationalism. In doing so, I hope to make clear that Defoe’s writing of the British nation must be understood as the product of, and a participant in, material changes in the social and cultural landscape of the British nation.

I have already claimed that *The True-Born Englishman* was written, at least in part, to contest Tutchin’s unification, in a single polemic, of a knot of concerns that differentiate between the English and Dutch, concerns that seek to restrict the classes of people capable of possessing a national identity to those capable of playing a role within the political nation. In *The Foreigners*, history is

¹⁹¹ *Works of Daniel Defoe*, pp. 591-3.

united with legal and political theory through a defence of lineage; in *The True-Born Englishman*, however, lineage is thrown into disarray and history detached from the legal and political. Though historical and religious particularity remains a fundamental element of national identity in Defoe's representation, the source of this particularity is the recent Glorious Revolution, and not some ancient guarantee of liberty. Thus the liberty that comprises a defining feature of the nation must be viewed not as the possession of a political elite, but the product of a national mob:

The government's ungirt when justice dies,
 And constitutions are nonentities.
 The nation's all a mob ...
 Till laws revive and mutual contract ties;
 A chaos free to choose for their own share,
 What case of government they please to wear¹⁹³

For Defoe, then, and implicitly within many (though not all) of the responses to Defoe, the constitution and political character of the nation is to be found in the community in which *all* participate; it is in the current reproduction of *all* the nation's families, and not merely the genealogies of the aristocracy and gentry from which the political nation is drawn.¹⁹⁴ It would seem impossible, then, that the nation may be confronted by a mob - the nation *is* the mob.

¹⁹² D. Defoe, *A General History of Trade ... This for the Month of August* (London, 1713), p. 46.

¹⁹³ *Works of Daniel Defoe*, p. 600.

¹⁹⁴ For an opinion differing to that of Defoe, see *The True-Born Englishman ... Answer'd*, p. 61: 'It is impossible Justice should die, while the Fountain of it is living: The Channels through which

As such, it is to be temporarily subject to law, as represented by (though not identical to) the monarch, and in particular the saviour-king William III, and it will maintain its legitimacy as a nation so long as that law (and not that monarch, or monarchical blood-line) is maintained. That law may structure the nation in various different ways; it may, for example, place sovereignty with the monarch, the aristocracy, or with the citizens (to take the classical division of governmental types), or it may, as so many commentators claimed it did in Britain, allow for a mixed sovereignty. Yet however sovereignty was disposed, it remained the product of 'A chaos free to choose for their own share', and always able to return to that chaotic state should the law that conjured it to order be broken (and here it seems appropriate to recall Defoe's description of the Union formed from 'a perfect *Chaos*' by the vigorous Queen Anne, and Defoe's insistence that she forms the nation's only guarantee of security).¹⁹⁵

The nation is thus always to be understood as the possession of more than a political elite; but this would not, perhaps, be saying very much were it not for the fact that Defoe does not consider the nation only as a political and legal entity. In his insistence upon Britain as a trading nation Defoe ensures that the general population maintains an active interest in the functioning of the nation at all times, and not merely at moments of acute crisis.¹⁹⁶ It is production, of goods and of people, and their exchange, that maintains the nation; it is the general population that achieves that production and that exchange, and it is thus the general population that maintains the nation, so retaining a legitimate right to

it passes may be choak'd up for a time; but as long as there is wherewithal to feed it at the Spring-head, can never wholly be stop'd.' Thus the nation never escapes the ancient constitution, which is the particular territory in which the political elite operates.

¹⁹⁵ *Works of Daniel Defoe*, p. 600; *History of the Union*, section 3, pp. 29-30.

‘call them [the members of the House of Commons] to an Account ... and by Convention, Assembly or Force ... proceed against them as Traitors and Betraiars of their Country’, no matter the claims of the political elite.¹⁹⁷

But it is not quite as simple as this. For though in Defoe there is, undoubtedly, a democratic impulse, a tendency to take seriously (and indeed promote) the claims of the mob and/or the people as political actors, there is also a tendency to give ‘political voice only to those who have a comfortable stake in the landed wealth of England ... Defoe appears indifferent to the multitude, the vulgar, the popular, or the plebeian.’¹⁹⁸ Such an attitude can be seen in his sixth *Essay at Removing National Prejudices*, in which he objects to the aggressive language of Scottish petitioners against the Union:

a Petition is in its Nature *a Prayer*, a Begging or Entreating; and let the Subject of the Petition be never so much Matter of Right, it is, by the Nature of the Thing, submitted to the Pleasure *of the Persons* *Petitioned*¹⁹⁹

Such a quote must remind us that for Defoe, as perhaps for most British political commentators of the time (and most historians of our time), there would seem to

¹⁹⁶ It would be easy enough to argue that, in times when the law was evidently still functional, the people would have no active interest in the nation.

¹⁹⁷ D. Defoe, ‘Legion’s Memorial’, in *The Shortest Way With the Dissenters and Other Pamphlets by Daniel Defoe* (Oxford, 1927 - presented to Harley, the Speaker of the House of Commons, May 14, 1701), p. 111.

¹⁹⁸ M. Schonhorn, *Defoe’s Politics. Parliament, Power, Kingship, and Robinson Crusoe* (Cambridge etc., 1991), pp. 82-3.

¹⁹⁹ D. Defoe, *Two Great Questions Considered Being a Sixth Essay at Removing National Prejudices Against the Union* ([Edinburgh], 1707), p. 5.

be a real problem as to the application of the terms ‘mob’, ‘people’, ‘public’ and ‘nation’.

To a certain extent, Defoe’s position can be understood as the result of varying political imperatives. This is made clear in Abercromby’s *The Advantages of the Act of Security*, in which he uses ‘the Famous’ Defoe to ‘attempt to prove by Revolution-Principles, That *the Parliament cannot finally conclude and determine the Whole of the Union, so long as the People shall continue to express their Dissent*’.²⁰⁰ Though it is uncertain whether Abercromby deliberately seeks to embarrass the powerfully pro-Union Defoe by this, it is clear that the Defoe who sought to defend William III from parliamentary encroachments upon his prerogative, or who had to defend himself from persecution after the publication of *The Shortest Way With the Dissenters*, might find himself having to drop the principles developed then in the face of a Scotland so widely opposed to Union. It would seem likely, moreover, that the political nation described by Defoe, in which the mob possesses a perpetual right to cashier law-breaking sovereigns (whether monarch or parliament), is subject to different conditions of existence than the nation of producers and traders which he invokes in (for example) his *General History of Trade*. For whilst the

- political nation is, nominally at least, permanently present, in years of legitimate
- rule it must remain quiet; the trading nation, meanwhile, may never be quieted,

but despite its permanent activity never aspires to the level of power claimed by the political nation - it is more productive of a national character, than of national institutions. These ‘nations’, then, though fundamentally connected, can perhaps

²⁰⁰ [P. Abercromby], *The Advantages of the Act of Security, Compar’d with These of the Intended Union* ([Edinburgh?], 1706), p. 6.

be seen as not yet coextensive; their functions are different, and it would seem possible still, within Defoe's discourse of nationhood, to invoke the one without *requiring* the other (though certainly such an invocation may remain uncomfortable).

This dual nationhood, this coexistence of a political mob and a trading population, would seem to be a crucial feature of Defoe's idea of nationhood; and though thus far I have stressed the extent to which these two nations interact in Defoe's construction of the nation, it must be clear that they are not wholly integrated. In part, this may be due to Defoe's usage of two distinct languages or discourses upon nationhood, the political and the economic, that would seem to be derived from different sources, and indeed, different periods. Manuel Schonhorn has insisted that Defoe's political theory is derived, not so much from the Lockean principles established at the Glorious Revolution, as from a biblical, and especially, an Old Testament language that encouraged him to see William III as a warrior-Prince, come to free and unite the English nation - legitimately degenerated into a mob at the time of his coming - by the wielding of the sword (as well as the sceptre - he thus ruled by force and authority, as well as by law).²⁰¹ Such a political language, such an understanding of monarchical authority, does not sit easily with Defoe's insistence upon England's existence as a nation of producers and traders; it would seem that in this bifurcation of the nation, this separation of the political grounds of authority within the nation from the economic purpose of the nation, lies the reason for Defoe's inconsistent attitudes as to who are the active members of the nation.

²⁰¹ In *Defoe's Politics*.

Defoe would thus appear to be caught in the same dilemma that faced many political writers in the eighteenth century, that of the correct relationship between political and economic power, between virtue and luxury. If, however, Defoe does not appear able to reconcile his national double vision, he would seem to gesture to an arena in which such a reconciliation might be effected: that of the reading public conjured up so powerfully in 'An Answer to a Question'.

Perhaps the most influential discussion of the development of a reading public has been that of Jürgen Habermas, who has insisted upon the reconfiguration, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, of 'the public' away from an exclusive political field that derived its authority largely through display, to an inclusive discursive field that derived its authority largely through the exercise of reason and criticism.²⁰² Though this representation obviously has some relevance for an exploration of the reading public in which Defoe operated, it remains, nevertheless, of somewhat limited use due to a seeming inability to distinguish between the actual manifestation of the reading public it seeks to explain, and the techniques by which that public sought to validate its own existence in the face of criticism.²⁰³ An account of this new reading public should therefore attempt to address the relationship between the medium in which that public was conducted, and the self-representations produced by that public; should seek to understand those representations as functions of that medium, and, while not taking their claims to be wholly true, should also seek to assess their actual or potential internalisation as ideals by the reading public.

²⁰² J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

²⁰³ F. Donoghue discusses precisely this (failed) attempt to regulate the developing public sphere in 'Colonizing readers'.

It is for this reason that Anderson's representation of the reading public appears so powerful. Claiming that nationalism as an idea and as an experience was derived from the expansion of the reading public during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the development of an extensive literature in the vernacular, Anderson insists upon the essential privacy of this literature. Though this privacy was hardly an immediate result of the shift to vernacular (the oral tradition, the practice of public readings, continued well into the nineteenth century), it certainly was an effect of this shift. This privacy, however, had two paradoxical effects: it allowed the publication, the making public, of the private sphere; and it allowed individuals to become aware of a community of readers that existed far beyond their own personal act of reading, as they become aware of others privately reading in public spaces the same texts as they.²⁰⁴ He thus aligns the empirical act and experience of reading in the modern world, a discipline fundamentally private yet essentially compromised by its presence in a public form, with the subjective effects of that prose, in which particular acts are rendered publicly comprehensible, and capable of appropriation by the various members of that public - the necessary condition for the formation of the 'imagined community'.

It would seem that both Defoe, and those writers who responded to him (and particularly to *The True-Born Englishman*), proved to be more or less conscious of their involvement in this expanding print culture, and the imagined community it made possible. Whether it be by insisting upon the reader's capacity to answer questions of national security (as in 'An Answer to a

²⁰⁴ R. Chartier ed., *A History of Private Life. III - Passions of the Renaissance*, General eds P. Ariès and G. Duby, trans. A. Goldhammer (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, 1989): 'the

Question'), or the need for members of the nation to acquiesce in certain community norms (as in those responses to *The True-Born Englishman* that criticised Defoe for his slander of the national lineage, and that sought therefore to evict him from that lineage), some notion of a national community made present in and through print culture would seem to structure the various understandings of the nation explored thus far.

Of course, this print culture, and the genres it sustained, can hardly be described as stable at this point; it is, therefore, necessary to recognise the significance of Defoe's participation in, if not the stabilising, then at least the normalising of this print culture. As such a prolific and varied writer, stretching the genres of history, journalism, essay-writing, poetry and the novel, and as the constant subject of partisan attempts to control his texts and their reception through censorship, and through the accusation of hypocrisy, of uncertain and constantly shifting views, Defoe can be seen to develop two crucial features of modern print culture: the authorial position, and the nature of truth in tales previously stigmatised as lies.

I began my examination of *The True-Born Englishman* by stressing its significance for Defoe as a text establishing his authorial identity, indicating not only his political views and his closeness to the then king, but also his capacity as a writer of note, and his willingness to adopt and argue controversial cases. Evidently, in a culture of the anonymous pamphlet or article, such a mark was of crucial importance, a guarantee of quality or at least of consistency; yet for Defoe, the need for one seems to have gained particular resonance, as the

attempts of opponents to ascribe anonymous works to him (a practice all too readily continued by more recent bibliographers) in an attempt to prove the mercenary nature of his pen, provided such a powerful threat to that identity.²⁰⁵ Indeed, at times it may have proved a threat to his very liberty, as it may have been assumed Defoe had broken the prohibition on writing satire placed on him after *The Shortest Way With the Dissenters* had such ascriptions stuck. Not surprisingly, Defoe wrote against such practices:

The Mob of wretched Writers stand
 With Storms of Wit in every Hand,
 They bait my Mem'ry in the Street,
 And Charge *me* with the Credit of their Wit
 Hymn, Song, Lampoon, Ballad, and Pasquinade,
 My recent Memory Invade;
 My Muse must be the Whore of Poetry,
 And all *Apollo's* Bastards laid to me.²⁰⁶

It was, perhaps, with Defoe's publication of *Robinson Crusoe*, however, and with Gildon's attack upon it as 'fiction and fable; what you mean by *legitimizing, invention, and parable*, I know not; unless you would have us think, that the manner of your telling a lie will make it truth', that Defoe's authorial

²⁰⁵ Perhaps the most significant attempt upon Defoe's reputation came with Abel Boyer's ascription of *An Argument Proving that the Design of Employing and Enobling Foreigners, Is a Treasonable Conspiracy* (London, 1717), to him; this ascription, if correct (and it still stands, due to a perplexity of evidence), would clearly undermine the position established by Defoe with *The True-Born Englishman*.

²⁰⁶ *An Elegy on the Author*, pp. 6-7.

position came under greatest scrutiny.²⁰⁷ Having earlier insisted that he acted only as editor of the text, and that therefore *Robinson Crusoe* was ‘a just History of Fact; neither is there any Appearance of Fiction in it’, Defoe was led by Gildon’s attack into a series of defences of his work that became increasingly complex; these sought to claim that *Robinson Crusoe* ‘is both allegorically and historically true’, but as they progressed it became clear that neither element of this binary was particularly appropriate, and each tended only to lead back to the other.²⁰⁸ It would seem that Defoe has no easy way to explain his relationship to his text, or to the new genre in which he is writing, but feels that it partakes of the approach of the historian and the allegorist, and that the truth of his text is, similarly, to be found within those better known genres. Defoe’s understanding of the novel form, and of his relation to it, certainly develops in subtlety as his experience of writing novels increases; but it is sufficient here to note the significance for Defoe of his authorial identity, and that the sources to which he most readily turns are those of history and of allegory (closely linked, of course, to political journalism and satire).

Defoe may thus be seen to address, and indeed actively face, the question of the relationships produced by the new prose forms developed out of the expanding print culture of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The need for an author to be knowable by his audience, and for his works to deliver some form of truth, however poorly defined, to that audience, would seem to be necessary concomitants of the development of a reading public more or less conscious of its own existence as an imagined community (of readers, of

²⁰⁷ C. Gildon, *An Epistle to Daniel Defoe* (London, 1719; rpt. London, 1923), pp. 113-14; quoted in *Factual Fictions*, p. 157. Gildon here is responding to Defoe’s defence of *Robinson Crusoe*

subjects). I hope this chapter has displayed, through my exploration of Defoe's works, the involvement of a growing reading public in a process of national self-examination. I have not sought to claim for Defoe that his understanding of the nation is definitive for his period, nor even that it is wholly coherent for him, despite his significance as one of the most important, and well-read, writers of the early eighteenth century on nationhood; but I do wish to stress that the features that helped structure Defoe's understanding (lineage and population, gender, the nature and purpose of history, the public and the mob), and the need to negotiate an appropriate relationship with the developing print culture in which these features are expressed, can be seen to permeate the responses of the British reading public more generally.

from an earlier attack also by Gildon.

²⁰⁸ *Robinson Crusoe*, p. 3; *Factual Fictions*, p. 159.

3 - Time, History and the Novel.

Although I began this study by asserting the need to consider history not so much as a discipline, but as a genre - constituted not by a set of rules about the handling of evidence and the pretence of a neutral, artless authorial position, but by the expectations of a reading audience as to what 'a history' should contain - I have, as yet, only described this genre in terms of its miscellaneous contents, its ambiguous limits, its educative function, and its free usage by readers willing to re-write it when necessary. There remain certain important elements to consider: its relationship to debates upon personal identity; its constitution of 'truth' in relationship to other forms of prose narrative (and particularly the novel); and the nature of historical time as it emerged within the form, with particular emphasis upon the ways in which national history treats of foundational moments, of origins and beginnings.

A wide-ranging discussion upon the nature of personal identity was conducted, in both academic and popular literature, during the eighteenth century. History's implication in this discussion is not often attended to - after all, history is explicitly interested in the careers of institutions, nations, states - not, for the most part, in the lives of individuals. In fact, however, as I have suggested in chapter one, the reading and the performance of history seems to have been consistently understood as one powerful site at which to negotiate the individual's relationship to the wider society. A further examination of the implications of this discussion for history's capacity to perform this negotiation between self and society would therefore seem necessary.

It has been claimed that it is John Locke's highly influential *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, and in particular his short chapter 'Of Identity and Diversity', that marks the turning point in the modern history of the self.²⁰⁹ Locke's argument found the seat of identity to be located wholly within the consciousness, an arena in which the self is made aware 'that it is *self* to it *self* now, and so will be the same *self* as far as the same consciousness can extend to Actions past or to come'.²¹⁰ This understanding came in opposition to a previously extant notion of 'the substantial self', in which:

the individual is made up of both mind and body, material and immaterial substance. The immaterial substance or soul is by no means the whole person in this construct, but it *is* that indivisible and immortal part of him which assures his personal continuity and ontological permanence.²¹¹

Such a self was designed to be always knowable, always identifiable, to have its sins adhere to it and so to be capable of being held responsible at the day of judgement. The soul, in this understanding, could not be divorced from the body it inhabited; even after that body's dissolution, the knowledge of, memory of the body persisted within the soul - and so it retained responsibility for the actions of the body.

²⁰⁹ J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. with a foreword by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1975), ch. 27; C. Fox, *Locke and the Scriblerians. Identity and Consciousness in Early-Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1988).

²¹⁰ *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 336.

²¹¹ *Locke and the Scriblerians*, p. 15.

Locke's self, on the other hand, was (in spite of his own desire for permanence and certainty) a self which seemed radically indeterminate. He could indeed imagine situations when a person might not be himself - when asleep, or, of course, when temporarily insane - when consciousness might fail and so produce an uncertainty that one was the same self today as yesterday. And though Locke himself did not wish to take up the full implications of this theory - that there is, in fact, no firm basis upon which to set identity - others were less averse to doing so, and more than willing to defend this radical new position from the assaults made upon it by defenders of the old.

There are at least two ways in which this argument about personal identity, and the prolonged controversy which it provoked, can be seen to interact with history. First, history was profoundly connected with the education of 'a loyal subject ... a good citizen', and, in the case of the elite man, with the learning of Greek and Latin, and the public spirit such learning was meant to convey.²¹²

Secondly, the modern self must, in order to be certain of its own continued existence, make resort to a form of history. It must aim to recall itself at all points in its personal history, and be able to connect those points into some form of unbroken narrative, able to tolerate change as a form of organic growth, though not as a dramatic departure (evolution, not revolution). This is a self existing in and through time, whose personal history is important not as a record

²¹² And not just Greek and Latin, of course - even Jane Austen allows that history might serve some purpose in supplying materials for children to read: 'historians are not accountable for the difficulty of learning to read ... it is very well worth while to be tormented for two or three years of one's life, for the sake of being able to read all the rest of it. Consider - if reading had not been taught, Mrs Radcliffe would have written in vain', *Northanger Abbey*, pp. 70-1. T. Mortimer, *A New History of England*, Vol. 1, p. 1.

of sins committed by an unchanging self-in-body, but as the only proof available of its remaining consistently present to itself, and so single and continuous.²¹³

Moreover, it is a self that faces a problem of where to begin as, uncertain of its own continuity, it must attempt to recover its origins in the dim and distant past, and show a consistency with that past through both the documentation of its evolution from it, and the quality of the narration of that evolution. In doing so, however, it continually risks discovering for itself a beginning, a disjunction from the past that inevitably disrupts any narrative of continuity.²¹⁴

To understand the effect of this, it is instructive to turn to that great totem of eighteenth-century historiography, David Hume's *History of England*. The strangeness of the composition of this text is perhaps easy to forget, as the passage of time has disguised, covered over the order in which it was written: but Hume's *History* reversed the usual order of narrative to begin with a volume on seventeenth-century *Britain*, before regressing through Tudor *England* back to the start of documented *British* history (the coming of Julius Caesar). As well as the oscillation between subjects, which may provide some evidence of Hume's adoption of what Colin Kidd has called an 'Anglo-British' identity, adopted by many Lowland Scots, it is worth noting Hume's need to avoid producing a history without origins.²¹⁵ This was despite Hume's belief 'that the adventures of barbarous nations ... afford little or no entertainment to men born in a more cultivated age', and that he should therefore neglect 'all traditions, or rather tales,

²¹³ Such a self does not easily fit with the classical historical narrative so popular in the earlier eighteenth century; and as Mark Salber Phillips has sought to show, the development of a form of history capable of accommodating issues of personal identity, of the new selfhood encouraged by the (auto)biographical impulses becoming so powerful in this period, was largely responsible for the slow demise of the classical form.

²¹⁴ I use here the distinction between an 'origin' and a 'beginning' that is outlined by E. W. Said in *Beginnings. Intention and Method* (New York, 1975), ch. 1 especially.

concerning the more early history of Britain'. And whilst he certainly fulfils his promise to 'hasten through the obscure and uninteresting period of Saxon annals', rattling through the eleven hundred year period from Caesar's arrival in Britain to the Norman Conquest in a mere fifty-three pages, nevertheless, that tedious period remained.²¹⁶

In writing of the Anglo-British nation, then, it would seem that even this most enlightened and sceptical of historians felt the need to connect the present with the dim and distant past, to diminish the rupture his *own* beliefs about the strictly modern nature of Anglo-British civilisation would seem to produce in the national history. Perhaps part of the reason for this lies in another beginning for Hume's history - the failure of his *Treatise Of Human Nature*, which 'fell *dead-born from the press*' in 1748, and perhaps influenced him to turn from philosophy to the almost inevitably more successful project of history-writing.²¹⁷ In that work, Hume had sought himself to contribute to the eighteenth-century debate on personal identity, insisting first that 'self or person is not any one impression, but that to which our several impressions and ideas are suppos'd to have reference', and secondly, that memory (or history?) 'does not so much *produce as discover* personal identity, by shewing the relation of cause and effect among our different perceptions'.²¹⁸ In this analysis, a person's self would seem to be the absent centre of his or her actions and perceptions, the tendency to which those actions and perceptions direct his or her consciousness in attempting to make sense of them. Self, therefore, is not produced by consciousness and memory, but discovered by it, and may be extended to times of which a person

²¹⁵ In *Subverting Scotland's Past*.

²¹⁶ D. Hume, *The History of England*, p. 1.

has no recollection. It would seem that Hume, having written the polite eighteenth-century nation in the first volume of a *History* (written, at least in part, to establish his own authorial presence, his own self, in a literary market that had neglected his first-born work), felt the need to extend the understanding he had gained of that nation to the period before it achieved its maturity in the Revolution Settlement - however little that period might appear to be in accord with the present.

This requirement to trace back to origins, in order to secure through the narrative re-presentation of that exercise of memory (whether individual, or, in the case of history, social memory) the identity of the present has, however, a somewhat odd effect upon the historian and his reader. For in order to perform this tracing back, the past must be *made present* to the historian; or, as it would seem to be more commonly understood, the historian must be brought into the presence of the past. Thus Bolingbroke sees history ‘inseparable from self-love ... [which] carries us forward, and backward, to future and to past ages’; thus for Edward Gibbon, genealogy is a ‘common principle in the minds of men ... we fill up the silent vacancy that precedes our birth by associating ourselves to the authors of our existence’; while for Hume, history allows us ‘to be transported into the remotest ages of the world ... [it] extends our experience to all past ages ... A man acquainted with history may, in some respect, be said to have lived from the beginning of the world’.²¹⁹ The verbs used by both Bolingbroke and Hume (carry, transport) clearly suggest this idea of being brought into presence,

²¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. xi.

²¹⁸ *Treatise*, p. 251, p. 262.

²¹⁹ *Letters on the Study and Use of History*, p. 23; E. Gibbon, *Memoirs*, p. 3; D. Hume, *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, T. H. Green and T. H. Grose eds (London, 1875 - originally published in varying editions 1741-77), vol. 2, ‘Of the Study of History’, pp. 388-91, pp. 389-90. I. Kramnick (ed), *Letters on the Study and Use of History*, p. 7.

while Gibbon's process of association suggests the usage of figures capable of mediating the historian's experience of the past - but it is in Kames's *Elements of Criticism*, in which he elaborates his notion of 'ideal presence', that this sense of the presence of the past is most clearly expressed.²²⁰

The notion of 'ideal presence' was designed to answer a problem associated with reading generally, and the reading of history in particular: how was it possible for something, not immediately present to the reader, to affect him or her? How could the written be assimilated into the individual experience of the *reader*, as well as of the writer? Kames suggests that:

An important event, by a lively and accurate description, rouses my attention and insensibly transforms me into a spectator: I perceive ideally every incident as passing in my presence. On the other hand, a slight or superficial narrative produceth only a faint and incomplete idea, precisely similar to a reflective recollection of memory.²²¹

Given an adequate narrative of the past, then, the reader is thrown into '*a waking dream*' in which 'there is no past nor future - A thing recalled to the mind with the accuracy I have been describing, is perceived as in our view, and

²²⁰ H. Home, Lord Kames, *Elements of Criticism. In Three Volumes* (Edinburgh, 1762 - Hildesheim and New York, 1970 rpt.). M. S. Phillips, in "If Mrs Mure be not sorry for poor King Charles", stresses the difference between Bolingbroke's humanist conception of history and its potential to instruct, and Kames's stress upon the operation of, the strengthening-through-repetition of the moral sentiments; whilst this may be correct, I find the continuities between these positions striking.

²²¹ *Elements of Criticism*, vol. 1, p. 110.

consequently as presently existing.'²²² In this way, then, the experience of the past may be made present to the reader.

This does not end the problem, however, for there is no room in this experience for reflection; in fact, 'reflection, if it engage our belief, never fails at the same time to poison our pleasure, by convincing us that our sympathy for those who are dead and gone is absurd.'²²³ Yet reflection is inescapably necessary for history to possess any instructive capacity - without it, 'history stands upon the same footing with fable.'²²⁴ As Kames believes ideal presence to produce a sense of the truth of a representation quite independently of its actual veracity ('When events are related in a lively manner and every circumstance appears as passing before us, it is with difficulty that we suffer the truth of the facts to be questioned'), this produces an acute problem for history as a separate genre, capable of producing its own notions of truth - a problem Kames seems wholly unaware of, or uninterested in, as he stresses the facility with which ideal presence 'strengthens the bond of society, and attracts individuals from their private system to exert themselves in acts of generosity and benevolence'.²²⁵ This insistence upon presence, this banishing of distance and reflection from the search for the past, for origins, would seem to be implied in most eighteenth-century approaches to history, though rarely so explicitly stated - whether within the canon of historical writing, or beyond, in the wider realm of the reception and performance of history that I sought to depict in chapter one.

In order to understand the ways in which the eighteenth-century writer and reader could begin to establish not only a connection with the past, but also

²²² *Ibid*, p. 108, p. 107.

²²³ *Ibid*, p. 116.

the truth, and so the validity, of that connection, it is necessary to consider the relationship of history to other forms of prose narrative, and in particular, its relationship to the developing genre of the novel. Thus far, this relationship has been most usefully analysed by literary historians seeking to understand the generation of the novel during the eighteenth century; its implications for the genre of history has received but limited attention, not least because, as I have suggested in chapter one, few historians perceive their writing to be part of a genre.²²⁶

Here, therefore, I shall seek to make use of the insights produced by this debate upon the origins of the novel. In particular, I will seek to relate the development of the historical genre to the uncertainty, pointed up by both Lennard Davis and Michael McKeon, present in the early modern period, as to the nature of a 'true' narrative.

For Davis, the novel emerged out of an 'undifferentiated matrix' of news and novels in which the proclaimed 'newness' of a narrative testified to a 'treweness' that bore no relation to the likelihood of it having actually occurred.²²⁷ Rather, a 'trewer' narrative was one which carried with it a certain *imaginative* value, a desirability regardless of its truth content; it was consumed as such, by a knowing audience aware that such narratives were too good to be true. This narrative mess, however, was provoked into redefinition through an

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 122, p. 121.

²²⁶ Thus there is no text to compare to Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel*, nor the refinement of argument that is to be found in L. Davis, *Factual Fictions*, M. McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740*, R. Mayer, *History and the Early English Novel*, and M. A. Doody, *The True Story of the Novel* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1996). M. S. Phillips, in *Society and Sentiment*, has examined the impact upon historical writing of the new culture of sentiment, and the flourishing of a variety of sub-genres of historiography; but deliberately refuses to describe the broader framework in which those genres function.

²²⁷ *Factual Fictions*, title of chapter 3.

increasing legal interest in the definition of factual and fictional narratives after the lapse of the licensing laws at the end of the seventeenth century. In particular, the use of fable or of allegorical methods in fiction, to allude to the true or real world, became less tolerated as attempts were made to clamp down upon the libels that such methods made possible. As a result of this redefinition of genres, ‘novels seem to have been assigned the responsibility for carrying fictional discourse, and news had the responsibility for carrying factual discourse.’²²⁸

For McKeon, meanwhile, the early modern period saw an epistemological crisis (‘questions of truth’) arising separately from, but parallel to, a social and ethical crisis (‘questions of virtue’), raising the paired questions of ‘What kind of authority or evidence is required of narrative to permit it to signify truth to its readers? What kind of social existence or behavior signifies an individual’s virtue to others?’²²⁹ It is this pair of questions, McKeon suggests, that provide the basis for the development of the novel as a genre of writing:

It attains its modern, “institutional” stability and coherence at this time because of its unrivaled power both to formulate, and to explain, a set of problems that are central to early modern experience. These may be understood as problems of categorial instability, which the novel, originating to resolve, also inevitably reflects.²³⁰

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

²²⁹ *Origins of the English Novel*, p. 20.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

To resolve these central questions of truth and of virtue, the novel, a form of fictional discourse, became sufficiently separated from history (now a form of factual discourse) for ‘questions of truth ... [to] be addressed by reference to a notion of “history” that, with its separation from ‘literature’, can be ‘realistically’ represented by that literature.’²³¹

Here it is necessary to pause a moment. These critics have been identical in pointing to the novel’s emergence from a largely disorganised field of prose narrative; they differ in their understanding of the relationship between newness and trueness, while McKeon goes further than Davis in asserting the novel’s involvement in a discourse upon virtue, upon the individual’s proper behaviour in society.²³² Both, however, fail to sufficiently address the relationship between history and fiction: it seems implicit to Davis’s argument that the production of a new genre of prose narrative left behind a kind of unrefined generic residue that became ‘real’ history; while McKeon’s treatment of history seems to view ‘the historical revolution’ as more or less complete *prior to* the crises of truth and virtue that led to the production of the novel.²³³

What it is necessary to understand here, then, is that the genre of history is itself involved in this process of generic redefinition, continued to be so during the eighteenth century, and partook of many of the features that have been attributed to the genre of the novel. Certainly, as I demonstrated in chapter one, eighteenth-century readers of history understood it to be a genre through which they could negotiate their relationships with society, were somewhat ambivalent

²³¹ *Ibid*, p. 419.

²³² For Davis, the claim to be ‘newe and trewe’ is a reflexive comment upon the imaginative, *fanciful* nature of the pre-novel narrative; for McKeon, however, it would seem that the well-worn idea of ‘strange but true’ becomes, in some cases during the seventeenth century, ‘strange *therefore* true’: *ibid*, p. 47.

over the issue of its actual truth, and were more than willing to re-write the history with which they were presented, should it prove necessary.

Eighteenth-century writers of history, moreover, were more than aware of the problems facing prose narrative in this period, and showed themselves to be as interested in formal experimentation as their pen-friends the novelists. Though Daniel Defoe, in his histories, did not trouble himself excessively with form, the fact that the generic status of many of his writings now read as novels should once have been that of history - that *Robinson Crusoe*, in particular, should have been subject to a lengthy controversy as to its proper generic status - should suggest the potential for history's formal innovation.²³⁴ Throughout the eighteenth-century, historians experimented with the form of their writing, adapting the classical narrative of political events both to incorporate new areas of human experience, such as cultural development, and the new forms of learning, of evidential proofs, provided by 'antiquarianism': thus the footnote, the appendix, the analytical interlude began to make more regular, and necessary, appearances within historical texts.²³⁵ Moreover, a consistent reflection upon the nature and purpose of historical study and writing took place from the mid-century.²³⁶

²³³ *History and the Early English Novel*, pp.12-13.

²³⁴ This, of course, is Mayer's argument - unfortunately marred by his failure to adequately consider Defoe's historical writing. Much of the writing which Mayer attributes to Defoe is, in fact, of doubtful provenance, rendering his argument in a sense unmade.

²³⁵ M. S. Phillips, 'Adam Smith and the history of private life: Social and sentimental narratives in eighteenth-century historiography' in *The Historical Imagination in Early Modern Britain. History, Rhetoric, and Fiction, 1500-1800*, D. R. Kelley and D. H. Sacks eds (Cambridge and New York, 1997), pp. 318-42, is interesting upon this subject.

²³⁶ For example, Bolingbroke's *Letters on the Study and Use of History* (1777 - first published 1752), Hume's 'Of the Study of History' (1741), Priestley's *Lectures on History* (1788), as well as the anonymous *Reflections on Ancient and Modern History* (Oxford, 1746), [P. Whalley?], *An Essay on the Manner of Writing History* (London, 1746), [J. Petvin?], *A Letter Concerning the Use and Method of Studying History* (London, 1753). The list, both canonical and ephemeral, could be much longer.

Perhaps the high point of this reflection came with the quite remarkable effort of Robert Henry, whose projected *History of Great Britain* must rank as one of the most ambitiously plotted of works:

The whole work is divided into Ten Books. Each book begins and ends at some remarkable revolution, and contains the history and delineation of the first of these revolutions, and of the intervening period. Every one of these books is uniformly divided into Seven Chapters, which do not carry on the thread of the history, one after another, as in other works of this kind; but all the seven chapters of the same book begin at the same point in time, run parallel to one another, and end together; each chapter presenting the reader with the history of one particular object.²³⁷

In this way, so Henry claimed, all ‘danger of intricacy and confusion is avoided ... every thing appears distinct and clear’ to the reader, whose attention might otherwise be ‘diverted, the gratification of his curiosity ... disagreeably suspended’, destroying his capacity ‘to form distinct conceptions of the whole’.²³⁸ With his division of history into multiple, parallel narratives, therefore, Henry was able to maintain the unity of history in the mind of the reader; he even went so far as to suggest that his readers might choose to follow

²³⁷ R. Henry, *The History of Great Britain, From the First Invasion of it by the Romans Under Julius Cæsar* (London, 1771-93), Vol. 1, p. iv.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. viii, p. vii.

their own paths through his history, according to their own desires and needs, leaving behind the usual master-narrative of political history.²³⁹

Both novelists and historians, then (and at times, of course, the one author performed both roles), sought to deal with the same issue of the ability of prose narrative to deliver adequate representations of the world which they sought to illuminate for their readers. Yet at some point, they diverged: the novel claimed a poetic truth based upon verisimilitude and the ability to provide ‘deep’ studies of selfhood, the history claimed an actual truth based upon documentation and reason; neither interfered explicitly in the realm of the other. How can their separation then be understood, other than as an arbitrary division, produced for no obvious reason out of an epistemological and ethical crisis that this division in fact does little to heal?²⁴⁰ And given the recent argument by Margaret Doody, in *The True Story of the Novel*, that the novel is not, in fact, the product of a modern western (let alone ‘English’) crisis of epistemology, not a new growth from a messily organised print culture, but a genre to be found in many different cultures, at many different times, is it even right to treat these seeming problems in prose narrative as particular to modern experience, or particularly meaningful for it?

To answer this question, it seems useful to turn to Benedict Anderson’s argument, in *Imagined Communities*, about the relationship between the genres of the novel and the newspaper, and the development of nationalism.²⁴¹ What is most vital in Anderson’s argument is the claim that the novel, in particular,

²³⁹ See ‘Adam Smith and the history of private life’, pp. 330-2 for a further discussion of Henry’s use of narrative.

²⁴⁰ As the ongoing dispute about history’s capacity to represent the past would tend to suggest.

²⁴¹ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, ch. 2 esp.

allows for the expression in narrative of a new form of simultaneity. The mediaeval idea of simultaneity

is wholly alien to our own. It views time as something close to what Benjamin calls Messianic time, a simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present. In such a view of things, the word “meanwhile” cannot be of real significance.²⁴²

In the modern world, however, the word ‘meanwhile’ is very much more meaningful, having moved away from a concept of time in which all history is simultaneously present in the eye of God, and in which ‘every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter’, to ‘an idea of “homogenous, empty time”’, in which several things can be understood to happen separately, but at the same time.²⁴³ This idea of simultaneity is a notion expressed, primarily, in the novel:

the structure of the old-fashioned novel ... is clearly a device for the presentation of simultaneity in “homogenous, empty time,” or a complex gloss upon the word “meanwhile”.²⁴⁴

Clearly, Anderson’s insight into the relationship between the novel and newspaper, the two apparently new genres of the eighteenth century, and

²⁴² *Ibid*, p. 24.

²⁴³ W. Benjamin, ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’ in *Illuminations*, ed. H. Arendt and trans. H. Zohn (London, 1970), pp. 255-66; p. 266. *Imagined Communities*, p. 24. See also E. Leslie, *Walter Benjamin. Overpowering Conformism* (London and Sterling, Virginia, 2000), p. 198 esp. on ‘empty, homogenous time’.

nationalism, is absolutely crucial for my study. This notion of simultaneity allows connections to be made between the development of a mass reading public, the spread of a fundamentally *individual* reading practice, and a sense of commonality, of community, despite that fragmentation of reading. However, Anderson goes no further than the genres of the novel and the newspaper, in (if we accept Doody's thesis) the apparently misguided assumption of their newness, their implication in a modernity that Anderson perceives as the prime and single place in which nationalism may flourish. Nationalism, a modern political form, must have a modern literary form for its expression.

Thus my usage of Anderson would seem to be vitiated upon two counts: first, that history is *not* a modern form, and thus not a suitable place for the primary expression of nationalism (however much it may later become altered by the development of nationalism as a political and cultural discourse); secondly, that nor is the novel, a claim which renders Anderson's entire theoretical edifice suspect.²⁴⁵ I want to suggest, however, that in fact both these elements may be put to work in order to save the relative modernity of the novel *and* the applicability of Anderson's thesis to the apparently ancient genre of the history. Moreover, I will suggest that in doing so it will be possible to supply the element lacking from Davis and McKeon's accounts of the development of the novel, and explain - at least in part - the splitting of the news/novels matrix into the

²⁴⁴ *Imagined Communities*, p. 25.

²⁴⁵ Anderson's discussion of the usage of history in the construction of national identity, in the second of two chapters added to the 1991 edition of *Imagined Communities*, seems to bear this point out - history becomes an issue only *after* the original nationalist moment of the late-eighteenth century, when it begins to dissolve an earlier conception of the *newness* of nations by stressing their origins in a dim and distant past. See *Imagined Communities*, ch. 11 'Memory and Forgetting', pp. 192-99 esp.

poetically true narrative of the novel, and the actually true narrative of the history and the newspaper.

The point, then, is to make use of Anderson's insight into the significance of a new apprehension of time, and of simultaneity, whilst insisting that he fails to take note of the one form of narrative most closely associated with the passage of time - history. This oversight is somewhat surprising, given the consistent attention paid to the question of narrative's suitability for the representation of time in modern historiography; and even more so, given that the idea of 'empty, homogenous time' comes from Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in which Benjamin insists upon the need for historical materialists to shun that form of time, and the historical understanding that comes with it, and turn instead to 'Messianic time', 'time filled with the presence of the now ... [able] to blast open the continuum of history'.²⁴⁶

'Empty, homogenous time' exists outside the realm of human action; it is physical time, the time of the universe, a form of time that has no meaning in itself but which may, when subdivided by regular, arbitrary measures, form the background against which a multitude of separate and/or conjoined events may be mapped. It is a form of time that has been associated - as a mass experience - with the modern world, particularly of work, in which the clock and the timetable, arbitrary measures of time, have come to organise labour into discrete and pure blocks, uncluttered by 'life' and 'leisure', which must take place outside that period set aside for work. Bringing with it the notion that time is something that could be 'lost', rather than merely taken up, it has had to be enforced upon an often refractory workforce before members of that workforce could themselves

view 'their time' - the medium through which their labour was to be expressed - as being itself of value.²⁴⁷

This form of time - despite being profoundly alien to the human experience of time, to the extent that it should, perhaps be thought of as 'fictional, in the sense that we speak of a "theoretical fiction"' - lies at the heart of the modern West's conception both of history and of experience, and can be seen to form a break with prior conceptions of time, whether individual 'task-oriented' time, or collective Messianic time.²⁴⁸ It does not do so easily, however, by reason of its essential incapacity to express the subjective experience of time. This is the founding insight of Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*, in which he seeks to defend the validity of the use of narrative in the writing of history by showing that narrative, and narrative only, is capable of expressing the human experience of time:

²⁴⁶ *Illuminations*, pp. 263-4.

²⁴⁷ E. P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism' in *Customs in Common*, pp. 352-403.

²⁴⁸ D. Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History* (Bloomington, Indianapolis, 1986), p. 25. G. Agamben, 'Time And History. Critique of the Instant and the Continuum' in *Infancy and History. Essays on the Destruction of Experience*, trans. L. Heron (London and New York, 1993 - first published 1978), pp. 89-105, discusses this form of time as part of a continuous Western tradition of thought; but it is its enforcement as a necessary part of a commercial, industrialising society that, I would suggest, enables its entry into the everyday experience of life *despite* its unnaturalness, and thus the generalised meditation upon time that I wish to suggest transforms the genres of history, the novel, and the newspaper. Doody does claim that the ancient novels give evidence of 'a culture with a consciousness of both personal and historical time'; but she goes no further than displaying the use of the calendar, conflates 'historical time' with 'objective time', and does not discuss the issue of simultaneity (*True Story of the Novel*, p. 135). It also becomes evident later in her thesis that she considers the English novel of the eighteenth century and after to be different from earlier forms of the novel, if only in its parochialism, dogmatism, and amnesia about its origins (ch. 12 - p. 292 esp.). Such an analysis need not trouble my thesis particularly - I have no particular investment in either the quality or the absolute pristine newness of the modern novel.

time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience.²⁴⁹

Now is neither the time nor the place to critique this assertion, nor the three-volume argument produced to substantiate it. Instead, I wish to turn to Ricoeur's discussion, made in his final volume, of the difference between fictional and historical narrative.

This difference can be most briefly described as being that between a form of narrative interested in 'the reinscription of lived time on the time of the world' in a third and mediating form of time, 'historical time', and one interested in 'the imaginative variations having to do with the way these two forms of time [lived time and the time of the world] are related to each other'.²⁵⁰ 'Historical time', according to Ricoeur, makes use of several concepts to assert a difference between the *idea* of 'empty, homogenous time' and the human experience of that time: the calendar, the generation, and the trace. The calendar, with its proximity to seasonal and astronomical cycles, is the least abstract of these concepts, but points in the direction of the clock, which occupies a strange double position as both the herald of 'empty, homogenous time', and one of the methods by which human beings resist its dispersing tendencies. The generation, meanwhile, divides an anonymous historical progression into chunks defined by the biological replacement of a society.²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ P. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. K. McLaughlin and D. Pellauer (Chicago and London, 1983-88); Vol. 1, p. 3.

²⁵⁰ *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 3, p. 142.

²⁵¹ *Ibid*, ch. 4.

Here, however, the crucial concept for my analysis is that of the trace. The trace, an item or fragment left over from some past time, some other society, most commonly found within an archive, should be understood not as a sign *of* the past, an item standing in metonymic relationship to its originating past, but as a sign that something *has passed*. It does not make its past present to the historian; it can only signify that something is now absent and in need of reconstruction. It is of use to the historian not because it confirms what is known, but because in its newness it throws what is known into disarray and requires its recomposition into some *new* order: ‘a trace is distinguished from all the signs that get organized into systems, because it disarranges some “order.”’²⁵²

It is this feature of the trace which ensures the essential impermanence of historical narrative, its commitment to a continual renewal through the immolation of all previous accounts. At the same time, however, it mediates between *forms* of time, implying the lived experience of individuals or institutions (‘lived time’) through a single sign that is to be understood as part of the great grey sequence of ‘empty, homogenous time’ (‘the time of the world’). It is the historian’s craft, therefore, ‘to conjure a social system from a nutmeg grater’ (or at least, and yet more abstractly, from the words ‘nutmeg grater’, written on a list).²⁵³

The trace, then, does in fact stand in a metonymic relationship to the past - but it can only do so *within the historian’s imagination*, as it does not truly, objectively, possess such a property: it is an absence brought to life only through the historian’s incantation. The trace is thus fundamentally dialectical,

²⁵² *Ibid*, p. 125.

expressing both the objective aspirations of modern historiography, its desire to approach each individual scrap of the past as an item in need of singular attention and purification from subjective taints, and its necessarily subjective, imaginative process of reconstruction.

As such, we can see that the trace is not only the name given to a species of evidence; it is an evidence in itself, for it embodies the change wrought upon the genre of history by the enforcement of 'empty, homogenous time' throughout the society to which it seeks to speak.²⁵⁴ The effect of the spread of the notion of 'empty, homogenous time' through eighteenth-century society was, I want to suggest, to increase the pressure upon the 'undifferentiated matrix' of news and novels, already suffering from the requirement to distinguish between true and fictional narrative, and to begin to produce a distinction in forms of narrative that sought to represent the passage of time.²⁵⁵ The newspaper, then, dealing with the present and near-past, presented the experience of a disordered simultaneity, of a constellation of instants oblivious to each other's existence but apprehensible within the framework of that genre. The novel, with no allegiance to any particular period of time, and with every truth-claim now to be understood as essentially ironic, was free to imagine the means possible for human beings to experience time: *Tristram Shandy* is perhaps the best example of this, a literary experiment in the representation of time not to be repeated until the modernist novels of Woolf, Joyce and others.²⁵⁶ History, meanwhile, the genre most

²⁵³ C. Steedman, 'Something She Called a Fever: Michelet, Derrida, and Dust', *American Historical Review*, 106 (2001), pp. 1159-80, p. 1165.

²⁵⁴ This is a profoundly compressed argument: to make it more fully, however, would require what I consider to be an unjustifiable diversion into a case study of just such a trace.

²⁵⁵ *Factual Fictions*, title of chapter 3.

²⁵⁶ L. Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (Oxford etc., 1983 - first published 1759-67). Indeed, Tristram lays a good portion of his flawed character at the door of

clearly connected to the passing of time, became saddled with a problem over which it has laboured ever since: the correct way in which to relate the present to the past. With time rendered no more than a sequence of distinct moments flowing from the future, through the transparent lens of the present, into a past that cannot be directly accessed (for the continuum of time is no longer imagined to exist simultaneously 'in the eye of God') a sense of continuity between past and present is lost, and with it, any sense that the past can be easily used to inform the present. This sense of fracture is already present in Defoe, with his insistence that the past be studied not to coerce or inform the present, but to demonstrate the historical existence of desires and tendencies that require action to palliate or shape them in the present.

Kames's notion of 'ideal presence' can be seen as an early attempt to answer the problem of this fracture of the past and present. His stress upon the power of a well-told narrative to enable the sympathetic imagination to abolish the distance between past and present - to bring the historian into the presence of the past - certainly goes a long way towards a solution. However, it would seem that 'ideal presence' can only operate effectively with the suspension of any questions as to the veracity of such a narrative, which gains any truth-effect from the quality of its telling. Such an approach to the telling of historical tales, however, could not last long, as the controversy surrounding the publication of the *Ossian* poems in the early- to mid-1760s would seem to suggest.

James Macpherson claimed that the poems he published were historically true, the productions of a third century Highland bard, Ossian, whose works had

time, the consciousness of which (or at least, of the need to wind up a clock) upsets the moment of his conception, to his eternal prejudice.

been saved for posterity through the oral traditions of the Highland folk; Macpherson himself claimed only the roles of editor and compiler. Such claims were not unusual in the presentation of imaginative works, of course: *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), *Moll Flanders* (1722), *Pamela* (1740) and *The Man of Feeling* (1771), amongst others, all claimed to be merely the edited versions of original manuscripts (with varying degrees of seriousness - Henry Mackenzie's representation of his manuscript's history is hardly designed to trick the reader into anything but laughter).²⁵⁷ In the case of *Ossian*, however, this claim to the actual historical existence of the Highland bard ran into an immense critical storm. The reasons for this are many, varied, and complex: among them lie the problems of the poetry's explicit political argument, that a Highland bardic society had pre-existed, and been responsible for forming that of Ireland. Then, there is the nature of the evidence for *Ossian's* historicity - the fact that Macpherson claimed to possess nothing more 'real' than oral testimony, which, as I have suggested, was widely viewed to be inadmissible as evidence.

What is for my argument the most interesting element of the criticism of *Ossian*, however, comes in one of Hume's unpublished essays, 'Of the Authenticity of Ossian's Poems'.²⁵⁸ It is in Hume's criticism of the 'style and genius of these pretended poems', which, when compared to the 'savage rudeness, and sometimes grandeur' of Lapp and Runic odes, displays:

²⁵⁷ D. Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, ed. M. Shinagel, (New York and London, 1975 - first published 1719); *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders*, (London, 1994 - first published 1722); S. Richardson, *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded*, (London, 1980 - first published 1740); H. Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling*, (New York and London, 1974 - reprint of 1771 edition).

²⁵⁸ D. Hume, *Essays*, pp. 415-24

an insipid correctness, and regularity, and uniformity, which betrays a man without genius, that has been acquainted with the productions of civilized nations, and had his imagination so limited to that tract, that it was impossible for him even to mimic the character which he pretended to assume.²⁵⁹

What condemns *Ossian*, then, is its anachronism, its author's inability to achieve the 'ideal presence' necessary to suspend disbelief and accept its poetic truth.

And yet, this was a poem which has 'been universally read, has been pretty generally admired, and has been translated, in prose and verse, into several languages of Europe'.²⁶⁰ Indeed, one of *Ossian*'s greatest selling points had been its display of the *politesse* of the early Highland Scots, so much superior to the manners displayed in the violent Greek and Roman productions - all of which tends to imply the limitations of 'ideal presence' as an explanatory mechanism for historical narrative (however appropriate it may be for fictional narrative).

With regard to *Ossian*, 'ideal presence' seemed to operate for many people despite both the weakness of its narrative, and the fact that the element of it most consistently praised ought to have immediately raised the suspicions of its readers. 'Ideal presence', therefore, far from bringing the reader into the presence of the past, can be seen instead as a way of simply dressing up the past in modern clothes, making it more recognisable and palatable to a modern audience.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 416, p. 417.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 415.

With the introduction of the notion of anachronism *at the level of style*, it would seem that eighteenth-century historical narrative began to enter into a historical understanding similar to that of the modern period.²⁶¹ The refusal of style present in many modern historians' work, the assertion of the need for the historian to adopt an 'objective' or 'neutral' position, and to write a 'plain' prose, can be seen as one outcome of this; another must be the articulation of the idea of the trace as a form of evidence.²⁶² Referring as it does to the passage of something now irretrievable, the trace is profoundly implicated in the need for history to relate experience *in* the past to the modern experience *of* the past. The trace both allows for the mediation of 'lived' time and 'world' time (as I have argued above), and aligns questions of truth (how do we know X happened?: because these traces suggest it) with questions of genre and style (how do we know this is history?: because evidence is treated in this form).

My argument, then, is that the modern genre of history has developed from a series of questions, or problems, posed during the eighteenth century. These problems included the nature of personal identity, and the means by which we might recognise and consolidate our identity; the relationship between prose narrative and truth; and the implication of genres of prose narrative in new attempts to represent the changing notions of time. These questions have been important to my study, in that they have laid the foundations for an attempt to relate the development of British national identity to the development of a

²⁶¹ It could perhaps be argued that previous notions of anachronism, so far as they were articulated, related more to the status of documents to be used as evidence, than to the manner of their usage.

²⁶² That a 'plain style' remains a style, and that a 'neutral' or 'objective' position remains impossible to achieve, is only the beginning of the problem for the modern genre of history. It must remain an open question as to how much damage has been done to the identity of 'the

national print culture in which the genre of history, so important to modern discussions of nationalism and national identity, played a significant role. In particular, they have forced me to relate the imaginative work of the individual reader to the imagined realm of the nation, via a genre whose function and form were undergoing radical change.

In this consideration of genre, therefore, it remains only for me to briefly discuss one particular structural feature of eighteenth-century time travail, a feature that should prove productive in my further study of British myths of national origin. This is the distinction, made by Edward Said in *Beginnings*, but seemingly present also in eighteenth-century accounts of where the nation came from, between an origin and a beginning. Said's analysis of these apparent synonyms (and certainly, I have used these terms almost interchangeably thus far) insists upon their essential difference: an origin, he claims, is a fundamentally passive claim about an object, and possesses an apparently 'natural' explanatory power; a beginning, on the other hand, is a fundamentally active assertion about an object, its ability to explain being always open to challenge. The aim of Said's analysis, of course, is to insist upon the greater political value and integrity of a 'beginning'; but its value for my argument is the light it helps shed upon eighteenth-century arguments about the origins, or beginnings, of the British nation.²⁶³

The usage of such categories has already been implied in my analysis in previous chapters: it is present in my analysis of Defoe's *True-Born Englishman*, and indeed his total historical method, with its tension between narrative and

historian' (and of historians more generally) by the enforced adoption of an essentially unreal position within their writing.

event/precedent allowing him to write a history in which the modern state, beginning at some point between the Glorious Revolution and the Act of Union, is not determined by its origins, but is an appropriate expression of them, an adequate solution to the problems they reveal. These categories are also present in my analysis of the limits of British history, where the common starting point of history was the coming of Julius Caesar, and Britain's entry into the documented past; but this was continuously challenged not only by a wish to read back from that point, but also by the antiquarian desire to discover a past prior to (and independent of) Caesar through the investigation of objects and traditions outside the usual canon of historical documents, and through the comparison of the British past with what was known from other peoples at similar stages of economic development.

Perhaps the most important expression of the origins/beginnings conflict, however, lay within the various theories of British liberty, and law. Whiggish ideas about the ancient constitution, Jacobite theories of the divine right of kings and radical theories of the Norman Yoke all operated as arguments about history in which a coercive past provided the present either with all the rights and liberty the good British subject/citizen could wish for, or with a vision of the rights and liberty the citizen/subject *should* possess, but which he or she had lost through the actions of encroaching monarchs, conspiring aristocrats and a deluded, or defeated, populace.²⁶⁴ What is common to all three approaches is the illegitimacy of any break with the conditions asserted to have reigned in the past.

²⁶³ *Beginnings*, p. 6 - 'In due course I hope to show ... how ideas about origins, because of their passivity, are put to uses I believe ought to be avoided.'

²⁶⁴ See J. G. A. Pocock, *Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*; R. J. Smith, *The Gothic Bequest. Medieval Institutions in British Thought, 1688-1863* (Cambridge etc., 1987); C. Hill,

A new beginning is not thinkable within their terms other than as a return to a past condition that is not understood as itself a starting point, but as a dispensation whose origins are now irretrievable.

These understandings of the relationship between the present's possession of rights, and the past's dispensation of rights, can be contrasted with the understanding developed by David Hume, Adam Smith and other Scottish Enlightenment figures - and to a certain extent, by Daniel Defoe before them - of liberty as a specific feature of modern, commercial society. Colin Kidd has argued, in *Subverting Scotland's Past*, that it was this understanding of the *modernity* of liberty that enabled Scottish thinkers to align themselves with an Anglo-British history of economic progress, and to turn their backs upon a Scottish history which glamourised a penurious national independence.²⁶⁵ Here, however, the important point must be that this discourse of liberty can be seen to provide a new approach to the relationship between origins and beginnings. It is the extent to which the nation has been able to escape its prior history of economic and political backwardness that determines the capacity for its members to possess liberty: economic, political, social, spiritual and intellectual liberty. Their understanding should not be represented as a pure expression of the 'new beginning' theme, however, for though the break between past and present may well be displayed as absolute, nonetheless it must be explained through recourse to an historical search for origins, a search that, paradoxically, requires the production of a new, imagined origin, a 'state of nature', out of

'The Norman Yoke' in *Puritanism and Revolution. Studies in Interpretation of the English Revolution of the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1958), ch. 3.

²⁶⁵ *Subverting Scotland's Past*, ch. 9 esp.

which all societies must develop, in relatively uniform manner, towards the modern state of prosperous liberty.

A discourse of liberty that does indeed involve a wholly new beginning, a sense of a break with the past that makes no attempt to reconcile itself to that past, does develop, however, during the British debates over the French Revolution. It is perhaps best demonstrated by Paine's dismissal of William the Conqueror, '*the head of the list ... the fountain of honour!* [as] the son of a prostitute, and the plunderer of the English nation.'²⁶⁶ Such a discourse both allows the re-imagination of society upon wholly new lines and risks its perpetual redefinition, the introduction of a notion of beginning bringing with it one of ending, in order to begin anew once again.²⁶⁷

This notion of an ending provides, of course, a dramatically different narrative expectation of historical explanation to that which comes with an origin and a ... ? The gap here is intended to express the impossibility of imagining a conclusion to a history developed out of an origin; such a history can only drift towards the ever-receding horizon of the present (or of perfection, in the eighteenth-century mode of history). Its only chance of conclusion must come from the interference of a subject who, by definition, exists outside the historical narrative: from an interventionist God, in a second coming.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ T. Paine, *Rights of Man* (London, 1985 - Part One first published 1791, Part Two first published 1792), p. 118; *Puritanism and Revolution*, pp. 99-122. Ironically enough, this should not be seen as a new development, but as a *return* to a realisation achieved 150 years earlier, during the *English Revolution*, by the Diggers and some Levellers. Moreover, it has its echo in the royalist insistence that the king's rule was absolute through the right of conquest.

²⁶⁷ In other words, every moment, every event, exists as or promises both repetition and change. This must surely be related to the modern notion of time.

²⁶⁸ On ends (and endings) see F. Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending. Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (London, Oxford and New York, 1966) and C. Steedman, 'About ends: on the way in which the end is different from an ending', *History Of The Human Sciences*, Vol. 9, no. 4 (1996), pp. 99-114.

The crucial distinction between the kind of historical narrative that is derived from origins, and that narrative which opens with a beginning, a starting point, then, is a structure of expectation. In the former, which I associate with Messianic time, the end is known and anticipated, but cannot be achieved from within the narrative frame. Any change is assimilated to a vision of stability, either within society or - as in the Scottish Enlightenment models of historical change - across societies, in the necessary phases of economic development. In the latter, which I associate with 'empty, homogenous time', the end is unknown until it is reached, but comes within reach of men; and so 'the End is present at every moment', structures are always ready to fall apart, or burst open into new life.²⁶⁹ This is not to say that this structure lacks ideas of the universal - it requires universal measures, of time or of liberty, to begin to be apprehensible - but that these universals are universal only for the moment of their expression, decaying rapidly as new, unique moments rush over them.

Modern historical discourse has, perhaps, lost something of this sense of beginning and ending, has perhaps regained some of the shading provided by the notion of the origin; but, as Carolyn Steedman has observed, there remains in historical discourse a sense of

temporariness and impermanence. And all historians, even the most purblind empiricists, recognize this in their acts of writing: they are *telling the only story that has no end*; they are writing something that it is impossible to write.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁹ *The Sense of an Ending*, p. 26.

²⁷⁰ 'About ends', p. 110.

Paradoxically, then, the development of the sense of an ending has deprived the historian of the position of universality that previously underwrote history. There is no author of our existence in a lived narrative that may be written by men; there are only readers and writers, whose beginnings and endings may differ.

This matters for my study of the writing of the British nation in historical discourse in that it provides an insight into the fundamental, and fundamentally contested, narrative structures into which such histories had to be placed, and begins to unpick the implications both for narrative, and for the comprehension of narrative, that new apprehensions of time bring with them. They form part of the imaginative terrain in which the nation was to be mapped out; they suggest an approach to the writing of the national past analogous to the approach of discourses of individual identity to the recollection of the individual past, and of genealogy to the familial past; and they give narrative expression to the questions of truth, fiction, time, and of the relationship between writer, reader and text, that lie at the heart of the confusions of eighteenth-century historiography.

4 - The Passions of History.

The central figure discovered in Daniel Defoe's exploration of the British nation was that of the reproductive female body, associated with a nation hovering somewhat uncomfortably between a polity and a mob. These elements, and the issue of the actual origins of the nation (or, more accurately, the denial of one actual origin of the nation), will be explored more generally in this section.

Before this, however, it would seem to be worth pointing out the somewhat fragile nature of Anglo-British history. It is an odd fact that, for all the pedagogical investment made in the national history - for all its apparent centrality to the idea of the good citizen and subject - that history was in fact extremely poorly covered. By far the most successful history prior to David Hume was that of Paul Rapin, which (in the 1756-63 reprint) 'ran to twenty-one volumes, thus continuing the trend for voluminous and expensive histories as well as the embarrassment to national pride that a French history of England was more widely read than that of any English historian'.²⁷¹ This point makes somewhat suspicious Oliver Goldsmith's claim, in his *History Of England, In ... Letters*, that

in England, separated, by its situation, from the continent, the reader may consider the whole narrative, with all its vicissitudes, in one

²⁷¹ E. Burke, *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke. Vol. 1. The Early Writings*, eds T.O. M'Loughlin and J. T. Boulton, textual ed. W. B. Todd (Oxford, 1997), p. 11 (Introduction). P. De Rapin Thoyras, *The History of England*, trans. N. Tindal (London, 1725).

point of view; it unites the philosopher's definition of beauty, by being *variously uniform*.²⁷²

In fact, as Goldsmith (in his noble persona) goes on to acknowledge, English history was in fact somewhat less than convenient for the reader: 'as the case is at present, we must read a library, to acquire a knowledge of English history; and, after all, be content to forget more than we remember.'²⁷³ All which makes sense of John Pinkerton's exclamation, 'Would to heaven we had fewer large books, and more small ones!'²⁷⁴

Not until the second half of the eighteenth century, and the publication of Hume's, and Goldsmith's, and Catherine Macaulay's histories, could the national history be said to have achieved the strength that comes with the establishment of a canon, to have escaped the redundancy, the repetitious ephemerality, that attends 'the nine-hundredth abridger of the History of England'.²⁷⁵ Even then, of course, this canon hardly appeared as an *English* product - neither Hume nor Goldsmith, nor many of the promoters of the sociological-historical method of the mid- to late-century, were English, and of course, Catherine Macaulay came with the great disadvantage of being both female and a radical. However, this mass of ephemeral history, for all its repetition, its plagiarism, its unsophisticated scholarship, its dubious prose and shrill political partisanship, can at least be

²⁷² [O. Goldsmith], *An History of England, in a Series of Letters From a Nobleman to his Son*, Vol. 1 (London, 1764), p. 9.

²⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 10. Here he echoes Laurence Echard, who, in *his History of England* (London, 1720), had noted that 'an Englishman, who desir'd to know his own Country's Story, was oblig'd to read over a Library' (first page of preface).

²⁷⁴ J. Pinkerton, *A Dissertation on the Origin and Progress of the Scythians or Goths*, p. v.

²⁷⁵ J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, p. 20, from her well-known defence of the novelist's art. Hume's *History* was first published 1754-62; Macaulay's *History* from 1763-83; Goldsmith's *Abridgement* in 1774.

viewed as a kind of public argument over the content and nature of the Anglo-British historical imagination.²⁷⁶

If, for Defoe, the prime place accorded to Queen Anne in his approach to the birth of the British nation came as the result of her masculine capacity to engender that nation, for many of his contemporaries her significance lay in her feminine *incapacity* to ensure the Protestant Succession with a child of her own.²⁷⁷ The body of the Queen was thus to become a prime site of fantasy for her concerned subjects, in search of an easy solution to the succession crisis.

Stuart Piggott, in his *Ruins in a Landscape*, records the response of one antiquary to the problem:

when one reads Edward Lhwyd's letter of 1702 describing his recent work to a friend, one re-lives the excitement of his discovering...the three early ninth-century stanzas that represent the most ancient surviving contemporary manuscript of Welsh poetry. He made a fairly accurate transcript, but could not translate them: he submitted them to William Baxter who, says Lhwyd, "declares it is to him a very plain prediction that our gracious Queen Anne shall have another prince who shall reign after her". The late Sir Ifor Williams puzzled for ten years over these nine lines before producing a

²⁷⁶ This is not the first time that I have moved from 'English' to 'Anglo-British'; I do so deliberately as, although I recognise the danger of too easily associating the two, I accept Kidd's argument in *Subverting Scotland's Past* that English history became, almost by default, British history - there was no true fusion of the English and Scottish past (let alone of the Welsh or, post-1801, Irish).

²⁷⁷ This is not to say that the death of all of Anne's children before her accession posed no problems for Defoe - 'An Answer to a Question' is clearly written with precisely this issue in mind - but that this was secondary to her position as the father of the British nation.

translation which satisfied him ... in the end it contained nothing about the gracious Queen²⁷⁸

Such reading of the runes, however, seems moderate by comparison with the optimism of Samuel Stebbing in his continuation of Francis Sandford's *Genealogical History of the Kings and Queens of England* when he hopes 'that the Almighty, who gives, as well as takes away, may still Bless Her Majesty and Her People, with an Heir from Her own Royal Loins ... from whom may spring a numerous Progeny of Princes, to continue the Succession to all Future Generations'.²⁷⁹ Expectations of the forty-two year old queen, who had already gone through more than a dozen births, seem a little high here.

This obsession with the monarch's capacity to reproduce does not, of course, die with Queen Anne; in fact, fecundity proves to be one of the cardinal virtues of the little-loved Hanoverians. Indeed, as one anonymous genealogist explained, the very family name of the Guelphs originated in a prodigious birth:

This Family is derived from one *Guelphus* ... the Son of *Isenberdus* Earl of *Altorff* in *Swabia*, whose Wife, call'd *Jermintrudis*, having accused a poor Woman in her Neighbourhood of Adultery, and causing her to be grievously Punished, for having twelve Children at a Birth, was afterwards herself Deliver'd of the like Number, and all of them Sons.

²⁷⁸ Piggott, *Ruins in a Landscape*, p. 66.

²⁷⁹ F. Sandford, *A Genealogical History of the Kings and Queens of England, and Monarchs of Great Britain, &c*, continued by S. Stebbing (London, 1707), p. 865.

Her husband being absent at the time of the Delivery, she commanded the Nurse to destroy eleven of them ... The Nurse going to perform this Inhuman and Wicked Command, was met by the Old Earl ... who ask'd her what she had in her Apron; she made answer, *Whelps*: he desired to see them: she denied him ... he open'd her Apron, and there found eleven of his own Sons ... whom the Old Earl commanded to be call'd *Guelphs* alluding to the *Whelps* or *Puppies* which the Nurse told him she had in her Apron.²⁸⁰

The accession of such a family to the British throne would certainly appear an apt solution to the problem of Stuart infertility, an infertility that threatened the political and religious settlement of Britain with a subversive return of the better-blooded Pretender. Through the Hanoverian succession, however, the British liberties confirmed in 1688 were once more tied to the blood-line of the monarch, whose abandonment of those liberties would be tantamount to the abandonment of his right. Moreover, as the new monarch's panegyrists were quick to point out, the Hanoverians could be seen as marking a *return* of the Saxon heritage, not merely a guarantee of them, for if the English were 'Europe's sink, the jakes where she [Providence]/Voids all her offal outcast progeny', their new monarch came from as mixed a stock, having

the Blood of those [English] Princes in his Veins, from the *Heptarchy* in the Person of *Ecbert*. He has also the Bloud Royal of *France*, and

²⁸⁰ Anon, *The Genealogy, and Chronological History of the Illustrious Family of Guelph or Welf* (London, 1716?), pp. 16-8.

of the *British, Pictish, Saxon, Danish, and Norman* Kings, with whom they marry'd, centred in him; so that he exceeds all the Sovereigns on Earth for the Antiquity of Royal Descent.²⁸¹

Thus the understanding of the nation's relationship to the monarch, and to the blood-line which that monarch represents, should be seen as operating within the origins/beginnings binary described earlier. On the one hand, 1688, and later 1714, could be viewed as new beginnings for the nation, their assertion of the ancient liberties of the English (and British) subjects requiring a reconfiguration of the monarchy, and thus of the nation, to suit those liberties. This view of the past is more than willing to consign the Stuarts to the dustbin of history, their blood being simply not good enough: 'not one Man among them had the Qualities requisite to make a good King of *England*...we allow *both the Women* of this Race ... to be worthy of Exception from this general Character.'²⁸² On the other hand, it could be denied that either 1688 or 1714 marked any kind of disruption with the past; they are, rather, exemplifications of that past, proofs that the English (and British) possessed the same character for liberty they ever had. Such an approach is less interested in the precise current relationship of liberty to blood-line, and is instead content to assert their mutual origins in the distant (though still dominant) past.

²⁸¹ *Works of Daniel Defoe*, p. 596; G. Miège, *The Present State of Great Britain, and Ireland*, continued by S. Bolton (London, 1748), p. 520. The monarch specifically referred to is George II. And as Linda Colley has pointed out, in both *Britons* and 'The Apotheosis of George III: Loyalty, Royalty and the British Nation 1760-1820', *Past and Present*, 102 (1984), pp. 94-129, a significant portion of George III's popularity - once it came - can be seen to derive from his spectacular success as a begetter of children (it would perhaps be too much to say, 'as a father', given the unpopularity of his son).

²⁸² T. Thumb, *The History of England. By Thomas Thumb, Esq.* (London, 1749), p. 262. Goldsmith, in his *The History of England* (Bungay, 1807 - first published 1771), vol. 1, p. 118, made no such exceptions.

But it is not only in discussions of the monarchical blood-line that the issue of fecundity, and the focus upon the unreliable female body, becomes significant. As I have suggested in my discussion of Defoe, the reproduction of the nation during the eighteenth century comes to be seen as an issue for all the families of that nation. Thus the late seventeenth-, and early eighteenth-century insistence upon a direct relationship between 'populousness' (density of population) and prosperity, the not unrelated desire to bring down labour costs and enforce increased efficiency through the exploitation of a labour surplus, and the constant demands for men for the armed forces, and for the burgeoning empire, were all responsible for focussing attention upon the reproduction of the nation, and particularly the labouring portion of the nation. So attempts were made to encourage immigration (at least in the early part of the century), to protect and support orphans, bastards and foundlings, to assess the current size of the population (amid near-hysterical claims that the population was in irrevocable decay) and to stress the unique importance of the nurturing role of mothers.

Within the history of the origins of the nation, however, this focus upon women's reproduction of the nation seems confined to two main issues: first, that theme already made much of in Defoe, the radical miscegenation that formed the basis of the English and British nations; secondly, the anxious reference made in so many histories to an apparent practice of the early Britons, of having wives in common. The miscegenation recorded in Defoe's *True-Born Englishman*, though rarely reported with quite the debunking glee evident in that poem, is consistently referred to in the histories of the eighteenth century as, almost, a source of pride; for though Britain's evident fertility has led her to be 'Too oft to Spoils and foreign Rage expos'd', yet so bountiful has the nation proved to be

that her invaders, the ragtag immigrants that have plagued her since the beginning of historical time, have been converted into loving children:

The grand Asylum where the Nations fly
 In quest of Bread, as well as Liberty;
 So strong th' Attraction of her pow'rful Charms,
 With Joy they throng to her extended Arms;
 Pleas'd with th' Adventure, take their fixed Rest,
 And hang like Infants at her fruitful Breast.²⁸³

Thus the Anglo-British nation (this formulation appears appropriate for a poem entitled *South Britain*, which is clearly neither one nor the other, neither English nor British) is possessed of as mixed a blood-line as her monarch, a blood-line that allows her historians to dispense with the usual panegyrics upon the ancient purity of that blood, and to stress instead the nation's achievements, and exemplary character, within documented history:

From Source of Infant Time we need not trace
 The Foot-steps of its most renowned Race:
 Nor shall we cloud our Verse with fab'lous Tales
 Of *Magog*, *Brutus*, or the Root of *Wales*;
 But draw the present manly martial Breed,
 Sprung from the *Roman*, *Saxon*, *Norman* Seed,
 Blended with *Britains*

From the old *Britains* they their Courage draw,
 And like the *Romans*, keep the World in Awe,
 Like *Saxon* hardy, and like *Norman* fierce,
 And spread their Fame around the Universe.²⁸⁴

Such national genealogies are evidently ideal vehicles for the negotiation of the origins/beginnings binary, with their avoidance of lengthy, and disprovable, lineages of individuals stretching into the fabulous past, and their replacement with abstract peoples, possessed of abstract qualities, that are felt to hold into the modern world. Thus they enable the historian to proclaim adherence to modern evidential practice even as they maintain the self-same realm of the imaginary, the fabulous, within that history, though converted into the apparently common-sense idea of national character.²⁸⁵ Indeed, they even allow the modern historian to make a strange claim to legitimacy in the recital of such lineages, as ‘Ossian’ MacPherson demonstrates in his *Introduction to the History of Great Britain and Ireland*:

²⁸³ Philopatriæ, *South Britain: a Poem* (London, 1731), p. 6, p. 7.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-6. As will be shown, the fact that the Danes are missing from this list of peoples making up the modern English state is no accident.

²⁸⁵ Other such accounts of the national genealogy, though with varying stress upon the idea of ‘national character’, include T. Salmon, *The History of Great Britain and Ireland* (London, 1725), pp. 438-40 especially; G. Miège, *The Present State of Great Britain*, p. 16; R. Henry, *History of Great Britain*, Vol. 2 (1774), pp. 518-20 especially - Henry is one of the few historians to take the Danes seriously as progenitors of the modern British nation. See below, pp. 174-91. It should also be noted that the idea of the English national character does not remain fixed over the eighteenth century: Hilliar’s vision of ‘a People so divided, not only among themselves, but each Man in himself’, possessed of ‘the most surprizing Spirit for *Novelty*’, is very different from Burke’s renowned representation of ‘our sullen resistance to innovation ... the cold sluggishness of our national character’. A. Hilliar, *A Brief and Merry History of Great Britain* (London, 1730), p. 1, p. 10; E. Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London, 1790 - first published 1790), p. 181. This fluidity is in fact part of the point of Paul Langford’s recent work on national character, *Englishness Identified*, though it seems to me that Langford uses this fluidity in order to avoid the question of change.

The revival of critical learning has enabled foreigners to extricate, in a great measure, their antiquities from the fables of the middle ages: In Britain we content ourselves with looking back with contempt on the credulity of our ancestors. From a pride incident to polished times we are apt to think ... that the transactions of the infancy of society are as untrustworthy of remembrance as they are imperfectly known. But this observation has been made ... to cover a glaring defect in ourselves. The British nations, till of late years, were much more remarkable for the performance of great actions in the field, than for recording them with dignity and precision in the closet.²⁸⁶

They enable also, however, an homogenising tendency to be applied to that differentiating roll-call of original influences: not only through the recollection of many years during which ‘the happy and real Union of Two Nations ... [through] their Intermarriages’ might take place; but also through the grafting of differentiated national genealogies upon undifferentiated, ‘pre-racial’ categories.²⁸⁷ Thus historians could claim that ‘though these nations were called by different names, as Angles, Jutes, Saxons, and Danes, they were all descended from the same origin, spoke the same language, and had the same national manners and customs’; thus writers might come to be criticised by later editors for ‘supposing the ancient Gauls and Germans, the Britons and Saxons, to have

²⁸⁶ J. MacPherson, *An Introduction to the History of Great Britain and Ireland*. By James MacPherson, *Esq* (London, 1771), p. 4. This claim gains support from an unlikely quarter, as the rabidly anti-Celtic Pinkerton lashes, in his *Enquiry*, ‘this Eighteenth century, fatal to real and solid literature ... A century in which men, women, and children, write, and all write alike well’ (Vol. 1, p. 199) - though it must be noted that Pinkerton takes MacPherson’s work as the prime example of all that is wrong with eighteenth-century historiography.

²⁸⁷ T. Salmon, *History of Great Britain and Ireland*, p. 115.

been all originally one and the same people; thus confounding the antiquities of the Gothic and Celtic nations.’²⁸⁸

If an antique miscegenation was perceived as a relatively benign, even valuable, force in the Anglo-British history, the issue of whether the ancient Britons held wives in common was not quite so comfortably viewed. The evidence for this unsavoury and anarchistic possibility, in which ‘No Child knows its own Father, nor Father his own Child; there can be no Superiority or Order among them: The Sons become Rivals to their Father, and the Mother prostitute to her Children; all the Endearments of Natural Affection are destroy’d’, came from the inconveniently canonical Roman histories, requiring any serious historian of Britain to deal with this immorality of their forbears without dismissing the one written source they possessed for their own ancient history.²⁸⁹

Some historians did indeed attempt to dismiss these stories out of hand as the reports of enemies - William Camden provides the most significant example of this approach - but their attempts to do so lack conviction:

As to the blot which *Chalcondilas* has cast upon our nation, of having wives in common, truth it self wipes it off, and confronts the

²⁸⁸ R. Henry, *History of Great Britain*, Vol. 2, p. 519; P. H. Mallet, *Northern Antiquities*, [trans. T. Percy] (London, 1770 - first published in French in 1755-6), Translator’s Preface, p. ii. This was one of the first texts to draw clear distinctions between the Celts and Goths, as its editor altered the original text to suit his new taxonomy - it should be clear that the Celt/Goth distinction is as imaginary, and as obfuscatory, as the Celt/Goth alignment that preceded it. Both draw their support from the biblical myth of origins briefly discussed in ch. 1, and discussed in depth in Kidd’s *British Identities Before Nationalism*.

²⁸⁹ T. Salmon, *History of Great Britain and Ireland*, p. 10.

extravagant vanity of the Grecian. *For ... Things related by any persons concerning others, are not always true.*²⁹⁰

Precisely where 'truth' resides in this merely sceptical statement is difficult to perceive.

Thomas Salmon perceived the practice of holding wives in common as being the expression of a trans-historical sinfulness, springing from 'The laying ... Colours upon their Bodies', which has as its modern corollary in 'those that put a Cheat upon Nature, and lay that lively Red upon their Cheeks The Dye sinks deeper than their Skin, and when the Mind is once prostituted, the Body will not long remain Chaste.'²⁹¹ Most historians, however, followed one of three strategies in dealing with the issue: some merely acknowledged the evidence of the Roman histories with the sorrowful statement that 'the accusation is too surely as just, as it is scandalous'; others sought to doubt the stories without impugning the veracity of the Roman histories:

both [Gauls and Britons] are accused of scandalous violations of chastity, and the latter of a promiscuous and even of an incestuous, concubinage. But this may possibly be founded only upon a report of the *Belgæ*, with whom they were at war, and upon a mistake arising from the custom of whole families lying together upon skins of beasts on the ground in the same room²⁹²

²⁹⁰ W. Camden, *Britannia*, p. clxiii.

²⁹¹ T. Salmon, *History of Great Britain and Ireland*, p. 9.

Such dismissals were bolstered by reference both to Tacitus's accounts of the German Goths, and their exemplary chastity, and to the modern Highlanders, amongst whom 'This custom, till of late, prevailed ... If we may judge of the ancient inhabitants of North Britain, by the present rudest part of the Highlanders, this circumstance of sleeping in the same apartment was not productive of that conjugal infidelity'.²⁹³

The third strategy, however, and by far the most interesting of the three, attempts to reconcile an acknowledgement of the truth of Roman accounts of ancient British sexual practices with modern concerns to preserve the true lineage, to avoid the anarchic disorder associated with a community of wives. These interpretations lament the evident immorality of this practice, and record its disruptive effects, but seek to insist upon the maintenance of lineage through a kind of paternity-by-precedence, and even the efficacy of such familial organisation in uniting the atomised individuals of the 'state of nature' into a community, a society:

Every man married indeed but one woman, who was always after, and alone, esteemed his wife; but, it was usual for five or six, ten, twelve, or more, either brothers or friends ... to have all their wives in common. But this, though calculated for their mutual happiness, in fact proved their greatest disturbance Every woman's children, however, were the property of him who had married her; but

²⁹² T. Whitaker, *History of Manchester*, Vol. 2, pp. 134-5; T. Carte, *A General History of England. Volume I* (London, 1747), pp. 71-2.

²⁹³ John Macpherson, *Critical Dissertations* (London, 1768), p. 140; for the comparison of the ancient Britons with Tacitus's Goths, see J. Owen, *Compleat and Impartial History*, pp. 9-11.

all claimed a share in the care and defence of the whole society, since no man knew which were his own.²⁹⁴

This approach would seem to link interestingly to attitudes towards women and lineage in the modern Anglo-British nation. Edward Gibbon, in his *Memoirs*, made it quite clear that the genealogical impulse rested ‘on a basis not perhaps sufficiently firm, the unspotted chastity of *all* our female progenitors.’²⁹⁵ The solution he proposed to this problem appears almost identical to that suggested by Oliver Goldsmith: ‘in every age and country the common sense or common prejudice of mankind has agreed to respect the son of a respectable father, and each successive generation is supposed to add a new link to the chain of hereditary splendour’.²⁹⁶

In order to avoid the pollution of the lineage, then, it is necessary almost to erase women from the process of reproduction, to produce instead a line of male begetters. Alongside this erasure, however, there is obviously placed another tactic to ensure the purity of the lineage: a consistent idealisation of English women, ‘who have been renown’d all over the World for their Chastity’, and the age-old insistence that

Adultery ... is a deeper crime in the wife than in the husband ... a wife does not yield, till unlawful love prevails, not only over modesty, but over duty to her husband. Adultery therefore in the

²⁹⁴ [O. Goldsmith], *History of England, in a Series of Letters*, p. 15. See also L. Echard, *History of England*, p. 2; [H. Maule], *The History of the Picts* (Edinburgh, 1706), p. 20; [O. Goldsmith, T. Salmon and P. Gordon?], *The Geography and History of England* (London, 1765), p. xvii.

²⁹⁵ E. Gibbon, *Memoirs*, p. 5.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

wife, is a breach of the matrimonial engagement in a double respect: it is an alienation of affection from the husband, which unqualifies her to be his friend and companion; and it tends to bring a spurious issue into the family, betraying the husband to maintain and educate children who are not his own.²⁹⁷

Such representations of the responsibilities of women towards their husbands could be backed up by references to their responsibility towards themselves, as historians provided prelapsarian images of childbirth among the ancient Britons who, as Robert Henry reported, ‘were generally of robust and healthy constitutions, and led simple, innocent, and rural lives, they are said to have brought forth their children with little pain or danger, and often without any assistance, or interruption to their business.’²⁹⁸

Thus idealisation, the aggressive and hypocritical monitoring of women’s behaviour within marriage, and the presentation of an unreal past that, if women only heeded, could point the way to safeguard themselves and their children through pregnancy and labour, all existed within the one discourse upon sexuality that sought to secure national and familial lineages from the potentially anarchic sexuality of women.²⁹⁹ Thus William Alexander’s assertion that a society’s progress could be measured through a study of its treatment of its women, Mary

²⁹⁷ [H. Home, Lord Kames], *Sketches of the History of Man*, pp. 202-3.

²⁹⁸ R. Henry, *History of Great Britain*, Vol. 1, p. 459. Or see J. MacPherson, *Introduction to the History of Great Britain and Ireland*, p. 211: ‘The uncorrupted chastity, the absolute abstinence from early venery, which a virtuous kind of prejudice established into an inviolable law among the Celtic nations, must have conduced to the immense size of their bodies ... Virgins were never given away in matrimony till their twentieth year; and thus the young couple, coming together in full maturity and vigour, transmitted their own strength and size to their children.’

²⁹⁹ This discourse worked against the grain, however, given the ancient Galenic/Aristotelian understanding of generation, which considered bastard children - conceived in the greater heat of illegitimate lust - to be more vigorous, more likely to thrive, than the lawfully begotten.

Wollstonecraft's insistence upon the right of women, as mothers, to participate in political society, and William Buchan's *Advice to Mothers*, 'that pregnancy is not a state of infirmity or danger ... that the few instances she may have known of miscarriages or of death, were owing to the improper conduct of the women themselves' can be seen as emerging from the self-same interest of a nation in its own certain reproduction.³⁰⁰

Perhaps the finest, though also most eccentric, example of the dangers of conception, however, comes in the comic novel *Tristram Shandy*. Uniting several of the themes I have already outlined, the novel documents the failure of Tristram's life to achieve the kind of coherence required by eighteenth-century theories of the self, not least as the result of his conception, botched by the intrusion of modern clock-time into his father's consciousness during sex. At the point of orgasm, his wife (who later proves as inept at judging her own pregnancy as she is at making love) asks him: '*have you not forgot to wind up the clock?*', which question 'scattered and dispersed the animal spirits, whose business it was to have escorted and gone hand-in-hand with the *HOMUNCULUS*, and conducted him safe to the place destined for his reception.'³⁰¹ Tristram never recovers the 'animal spirits' necessary to hold firm in his character - and the result is a novel in which the 'hero' is not born until the third volume, cannot progress in a straight plot-line, and which ends by declaring itself to be no more

³⁰⁰ W. Alexander, *History of Women*, p. 103; M. Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. with an introduction by J. Todd (Oxford and New York, 1993 - first published London, 1792), pp. 63-283; W. Buchan, *Advice to Mothers, On the Subject of Their Own Health* (London, 1803), p. 32 - see also pp. 21-2 on the folly, for themselves and for society at large, of 'weak, languid, nervous, or deformed women ... [approaching] the marriage-bed'.

³⁰¹ L. Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, p. 5, p. 6.

than 'A COCK and a BULL' story, though 'one of the best of its kind, I ever heard.'³⁰²

Popular History and the Danish Yoke.

This is one of the most difficult passages in the English history. On which ever side we view it, it still appears altogether unaccountable. The Danes, alone, in a manner, were in possession of all the Eastern and Northern countries; and in Mercia, that is, in the heart of the kingdom, they were as numerous as the English. Four kings of their nation had reigned successively, who, far from humbling them, had no doubt shown them great favour, and given them the preference. And yet, without any thing extraordinary happening, except the death of Hardicanute, a prince of little merit and reputation, they will have it that the English were suddenly become superior. But this is not all, 'tis affirmed, that this superiority was so great as to enable them to expel the Danes out of the kingdom ... all on a sudden, these powerful and formidable Danes are reduced to nothing, in the reign of a prince the most unwarlike that had ever sat on the throne.³⁰³

³⁰² *Ibid*, p. 539.

³⁰³ T. Mortimer, *New History of England*, fn to p. 113. Most historians make reference only to three Danish kings - Canute, Harold Harefoot and Hardicanute - this is because Sweyn, the effective ruler of England before Canute, was never crowned.

Of the five peoples - Britons, Romans, Saxons, Danes and Normans - that fed into the historical imagination of the British, the Danes possessed the most marginal, and peculiar, position. The one people not to be applied to as a legitimating origin of that nation, despite their obvious parallels to the modern, sea-faring British, even the presence of their blood in the modern stock seems to have been held in doubt by several eighteenth-century authors, as they record not one, but two genocidal purges of the Danes: the first, and more generally recorded, under Ethelred the Unready; the second, and more unusual, being that quoted above.³⁰⁴ Moreover, as I have already pointed out, there are several instances in which the Danes are simply omitted from the roll-call of the British origins, or are assimilated to the Saxons, who thereby retain their precedence within the national imagination. Thus Burke, in his unpublished 'Essay towards an History of the Laws of England', insisted that the Danes produced 'no material change' to the Saxon legal system as 'They were of the original country of the Saxons, and could not have differed from them in the groundwork of their policy'.³⁰⁵ There would seem to have been a concerted effort on the part of eighteenth-century historians to efface the Danes from the British history.

There are several possible explanations for this impulse. There is the association of the Danes with miscegenation, and the corruption of the English or British women, which acts as a reminder, should one be needed, that accounts of miscegenation have always a dual character, and cannot be seen as simply

³⁰⁴ It is referred to also in Society of Military Gentlemen, *The Military History of Great Britain* (London, [1763?]), p. 23; T. Salmon, *History of Great Britain*, p. 438; and T. Carte, *General History of England*, p. 346.

³⁰⁵ E. Burke, 'An Essay' (1757?) in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke. Vol. 1.* pp. 321-31; p. 328. Of course, attempts are made to give the Normans a Saxon origin also - but, for obvious reasons, there can be no reasonable attempt made to efface the Normans from British history.

laudatory.³⁰⁶ There is the insult offered by the Danes to any narrative of national progress and unification, as their assaults upon the only recently established English and Christian nation led to its dissolution, the establishment of a separate northern state (the Danelaw), and intermittent warfare between the two 'South British' states for two centuries. In fact, it could be argued that the presence of the Danes revealed the idea of a united Saxon England to be a chimera, the idealised back-projection of the modern Anglo-British polity. There is the further insult offered to Anglo-British ideas of manliness and liberty - both of which were, at least by mid-century, fundamentally associated with a notion of control, of the *limits* set to them - first by the excessive violence, the physical and sexual licence of the Danish raiders, and later by the introduction of an intrusive state and, especially, tax policy (the Danegeld).

In all these elements, then, the Danes seem to occupy the 'dark side' of Anglo-British history. In denying their presence, or at least the significance of their presence, in that history, eighteenth-century historians sought to protect their image of the civilised Anglo-British nation, and its history, from a people who seem to have been best represented as its Vandals:

The ravages of the Danes, in their plundering expeditions through the island, were so strongly impressed upon the feelings and fancies of our ancestors, that the memory of them has generally superseded all

³⁰⁶ See T. Salmon, *History of Great Britain*, p. 368, and Anon, *Canary-Birds Naturaliz'd in Utopia. A Canto* (London, [1709]), p. 7.

the other traditions of the island, and the chronicles of the vulgar refer almost every remarkable monument to the Danes.³⁰⁷

The common people, then, have been estranged from their own history (which of course possesses a particularly powerful relationship to the nation) by their experience of the Danish presence. This introduces the final, and for me the most significant element of any attempt to explain the purge of the Danes from the Anglo-British history, that is, their entanglement with the common people's historical imagination. This imagination must not only be trained to a proper understanding of the Anglo-British nation, with its peculiar rights and liberties (as I have argued in chapter one), but must be reformed away from a prior, and perverse, conception of history and nation. This is particularly the case because it would seem that the common people, the vulgar, have a peculiarly close relationship with the national history: like living fossils, or noble savages, they unconsciously display to polite society its definitely impolite origins, their supposed lack of reflection allowing an unmediated national character to shine through. It is for this reason that it is so easy to move between 'the feelings and fancies of our ancestors' and 'the chronicles of the vulgar': the two are almost the same objects.

Before I discuss this particular aspect of the common, vulgar or plebeian historical imagination, however, it will be necessary to attempt a brief outline of the more general position of that history within the elite historical endeavour. There can be little doubt that within the histories of the late-sixteenth to mid- or late-seventeenth centuries, the evidence of the vulgar was of great importance.

³⁰⁷ *History of Manchester*, Vol. 1, p. 236.

Camden's *Britannia* is certainly deeply indebted to his plebeian informants; meanwhile, it has been claimed that for Leland, and for other major English antiquaries, 'the "common voice" or "common fame": what almost everyone in the area agreed had happened in the past', was a form of oral evidence of great value.³⁰⁸ Moreover, it would seem that the search for the past of the 'Tudor and early Stuart antiquaries' can be seen as operating almost as a shared endeavour; at least, the account of one minor antiquarian of his labourer's discovery of a trove of Saxon coins

conveys gratitude and even a hint of admiration for the quick-wittedness of young Thomas Ryse, rather than a sort of "see-the-silly-cowherd" contempt one reads in an Anthony à Wood or a Thomas Hearne fifty or a hundred years later.³⁰⁹

However, the deterioration in social relations taking place from around the mid-seventeenth century on, alongside the proliferation of an apparently more reliable medium of information (print), allowed the depredation of oral, and thus of much vulgar history. In particular, it allowed the strictures of John Locke and other educationalists against letting the children of elite families hear the 'old wives' tales' peddled by their lower-class nurses, lest they be irrecoverably damaged by the phantoms raised in their minds during their tender years.³¹⁰ No

³⁰⁸ D. R. Woolf, 'The "Common Voice": History, Folklore And Oral Tradition In Early Modern England', *Past and Present*, 120 (1988), pp. 26-52; p. 30.

³⁰⁹ D. R. Woolf, 'Little Crosby and the Horizons of Early Modern Historical Culture' in D. R. Kelley and D. H. Sacks (eds), *The Historical Imagination in Early Modern Britain. History, Rhetoric, and Fiction, 1500-1800* (Cambridge etc., 1997), ch. 5, pp. 93-132; p. 118.

³¹⁰ A. Fox, "'Old Wives' Tales": Women And Oral Tradition In Early Modern England', Paper given at University of Warwick, 18/5/00. J. Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*

longer either necessary or desirable, the vulgar history could be left behind by elite historians, to be rediscovered and popularised only in the later eighteenth century as folklore. Thus Vicesimus Knox, in his *Essays Moral and Literary*, could assert that

The popular ballad ... is rescued from the hands of the vulgar, to obtain a place in the collection of the man of taste. Verses which a few years past were thought worthy the attention of children only, are now admired for that artless simplicity which once obtained the name of coarseness and vulgarity.³¹¹

Knox's attitude would seem to be a perfect representation of this rediscovery of popular culture, popular history, by the eighteenth century elite. The vulgar are both praised and stigmatised for their 'naturalness', their 'artless simplicity', which can, of course, only be appreciated 'in the collection of the man of taste'. No longer the possessors or producers of their own culture - for they cannot appreciate it - the vulgar are simply the carriers of a culture which must be 'rescued' from them, recorded and scrutinised by an elite above those petty traditions, and so able to understand them far better than the people who merely lived them.

If, by the mid- to late-eighteenth century, then, the vulgar could be seen more as historical objects than subjects, more as commodities than either producers or consumers within the cultural marketplace, and if this was the case

(1693) in J. L. Axtell (ed.), *The Educational Writings of John Locke* (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 109-325 (rpt. of 5th Edn., London, 1705): sections 138 and 191 (pp. 242-4 and pp. 302-3) especially.

at the same time as Whitaker and others sought to make them ‘good’ readers of the Anglo-British history, then it would seem of particular interest to explore the kind of history produced and consumed by common, vulgar, or plebeian readers. Such histories, though of course powerfully related to the oral tradition (it might reasonably suggested that all histories, even our contemporary logocentric texts, have their roots in an oral culture), certainly took place within a textual environment as well: these are the ‘Small Books and Pleasant Histories’ used by Margaret Spufford in her analysis of literacy in seventeenth-century England, variations of which Samuel Bamford recorded having read as a child some hundred and fifty years later:

numerous songs, ballads, tales, and other publications, with horrid and awful-looking woodcuts at the head...Every farthing I could scrape together, was now spent in purchasing “Histories of Jack the Giant Killer,” “Saint George and the Dragon,” “Tom Hickathrift,” “Jack and the Bean Stalk,” “History of the Seven Champions,” tale of “Fair Rosamond,” “History of Friar Bacon,” “Account of the Lancashire Witches,” “The Witches of the Woodlands,” and such like romances³¹²

³¹¹ V. Knox, *Essays Moral and Literary*, 2nd edn. (London, 1779), essay 47. Quoted in P. Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1996; revised rpt. of 1978 edition), p. 5.

³¹² S. Bamford, *The Autobiography of Samuel Bamford. Volume One. Early Days. Together With an Account of the Arrest, &C.*, ed. with an intro. by W. H. Chaloner (London, 1967; *Early Days* first published London, 1849). As will become clear, however, I do not agree with Spufford’s characterisation of these histories as ‘useless ... truly a pass-time ... and truly a relaxation ... not serv[ing] any other ends polemic or political’; *Small Books and Pleasant Histories*, p. 249.

Such reading was of crucial importance in maintaining literacy among vulgar readers through the eighteenth century, and was to powerfully impact upon the forms of writing they were to produce, in unprecedented numbers, in response to the French Revolution. In particular, the use of allegory, of fabulous tales, and of animal stories, bear the evident marking of this form of reading.³¹³

There is a huge quantity of this literature, the study of which has already produced several volumes by different historians interested in the popular historical imagination in the early modern period. Here, however, I wish to concentrate upon one particular popular history - to do otherwise would require an entirely different thesis to be written - one which does not feature on Bamford's list, but which was widely available in chapbook form throughout the eighteenth century. The consistent absence of the Danes from the remembered Anglo-British history makes their prominent presence in *The History Of Guy, Earl of Warwick* - originally a lengthy romance appealing to elite readers, but by the eighteenth century a drastically edited work primarily read by the vulgar and to children - an intriguing feature.³¹⁴ Guy's story can be summarised thus: the son of the Earl of Warwick's steward, Guy falls in love with Phillis, the Earl's daughter. She refuses him as 'but young and meanly born, and unfit for my degree' - but tells him to go off into the wide world, there to prove himself in

³¹³ See O. Smith, *The Politics of Language 1791-1819* (Oxford, 1984).

³¹⁴ There are numerous chapbook editions of this history: I have consulted Anon, *The History of Guy, Earl of Warwick*, I (London, [1750?]), II (Derby, 1796 - reprinted in *Guy of Warwick and Other Chapbook Romances*, ed. J. Simons [London, 1998]), and III (London, [1800?]); Anon, *The Famous History of Guy, Earl of Warwick* (Newcastle, [1800?], pp. 53-68); Anon, *The History of the Famous Exploits of Guy Earl of Warwick* ([London, 1720?] - not a chapbook, but a quarto edition); G. L., *The Noble and Renowned History of Guy Earl of Warwick* (London, 1706 - but not a chapbook, at 157 pp.); S. Smithson, *The Famous History of that Renowned Hero, Guy, Earl of Warwick. By Samuel Smithson* (York, [1750?]); and Anon, *The Famous History of Guy Earl of Warwick* (Newcastle, Printed in this present Year [1780?]).

great feats of bravery, which he inevitably does.³¹⁵ Eventually he returns to England, where he marries Phillis, whose father dies shortly after, leaving Guy his Earldom. Soon after this, however, Guy is struck with remorse for the sinful things he had done to prove himself to Phillis, and thus he goes a-wandering once more. He eventually returns home, anonymous and an old man, to an England

in great distress, the Danes having invaded the land...King Athenstone [*sic*] was forced to take refuge in his invincible city of Winchester

The Danes having intelligence of Athelstone's [*sic*] retreat to Winchester, drew all his forces thither, and seeing there was no way to win the city, they sent a summons to King Athelstone, desiring that an Englishman might combat with a Dane, and that side to lose the whole whose champion was defeated.³¹⁶

Guy, of course, steps forward, and enters into battle with the Danish champion, Colbron. Gradually he comes to dominate:

Colbron in his combat began to faint, and bid Guy sue for mercy at his hands and to leave fighting. No coward, said he, I'll have thy life With that he gave Colbron a mighty stroke ... the next blow brought him to the ground

³¹⁵ *The History of Guy* (London, [1750?]), p. 5.

³¹⁶ *The History of Guy* (Derby, 1796), p. 65.

After the conquest won by the English, the Danes all departed to their own country.³¹⁷

In fact, in at least one version of the story, Guy defeats the entire Danish army almost single-handed.³¹⁸ Shortly after this, he dies.

It should already be evident, then, that *Guy of Warwick*, a story about the amazing success of a little man, meanly-born (it is notable that the Guy of the chapbooks is rather more lowly than the Guy of the original romances, who had indeed been born of 'a Gentleman of *Northumberland* ... But the Arms of King *Edgar* prevailing ... *Guyraldus Cassibilanius* [Guy's father] ... lost his Estate'), may well also be seen as an example of a particular plebeian consciousness of history, a history different from the elite story, one both acutely aware of, and capable of repairing a particular experience of conquest and subordination in a way that the elite version simply could not realise.³¹⁹ This recognition can only be strengthened, however, when it is realised that the particular incident described in *Guy of Warwick* has a direct parallel in - can be seen as a re-writing of - that elite history. Echard, in his *History of England*, provides one of the fullest descriptions of the battle for the English crown between Canute and Edmund Ironside, who:

generously agreed, to prevent the Effusion of more Blood [there having been three battles between their respective armies already] ... to decide the Controversie by a single Combate between themselves.

³¹⁷ *The Famous History of Guy* (Newcastle, [1800?]), p. 24.

³¹⁸ *The History of the Famous Exploits of Guy* ([London, 1720?]), p. 21.

In which we are told, That their Darts and Lances on both Sides being broken, they fell furiously with their Swords upon each others most incomparable Armour, the resounding Noise of which struck the Ears of the Spectators with Terror, and their Eyes were dazled [*sic*] with the Flashes of Fire which flew from the Swords of these Heroes. At length the admirable Valour of *Edmund* prevail'd, whom *Canute* very strenuously resisted, but fearing the Success, he thus obligingly accosted his Adversary: *Young Man ... what Necessity is there for either of us to dye by the Sword, out of Ambition of Governing? Let us be Adoptive Brothers, and divide the Kingdom ...* With these Words, the generous Mind of the young King was mollify'd, and a Kiss of Peace was given on either Part

King *Edmund* did not long survive this DivisionBy his Death the *Danes* prevail'd, and the *Saxon* Monarchy in a great measure ended³²⁰

No wonder the popular histories of *Guy of Warwick* insisted upon the death of Colbron, despite his pleading. The weakness of Edmund Ironside, in this (doubtless apocryphal) tale of noble condescension and reconciliation, was responsible for the division of the only recently reunited Saxon England, and its subjection to a tyrannous foreign dynasty; *Guy of Warwick* seems to have allowed its readers to imagine a new ending to that story, one in which the Danish Yoke never had to be endured.

³¹⁹ *The Noble and Renowned History* (London, 1706), pp. 1-2. Note that Guy's father is named after Cassibelan, the leader of the British resistance to the Romans.

The plebeian celebration of the overthrow of the Danes and, as we have seen, this obsession with the Danes, was understood to be a particularly plebeian affair. The association of ‘almost every remarkable monument’ with the Danes, celebrations of Hocktide, commemorating the removal of the Danes from England can all thus be understood, perhaps, as part of the ‘Norman Yoke’ discourse.³²¹ Once again, then, the presence of the Danes within the Anglo-British history can be seen to possess a strangely dual character. On the one (elite) hand, the Danes are closely associated with a misguided plebeian history, and indeed with the plebeians themselves in their capacity as the violent, licentious mob that (recalling Defoe) is always liable to dissolve the nation in defence of lost rights and liberties. On the other (plebeian) hand, the coming of the Danes is to be understood as the introduction of a foreign tyranny, ‘who had loaded them with insupportable taxes, and made it their business not so much to govern as to plunder the nation’, a usurpation of rights and liberties appearing uncomfortably similar to the contemporary governing elite (not to mention their German king).³²²

This, united with the need asserted by Joseph Priestley for all, even ‘low mechanics and manufacturers’, to be involved and interested in the history and politics of the Anglo-British nation, and, most of all, with Adam Ferguson’s assertion that ‘When traditionary fables are rehearsed by the vulgar, they bear the

³²⁰ L. Echard, *The History of England*, p. 44.

³²¹ *History of Manchester*, Vol. 1, p. 236; on Hocktide, see T. Salmon, *The Chronological Historian* (London, 1733), p. 7. A. Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture*, also makes it quite clear that the Danes were a particularly important element of the plebeian historical imagination (or the ‘common voice’). As he points out, however, this should not be taken to demonstrate a true historical remainder from the time of the Danish invasions, but the result of a shift in elite historical discourse during the fifteenth century, when the arrival of the Tudors caused a re-writing of memorials of English victories over the Welsh. The Danes thus provided a fine replacement as chief whipping-boy in English history; though it should be noted that the original version of *Guy of Warwick* pre-dates this shift, thus complicating things somewhat.

marks of a national character', it is no surprise that the plebeian obsession with the Danes should be met with an elite incomprehension and doubt.³²³ Incapable of being aligned to, or incorporated within the elite history; implying either a corrupted plebeian historical imagination, or a discontent - however mediated - with the established order of the Anglo-British nation, the apparent disappearance of the Danes at the death of Hardicanute must remain, for the elite history, 'one of the most difficult passages in the English history ... altogether unaccountable.'³²⁴ That, or it must be simply exiled from the realm of true history - for, as Ferguson's quote continues, vulgar traditionary fables,

when made [into] the materials of poetry ... instruct the understanding, as well as engage the passions. It is only in the management of mere antiquaries, or stript of the ornaments which the laws of history forbid them to wear, that they become even unfit to amuse the fancy³²⁵

In other words, this form of plebeian history (and it is difficult to know whether there might be another sort of plebeian history) can only be understood through the exercise of the poetical imagination; its truth lies not in its content, but in its style, and the emotions it raises in the listener. Such an attitude can be seen as continuous with the project of cultural appropriation that came with the 'rediscovery' of popular culture, and indeed, with the assertion of the new form

³²² T. Mortimer, *New History of England*, p. 113.

³²³ Priestley, *Lectures on History*, p. xxxvi; A. Ferguson, *Essay on the History of Civil Society*, p. 76.

³²⁴ T. Mortimer, *New History of England*, fn to p. 113.

³²⁵ A. Ferguson, *Essay on the History of Civil Society*, p. 77.

of written historical time over a local, oral time that has ‘little sense of a relative past and either ... [does] not assign dates to events in their tradition or ... [forgets] large parts of the past; the transmitters of such traditions thereby “telescope” their own history’ in a manner that can now only be apprehended within the realm of fancy.³²⁶

In the process of this rediscovery, I would suggest that the plebeian history, and indeed the plebeian historian, were excised from the larger, more capacious prospects of elite history, and converted instead into objects or evidences within the new historical understanding; as examples to be displayed ‘in the collection of the man of taste’.³²⁷ This occurred not least because that plebeian history and historian did not sit well within the elite historical project that sought to define the imaginative terrain of the modern Anglo-British nation - a nation that necessarily included, at least within its self-representations, an ever wider societal spectrum.³²⁸

In imagining Britain, then, eighteenth-century readers and writers of history sought to apply the new evidential, temporal, and stylistic discoveries of the ‘historical revolution’ - which, as I have sought to display, should be understood less as the coming to rationality of a discipline than as the inevitable realignment of a genre of writing within a society undergoing an economic and cultural revolution - to a body of ideas or figures through which the Anglo-British history could be explored, expressed, and made useful to individuals

³²⁶ D. R. Woolf, ‘The “Common Voice”’, p. 31. Similar points are made by A. Fox, in *Oral and Literate Culture*, and indeed by most commentators on oral historiography.

³²⁷ P. Burke, *Popular Culture*, p. 5, quoting Knox.

³²⁸ This process of appropriation would seem to be similar to that described by Carolyn Steedman (in parentheses, to display the very danger of such processes), in ‘About ends’, p. 107: ‘The relationship between the story-taker and the informant was never one of equity; and there is the

seeking to articulate their place in the nation. In the process, women and the common people - the physical and economic reproducers of the nation, and the bearers (whether conscious or not) of the meaning of that nation - were re-imagined within historical discourse, the disruptive elements of their representations being worried at, debated, and idealised out of existence in order to produce relatively secure evidences for the historically correct modern nation.

Alongside this there is a curious feature that begins to develop within history: history starts to be something that happens to other people. The reader and writer of history may well exist within history; but that history no longer impinges upon their own experience except as material to be used in supporting, explaining, and enlivening that experience. If this experience of history-writing was capable of producing a nation, that nation cannot be understood as anything but one created by an elite - the readers and writers of other people's history - seeking to legitimate their social, political and economic positions through the projection of a united community that can, however, only be imagined through the exploitation of others.

I have described elsewhere the importance of two distinct views of the past to the changing nature of history-writing in the eighteenth century.³²⁹ One, perhaps best explored by John Barrell in his work on painting and the public, is the broad, general view best gained (as Catherine Morland instinctively understood) 'from the top of an high hill'.³³⁰ Such a view, consciously

unheeded cry that they will not only take your labour and your life, but even take your story too. The Story-taker is the appropriator.'

³²⁹ M. Adams, 'A View of the Past'.

³³⁰ J. Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt. 'The Body of the Public'* (New Haven and London, 1986); 'The Public Prospect and the Private View: The Politics of Taste in Eighteenth-Century Britain', ch. 3 in *The Birth of Pandora and the Division of Knowledge* (London, 1992). J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, p. 71.

understood by eighteenth-century theorists to be analogous to, and to guarantee, comprehensive political vision, enabled the viewer to perceive the general relationships between particular objects while converting those objects (which often were, of course, people) into mere figures in the landscape whose lack of individuation matched their lack of political consequence and perception.

The second, discussed again by Barrell, but also more generally by Vic Gatrell and G. J. Barker-Benfield, is that of the more sentimental scene, in which a particular scene of distress produces a sympathetic response in its viewer.³³¹ This view, described by Adam Smith in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, was to explain the gentle virtues of sociability which Smith understood to have been ushered into the modern world along with the division of labour and the development of imaginary wants.³³² Such a view would appear to be in direct opposition to the aforementioned broad, general view of the civic humanists examined by Barrell; however, it becomes clear on closer examination that there are, in fact, structural similarities between the two views. Though the second is undoubtedly available to more people than the first, like that first view it does *not* require any identification with the object being viewed; that such an object provokes pity, anger, sorrow or delight in the viewer is no sign that such emotions are present in the object viewed. Indeed, the insensibility of many such objects to their own plight is precisely one of the impulses behind the provocation and expression of sympathy.

These views, I would suggest (as Mark Salber Phillips has in *Society and Sentiment*), are the two major views of the past available to the eighteenth-

³³¹ V. Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree*; G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*.

century historian. What is significant to note here is that neither view requires - in fact, one view might be seen to actively prevent - identification between viewer and object, between historian and source. Both views, moreover, have built into them the exclusion of large swathes of the British population from the position of the observer. These histories might enable their elite readers and writers to construct or experience their own sense of self through the viewing of other's experiences and beliefs, but they neither facilitate an identification with those others, nor allow for either a reciprocal viewing or the adoption of the privileged viewpoint by those outside the charmed circle of sensible bodies.

This obviously has profound implications, both for the 'imagined community' of the British and for the discipline and genre of history itself. Within these systems of thought, it appears impossible to understand others as being more or less the same as yourself - making them dramatically incompatible with the structure of feeling which Benedict Anderson has described. If, as I have claimed, the 'imagined community' is a *necessarily* utopian construct, gaining its legitimacy from its capacity to mediate between individual and communal identifications *without apparent loss*, then the failure to achieve that aim - indeed, the *disavowal of that aim* as impractical, a disavowal which seems to underpin the theses of historians such as Linda Colley, who seek to demonstrate the existence of a pragmatic loyalism dressed up in the language of the 'imagined community' - must throw that entire project into doubt. The people who made and were made by the discourses of civic humanism and of sensibility were not able to imagine themselves to be the same as those figures -

³³² A. Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie eds (Oxford, 1976 - first published 1759).

women, the mob - which their political vision used to establish the meaning of their national community. It is this fault-line in the 'imagined community' supposed to have developed in the eighteenth century that the second half of this thesis will go on to explore; using the themes and figures developed in the first part of my thesis, I will examine two further sites of identity-construction and contestation, before seeking to conclude with that great site of conflagration, both discursive and political: the French Revolution.

5 - A New Vision of the Nation? The Population Debate, 1753-1801.

In March 1753, a Bill was introduced into Parliament to establish an annual census in Great Britain. To be administered by the Overseers of the Poor in each parish, it would, had it passed, have provided Britain (and British historians) with information on demography bettered only by Sweden.³³³ To its supporters, such a Bill seemed essential to enable Parliament to properly formulate policy on issues such as the raising of an army and organisation of the militia, migration (both internal and external), naturalisation, the burden of the poor, and the Scottish question (in particular, the entry of Scots into the French army).

Its opponents, on the other hand, saw this apparently inoffensive attempt to provide government with the information required to make good policy as ‘totally subversive of the last remains of English liberty’:

An annual register of our people, will acquaint our enemies abroad with our weakness, and a return of the poor's rate, our enemies at home with our wealth. Our enemies abroad are the Spaniards and the French, and our enemies at home are place-men and tax-masters

To what end then should our number be known, except we are to be pressed into the fleet and the army, or transplanted like felons to the plantations abroad? And what purpose will it answer to know where

³³³ D. V. Glass, *Numbering the People. The Eighteenth-Century Population Controversy and the Development of Census and Vital Statistics in Britain* (London, 1973), p. 13, p. 20. Sweden's demographic statistics began in the 1740s, and produced, by the 1760s, ‘the outstanding demographic statistics of the eighteenth century’, p. 13.

the kingdom is crowded, and where it is thin, except as we are to be driven from place to place as graziers do their cattle?³³⁴

A census, according to this view, could thus only be understood as part of an attempt to extend state power over the subject; and though, of course, the usual comparison of British liberties to French slavery and wooden shoes was made, in fact, a better example of the likely outcome of such a Bill could be easily found within English history:

if a young woman should refuse to answer any question concerning her sex or age, which may be wantonly put, the overseer or constable, for ought that appears, may examine her, as the officers of *Richard the Second* did the young women, in a similar case; and if she resists such examination, she will, besides the insult and abuse, incur a penalty, for opposing the king's officers in the execution of their office.³³⁵

The census, then, according to its opponents, would not only be an extension of state power over the political rights and liberties of the subject, but the intrusion of that power into their homes, an intrusion explicitly understood as a sexual assault similar to that supposed to be responsible for the Peasant's Revolt in 1381. And if this example described the exorbitance of Parliament's attempt upon popular liberty, it also described the likely outcome of its success: anarchy

³³⁴ *The Parliamentary History of England*, Vol. XIV (1747-53), pp. 1319-20.

³³⁵ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Nov. 1753, p. 551.

and the mob, a mob which, like that found in *The True-Born Englishman*, is endowed with legitimate complaint in the face of this tyrannical imposition.

In fact, though the Bill passed all three readings in the Commons, it was to fall in the Lords, and was not re-introduced. A second Bill was introduced in 1758, though with a rather less impressive mandate; it too failed, however, and the matter was not raised again in Parliament until November 1800, when a census Bill succeeded in passing unopposed, leading to the first British census in 1801.

There are two major issues raised by this brief recital of events. First, and most obvious, is the question of how both parliament and public opinion came to abandon this passionate opposition to the counting of the people, particularly given the lack of further discussion of the matter within parliament, in a period generally represented as one of stagnation in the development of political arithmetic and statistics.³³⁶ Secondly, and more significantly for a discussion of national identity, how did the desire to enumerate the population affect attitudes towards, and the vision of, 'the people'?

In fact, as Julian Hoppit has recently asserted, there was no dearth of statistical exploration into many areas, ranging far beyond the usual limits ascribed to eighteenth-century political arithmetic ('estimates of national income and population'). Eighteenth-century political arithmeticians were able and willing to 'explore public finances, economic performance, poor relief, military matters, religious affiliation, social order, and so on.'³³⁷ More significantly, within the specific realm of enquiries into the size of the national population, the

³³⁶ Glass, *Numbering the People*, p. 11; M. J. Cullen, *The Statistical Movement in Early Victorian Britain. The Foundations of Empirical Social Research* (New York, 1975), pp. 7-8.

Bills introduced in 1753 and 1800 can be seen to frame a lengthy debate, conducted out of doors, over not only the size, but also, crucially, the trend of population in England and Britain, a debate which flourished in the absence of hard facts ensured by the failure of the 1753 Bill. In exploring the contexts of the two Bills, then, I shall also be describing the inauguration and termination of that debate, the *mentalités* structuring the debate as well as the process of change which that debate, at least in part, enabled.

The first point to note is the atypical context of the 1753 Bill. Introduced at the same time as the Jewish Naturalisation Bill and the Clandestine Marriage Act, this Bill would seem to form part of an overall approach aiming to manipulate the British population from the centre, an approach which possesses a continuity with earlier mercantilist arguments, mentioned in my discussion of Defoe, about the value of ‘populousness’, and the need to ensure the maintenance of a population large enough to maintain economic growth. This is not to claim that these three Bills existed as a coherent whole; certainly, the Clandestine Marriage Act could hardly be described as a means to promote populousness, and indeed was frequently represented as a direct threat to it, however necessary it might be to ensure familial stability:

Much may be, and much has been, said both for and against this innovation upon our antient laws and constitution. On the one hand, it prevents the clandestine marriage of minors, which are often a terrible inconvenience to those private families wherein they happen.

³³⁷ J. Hoppit, ‘Political arithmetic in eighteenth-century England’, *Economic History Review*, 49 (1996), pp. 516-40; p. 517.

On the other hand, restraints upon marriages, especially among the lower class, are evidently detrimental to the public, by hindering the encrease of people³³⁸

Rather, it is the relatively direct manipulation of the population by government that should be focussed upon here, and that can be seen to link the process of information-gathering that the Census bill represented, with the processes of centralisation and direct control represented by the Marriage Act and the Jewish Naturalisation Bill; a linkage that can be seen to underpin opposition to the Census Bill. As yet, there does not seem to be a developed sense of the population as something that may be affected indirectly, as well as directly; it seems to remain a collection of bodies, rather than an abstracted society whose desires may be influenced, rather than having their bodies coerced.

It is this sense of the linkage between political arithmetic as a form of knowledge, and the application of a centralised power that Peter Buck suggests was lost during the second half of the eighteenth century.³³⁹ Political arithmetic, from its inception in the mid-seventeenth century, had been consistently associated (by both its defenders and detractors) with an increase in the power of central government to form policy and, especially, to tax the population (an association perhaps best supported by the development of customs and excise into the most efficient, extensive and modern arm of the eighteenth-century state). It is Buck's argument, however, that from the 1750s onwards political arithmetic fell out of the hands of the state, and into the possession of private

³³⁸ W. Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (Oxford, 1770 - first published 1765-9), 4 vols., I, p. 438.

individuals, operating within the public sphere. In the process, political arithmetic, and the kind of knowledge it generated, not only became the pursuit of a wider, more inclusive group, but 'what had been a scientific prospectus for the exercise of state power became a program for reversing the growth of government and reducing its influence on English social and economic life.'³⁴⁰

Buck's argument is, of course, somewhat overdrawn in its insistence upon the 1750s as a changing point; it also tends to neglect the conflicting views of the various dabblers in political arithmetic after 1753, and fails to address the fundamentally inadequate evidence upon which the debate on population is built, even though half the debate is spent, in fact, arguing over how to interpret admittedly dubious evidence.³⁴¹ There certainly was not unity among the gentlemanly arithmeticians over either the correct method of, or the results gained by, political arithmetic; but what it is important to take from Buck's account is precisely the extent to which political arithmetic became an arena in which different factions within a critical public, and not the state, were able to debate the current state of society, its tendencies, and the correct approach to adopt in future.

A further element distinguishing the population debate, and indeed the Act of 1800, from the 1753 Bill, was the consistent presence of war. The first stage of the debate began in the shadow-boxing that preceded the Seven Years War, and continued in the awareness of the British failures with which that war began. The second stage of the debate was powerfully affected by both the

³³⁹ P. Buck, 'People Who Counted: Political Arithmetic in the Eighteenth Century', *Isis*, 73 (1982), pp. 28-45.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 28.

American War of Independence, and the French Revolutionary Wars. In both stages of the debate, arguments over the wisdom (and indeed, the patriotism) of those seeking to establish the size and tendency of the population - thus potentially giving away important information to the enemy as to the British capacity to wage war - were common. And by the time of the 1800 Bill, as Linda Colley has pointed out, Britain had been so hard-pressed by war as to have 'no choice but to make the shift from seeking quality support at home to seeking it in quantity'. Thus Parliament passed not only the Census Bill, but also the Defence of the Realm Act of 1798, 'repeated in 1803...the most ambitious and precise taxonomy of its people compiled since the Domesday Book.'³⁴² It would seem that a census, in 1800, after the French Revolution, the rise of Napoleon and of an unprecedented domestic radicalism, had lost some of its terrors for the British elites. They had, after all, already suspended *Habeas Corpus* - that great centrepiece of British liberty - in an attempt to control the aforementioned radicalism. To take a census must have seemed pretty small beer by comparison.

Yet if changing political circumstances rendered a census less objectionable - indeed, made opposition to a census appear trivial - such circumstances cannot be allowed to belittle the significance of the debate that preceded them, and the changes which that debate wrought upon attitudes towards political arithmetic. No longer was the debate over liberty conducted between those for, and those against, the centralised collecting of vital statistics. Rather, by 1800, both sides sought improved evidence as to the true state of the nation, both sides sought to prove their arguments through the deployment of

³⁴¹ Thus reference is made, in the debates on the 1753 Bill, to 'the curiosity of those gentlemen who love to deal in political arithmetic', suggesting that the separation of political arithmetic from

arguments based not upon abstract political premises, but abstracted statistical information. Moreover, it would appear that the British population itself was somewhat less concerned at the collection of information that potentially left them open to yet further taxation than previously. Thus, despite the geographically variable effectiveness of the government's enquiries, and the common reporting of opposition to Westminster, Colley does not report any opposition quite so forceful as that which faced William Wales only twenty years before:

My friends, in some parts of the country, were assailed, not only with persuasions, but by threatenings of every kind; such as loss of employment, prosecutions, and even blows In a large manufacturing town, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, I was beset by a crowd of women, who had taken an alarm from the nature of my inquiries, and perhaps, escaped, the fate of *Orpheus*, by whispering [to] one of the good women, who had set upon us, that his Majesty might possibly settle small annuities on every poor man and his wife, who brought up a certain number of children, to be useful members of society.³⁴³

state control was already underway by that point, *Parliamentary History of England*, p. 1330.

³⁴² L. Colley, *Britons*, p. 289.

³⁴³ *Ibid*, pp. 289-300; W. Wales, *An Inquiry into the Present State of Population in England and Wales* (London, 1781), pp. 7-8, reprinted in D. V. Glass (ed.), *The Population Controversy. A Collective Reprint of Material Concerning the 18th Century Controversy on the Trend of Population in England and Wales* (London, 1973). Orpheus was torn limb from limb by the Maenads, and his head thrown into the river Hebrus.

To explain this change, implicating both those at the political centre and the margins, it will be necessary to make a closer examination of the population debate which took place between the Census Bills, relating it to broader changes taking place in British society in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Beginnings.

The opening salvoes of the population debate were, with a single exception, published within the pages of the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* in the period 1755-8, and can be seen to mark both a continuation of, and divergence from, earlier discussions of populousness. Previous accounts had shown themselves to be as interested in the old argument as to the relative achievements (in population as much as in culture) of the ancients and moderns, as with obtaining accurate information on the current size and tendency of the British population. Certainly, it was this argument that lay behind David Hume's well-known foray into the field, his *Essay Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations* (1752), as it was for Robert Wallace's *Dissertation on the Numbers of Mankind* (1753).³⁴⁴ Other accounts, such as Corbyn Morris's *Observations* (1751), tended to focus more upon the particular experience of a single locality

³⁴⁴ D. Hume, 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations' (first published 1752) in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, vol. 1, pp. 381-443; [R. Wallace], *A Dissertation on the Numbers of Mankind in Antient and Modern Times: in Which the Superior Populousness of Antiquity is Maintained* (Edinburgh, 1753).

(most often, as in Morris's case, London, where the Bills of Mortality provided valuable statistical information, more easily tapped than other sources).³⁴⁵

The three letters of William Brakenridge which began the debate to be examined here, however, show both the reliance of this debate upon what had gone before, and its tendency to move beyond earlier discussions.³⁴⁶ Thus, though Brakenridge's first letter is particularly interested in the population of London, and its apparent decrease since 1743, in his second he sought to establish the size, both actual and ideal, of the English population 'either by the number of *Houses*, or the quantity of *Bread* consumed', while in his third he moved on to consider its tendency to increase or decrease.³⁴⁷

Brakenridge's arguments, in progressing from the relatively good evidence he found for London, to an estimation both of the size and tendency of the English population from the distinctly less useful evidence of consumption and of houses, opened the ground for the further discussion of the national population on the basis of those extremely poor evidences. These could be backed up by the philosophical commonplaces of either a Humean commercial modernism, or the increasingly vitiated discourse of civic humanism. For, though Brakenridge was immediately answered, and taken to task for the limitations of his evidence and arguments, the debate which he began had more

³⁴⁵ The Author of a Letter from a Bystander [C. Morris], *Observations on the Past Growth and Present State of the City of London*, (London, 1751).

³⁴⁶ W. Brakenridge, 'A Letter ... concerning the Number of Inhabitants within the London Bills of Mortality' (1), 'A Letter ... concerning the Number of People in England ...' (2), and 'A Letter ... concerning the present Increase of the People in Britain and Ireland ...' (3), *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, 48, II (1755), pp. 788-800 (1), 49, I (1756), pp. 268-85 (2), and 49, II (1756), pp. 877-90 (3), reprinted in Glass, *The Population Controversy*.

³⁴⁷ Brakenridge (2), p. 269.

to do with political beliefs, with particular views of the nature of society, than with the careful representation of that society; and so it would remain.³⁴⁸

These arguments, then, were derived from earlier discussions - the disagreement between Hume and Wallace, for example, provided a classic exposition of the arguments to be mobilised by Brakenridge and his opponents - but were now deployed in an arena, a form of enquiry, associated with a different, a more scientific, approach to truth than that represented by the rhetoric of the polite essay. The tensions resulting from this shift in the generic site of these arguments were to remain a significant feature throughout, allowing us to perceive this as, in part, a debate about the correct usage of political arithmetic, and the correct approach to truth; as being involved in a similar process of development as that I have outlined for historiography.

This perhaps points to the significance of the debate having been conducted under the aegis of the Royal Society, a body closely associated with the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century, and particularly with the use of inductive reasoning. According to Richard Forster,

For a century now past, the English way of philosophising (and all the rest of the world is come into it) is not to sit down in one's study, and form an hypothesis, and then strive to wrest all nature to it; but to

³⁴⁸ R. Forster, 'An Extract of the Register of the parish of Great Shefford, near Lamborne, in Berkshire, for Ten Years', and 'A Letter ... concerning the Number of the People of England', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, 50, I (1757), pp. 356-63 and pp. 457-65; [G. Burrington], *An Answer to the Rev. Dr. William Brakenridge's Letter, &c.* (London, 1757); all reprinted in Glass, *The Population Controversy*.

look abroad into the world, and see how nature works; and then to build upon certain matter of fact.³⁴⁹

This he contrasted to Brakenridge's improper method, thus engaging him in a subtle and careful contest over the grounds of the debate between himself and Brakenridge. Siting himself within an English tradition of philosophical enquiry, one which he contrasted with the Cartesian (and thus implicitly the French) method, Forster sought to call to the aid of his argument both the great philosophers of that tradition, Bacon, Newton and Locke, and the tradition of the journal in which he wrote. Moreover, he threw into question the very political discourse with which Brakenridge's arguments were associated, that of an English patriotism which rejected the political, economic, and moral corruption associated with Robert Walpole's premiership, and with the regimes which succeeded him.³⁵⁰

Brakenridge's arguments were, essentially, derived from the same stock as those notoriously employed by Dr. John 'Estimate' Brown, and explored by Gerald Newman in *The Rise of English Nationalism*, arguments based in an opposition to luxury and excessive commerce.³⁵¹ This commerce was associated with an elite cosmopolitanism (or, more simply, Francophilia - for France was generally held to be the leading nation for cosmopolitan *politesse*) which worked against the interests of the nation. Unnerved by the early conduct of the Seven Years War, and especially by the loss of Minorca to the French, Brown's

³⁴⁹ Forster, p. 461.

³⁵⁰ See I. Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and His Circle. The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1968).

³⁵¹ G. Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism*; J. Brown, *An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times. By the Author of Essays on the Characteristics, &c.* (London, 1757).

jeremiad predicted the end of British power, liberty, and prosperity under the influence of “a *vain, luxurious and selfish* EFFEMINACY” which permeated ‘the Manners and Principles of those who *lead*’.³⁵² Behind this extravagant denunciation of the British elite, Newman suggests, there lay both a critique of the British elites and their abandonment of political responsibility, and the seeds of an English nationalism that sought to reject both the frenchified elites and the French cultural project itself.

Brakenridge’s letters in the *Philosophical Transactions*, written at the same conjuncture as the *Estimate*, clearly operate within a similar register as that of Brown. Though more willing to accuse ‘the lower people’ of causing the depopulation of London as a result of their ‘vicious custom ... of drinking spirituous liquors’, than Brown (who perceived the manners of the ‘People’ to be ‘in general much more irreproachable than their Superiors’), other factors behind London’s decline were seen to be ‘the *fashionable* humour of living single’ and an ‘increase of trade in the northern parts of Britain’.³⁵³

It was in his account of the size and tendency of the British population, however, that Brakenridge’s opposition to an excessive commerce became clearest:

to account for the cause of the want of increase in our British Isles, it seems to be chiefly owing to three things, that operate together. The fashionable humour that greatly prevails, by which above one-third of our people in England above twenty-one years of age are single,

³⁵² Brown, *Estimate*, p. 29, p. 25.

³⁵³ Brakenridge (1), p. 798. My emphasis.

occasioned by a variety of circumstances; and to our wars and commerce at Sea, which are rather beyond our natural strength, by destroying more of our people than can well be spared ... and lastly, to the use of spirituous liquors³⁵⁴

Thus, not only are the British to be blamed for their excessive consumption of liquor, and their unnatural desire to remain single, but the very system of war and (particularly) commerce, pursued with such success by the British for the previous fifty years, is to be seen as responsible for their decline. Then, as the final guarantee of his argument, he gestures to the political arithmeticians who preceded him, and upon whom, he insists, his work depends:

I reasoned, and made my calculation, upon the same principles with Sir William Petty, Mr. Graunt, and other approved Authors. From a continued increase in the Bills they inferred, that there must be a proportional increase of inhabitants; and I from the continued decrease in them, in the same circumstances, have endeavoured to prove a similar decrease of people. If their reasoning is just, mine cannot be false.³⁵⁵

Thus we can begin to fully understand Forster's attempt to claim the higher philosophical ground. Brakenridge, he suggests, for all his quotation of illustrious predecessors (indeed, partly because of that very quotation), has

³⁵⁴ Brakenridge (3), p. 886.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 890.

missed their method and, in doing so, has not only placed political argument above true representation, but has abandoned the true *English* method of philosophy. Thus we can understand this conflict over philosophical method to also be one over national identity, empirical method being the peculiar possession of an Englishman.

It has become something of a commonplace to contrast the Anglo-American and Continental traditions of thought in both philosophy and history, a contrast which, though rarely free of national chauvinism, point-scoring, and an attempt to constrict the discipline, nevertheless has some purchase upon what appears to be a genuine cultural difference between these two traditions. Taking his inspiration from this contrast, particularly as discussed by E. P. Thompson in his essay, 'The Peculiarities of the English', Anthony Easthope argued in *Englishness and National Culture* that 'in addition to all the well-known practices and institutions securing what Freud refers to as the "rational" interests of members of a nation, and in addition to all the more evident objects of national identification ... what at a less conscious level incites identification with nation is a particular and distinct discursive formation.'³⁵⁶ And in the case of the English, he argued, that discursive formation is empiricism: the very philosophical method over which Brakenridge and Forster fought in this exchange. Thus Brakenridge's English patriotism, the patriotism lying at the heart of Newman's account of *The Rise of English Nationalism*, sought to make political arithmetic over into a vehicle for its arguments. In doing so, however, he came up against the opposition of Forster's political arithmetic, which, in seeking to provide a methodologically sound understanding (and defence) of

modern society, contributed to the development of a discursive formation that was to prove crucial to the development of modern English identity. These two approaches therefore possessed similar contents, but laid most stress upon different aspects of them, and so sought to orient them in entirely different directions.

In fact, of course, the situation was rather more complex than this brief (though already complex) account suggests, not least because of the weaknesses and blind-spots of Easthope's argument. Apart from the seemingly inescapable (though still somewhat peculiar) nostalgia for a lost Englishness that infects his otherwise impeccably critical text, perhaps the most significant failing in Easthope's argument is his refusal to discuss the seemingly obvious problem that a significant portion of the English canon of empiricists were actually Scottish.³⁵⁷ This problem, though obviously always a potential embarrassment in discussions of Anglo-British national identity, is particularly acute, however, in that the development of political economy out of political arithmetic (which Thompson, in 'The Peculiarities of the English', had seen as one of the most significant contributions of the empirical tradition to eighteenth-century thought) was one definite fruit of the *Scottish* Enlightenment.³⁵⁸ In discussing the development of political arithmetic and political economy in the context of a politically charged argument over truth, then, it is simply not appropriate to understand the debate to

³⁵⁶ A. Easthope, *Englishness and National Culture* (London and New York, 1999), p. 18.

³⁵⁷ Thus Easthope claims that 'to become an imperial power, a nation must sacrifice part of its national particularity. This is what happened when the idea of 'Britain' became promoted as a more general name to include the other nations subjected by the colonising power of England - something of Englishness had to be given up', before going on to make the seemingly unprovable assertion that 'Under the conditions of modernity people need a national identity and so a desirable side-effect of my analysis here will be to isolate and retrieve aspects of a specifically English identity' (p. 27).

³⁵⁸ Thompson, 'The Peculiarities of the English', p.272: 'Bacon had expelled God from the natural sciences. Adam Smith expelled him from economic theory.'

be one between two different visions of Englishness, two forms of English patriotism. Instead, we must recognise the extent to which at least one side of the debate was involved in a dialogue between Scottish and English sensibilities. Moreover, we must further recognise, unlike Easthope, that empiricism cannot be understood to be somehow non-hegemonic simply because it appears to be so pervasive within the English and British nations; rather, we must see it to have arisen out of arguments over the nature of truth that were, in fact, absolutely saturated with political discourse and, indeed, the actual exercise of power.

To begin to understand this, it is perhaps useful to recall Colin Kidd's argument, in *Subverting Scotland's Past*: that in the years after the Act of Union, the previously powerful body of Scottish whig historiography became increasingly difficult to maintain under the pressure of an English whig historiography hostile both to Scottish claims of national independence and to the violence underlying the Scottish whig tradition. Thus the great Scottish historians and philosophers of the eighteenth century came to abandon 'Scotland's meaningless past' in favour of:

the *History of England*, not only because a properly British history would have been more burdensome, technically difficult and awkward to structure, but because it would not have served as a more comprehensive explanation of modern British society than the history of England.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁹ C. Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past*, p. 211, p. 210. Kidd is talking particularly of Hume here, but his point applies more generally.

In the process, the Scottish contribution to the national history became, not one of facts or evidences, which could (and should) all be culled from the more developed English history and social, political and economic structures, but one of scientific rigour: 'English history became the basis of British identity, but subject to a "quality control" check from Scotland's sophisticated literati.'³⁶⁰

And as that 'quality control' became understood not as the product of a particular cultural background, but a neutral, transparent necessity for philosophical and historical work, so it became absorbed into *English* national culture, its Scottish genealogy largely forgotten.

There remains one final twist to this discussion, however. It was not only the importance of the Scottish element to the construction of English empiricism that was forgotten, or at least elided, in the naturalising of that empiricism into a national discourse; it was also the Scottish account of the source and nature of English liberty. For, as interested in English history as writers such as Hume and William Robertson undoubtedly were, they did not see in that history the prescriptive bundle of rules by which English liberty might be recognised and maintained, but the process through which that liberty - a liberty understood to be based in the prosperity and culture of English commercial society - had evolved. They took this attitude, because they sought to participate in that liberty, to bring a backward Scottish economy and society into the possession of commercial prosperity and culture. They were thus less interested in exploring the particularity of the English experience (particularity being less than helpful to a society seeking to emulate another), than in discovering the general principles

³⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 212.

that might allow all human beings (necessarily considered to possess a universal human nature) to achieve that liberty.

As Kidd has argued, the eighteenth century saw the abandonment by Scottish historians of the notion of an ancient Scottish constitution, in favour of a philosophical history capable of attaining generalisable knowledge. English historians, however, remained able to discuss the ancient English constitution, with only the occasional nod to developments in historiography, for a good century more; indeed, within the nationalist history, it would be arguable as to whether such a perspective has yet been wholly abandoned. Liberty, for many English historians, thus remained to a certain extent the property of their national history, rather than the product of a fortuitous historical process. The development of political economy, and the empiricist approach to truth, was not therefore necessarily disruptive of a previous understanding of the nation as dependent upon a prescriptive historical origin.

All of this has carried me a long way from the debate between Brakenridge and Forster, which must, of course, be considered as wholly innocent of the further development of the argument over population; it is only in so far as their debate implies further developments that my digression is legitimate. Brakenridge initiated the debate with an attempt to understand the apparent decline of the population first of London, then of England, in terms of a failure of virtue and the spread of luxury and a vicious commerce. Forster's response, based upon a calculation of the number of people required to cultivate an acre of 'good' land, and an assumption that one third of the English population was located in towns, and *not* involved in agriculture, moves away from previous approaches to population when he insists 'that we should not

measure the happiness of the nation by the number of mouths, but by the number of hands', and questions Brakenridge's apparent belief 'That our commerce at sea is one cause of the decay of our fencible men: which sounds in my ear like saying, that if we had less trade, we should have more people.'³⁶¹ The contrast becomes clearer in the final letter in this exchange, Brakenridge's fourth, where he insists that though:

trade increases riches, and gives more of the conveniencies of life, and brings luxury along with it ... it does not necessarily breed people: For we see in those countries where they have little trade, the people increase much faster than they do with us³⁶²

Forster drew up a reply to this last letter of Brakenridge, but it was not published, the Royal Society choosing to end the correspondence on the subject.³⁶³ The reasons for this are uncertain, though Forster evidently did not consider them entirely innocent: in his letters to Birch (the Secretary of the Royal Society), Forster questioned not only 'How it came to be kept so long ... I wish I

³⁶¹ Forster, p. 360, p. 463, p. 464. E. A. Wrigley, *People, Cities and Wealth. The Transformation of Traditional Society* (London, 1987), Table 7.2, p. 162, estimates the urban population of England to be 21% of the total c. 1750, and 27.5% in 1801. At this point, it would also seem worth pointing out that for all Brakenridge's carelessness with evidence and argument, his pessimistic account of the English population - which he fixes 'at six millions, or rather less' (Brakenridge, [2], p. 275) - would seem to be closer to the truth than Forster's guess of '8,556,252' (Forster, p. 360); at least, in Schofield's recent estimates for English population growth in the eighteenth century, the figure given for 1756 was 5,993,415; not until 1801 did the English population reach Forster's figure. R. Schofield, 'British population change, 1700-1871' in *The Economic History of Britain Since 1700. Second Edition. Vol. 1: 1700-1860*, R. Floud and D. McCloskey eds (Cambridge, 1994 - first edn. 1981), pp. 60-95; p. 64.

³⁶² W. Brakenridge, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, 50, I, 1758, pp. 465-79 (4), reprinted in Glass, *The Population Controversy*; p. 477.

³⁶³ Glass, *Numbering the People*, p. 51.

cou'd reconcile this with Philosophical Justice & Impartiality', but also the standards of accuracy and understanding represented by the *Transactions*:

If you were equally carefull [*sic.*] in ye publication of all your papers
It wou'd be more for your Honour. Be so good to present my
Respects to your Committee, & tell them I desire They wou'd appoint
one of their Number (an Englishman) to attend to ye Sense only.

The first Sentence of No. XX. of your last Publication p. 179
wanted such Inspection. I have consider'd it over & over. And to me
it appears stark nonsense.³⁶⁴

Forster's irritation at the apparent failings, and implied partiality of the *Philosophical Transactions* would be echoed some twenty years later by another, later participant in the population debate, William Wales: 'It is, in a great measure, become lately a *genteel* Society, rather than a *learned* one. No man of learning has lately had any chance of admission, unless he was at the same time a man of fortune; and these two Qualifications come but too seldom together.'³⁶⁵

This returns us to Buck's argument about the increasingly private, and gentlemanly nature of political arithmetic in the second half of the eighteenth century. So private, so genteel had this arena in fact become, these letters suggest, that the very institutions devised to support the enquiries of political arithmetic seemed no longer capable of doing so. Certainly, the *Philosophical Transactions* were to play little further part in the development of the population

³⁶⁴ Forster's letter to Thomas Birch, 4/12/1760, reprinted in Glass, *Numbering the People*, p. 88.

debate (though interestingly enough, Price was to begin his championing of the pessimistic view of the English population there, before moving into the wider sphere of the pamphlet-reading public). Instead, contributors to the debate after 1760 followed the lead of *An Answer to the Rev. Dr. William Brakenridge's Letter*, which sought to dispel Brakenridge's 'melancholy Dream' before 'the Public, desiring the respectable Corps of Reviewers, Critical-Reviewers, Magazine and Literary Magazine-Writers, to give their Opinion, either for the Doctor or me, as seemest best to their profound unerring Judgment.'³⁶⁶

In other words, as a (perhaps not untypical) result of the increasingly private nature of enquiries into political arithmetic, contributors to the debate increasingly sought to address themselves to a wider 'Public', a public here explicitly defined as the literary and critical public still very much in the process of formation. Clearly, writers on the subject of population had long sought to place their arguments before such a public: Hume and Wallace, but also William Bell and William Temple had certainly applied to an extensive literary public sphere; but their arguments were, as I have earlier suggested, arguments suited to the polite essay, and not to the number-crunching work of political arithmetic.³⁶⁷

It was the debate developed in the *Philosophical Transactions* that made the calculation of numbers central to a politically charged argument about the relationship of populousness to commerce, virtue, and liberty; and it was the

³⁶⁵ William Wales to Dr. John Heysham, 30/1/1784, reprinted in Glass, *Numbering the People*, p. 44.

³⁶⁶ [G. Burrington], *An Answer*, p. 2; R. Price, 'Observations on the Expectations of Lives, the Increase of Mankind, the Influence of great Towns on Population, and particularly the State of London with respect to Healthfulness and Number of Inhabitants', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, 59, 1769, pp. 89-125.

³⁶⁷ W. Bell, *A Dissertation on the Following Subject: What Causes Principally Contribute to Render a Nation Populous?* (Cambridge, 1756); [W. Temple], *A Vindication of Commerce and the Arts; Proving that they are the Source of the Greatness, Power, Riches and Populousness of a State* (London, 1758).

exhaustion of the specialist audience represented by the *Philosophical Transactions* which led to the expansion of the debate into the wider literary public sphere.

In fact, this early part of the debate had little immediate effect, as, apart from a single work in 1767, prophesying doom to Britain's relationship with the North American colonies should she not reverse her apparent decline in population, there would not seem to be any further development in the argument until Richard Price's first paper on the subject was published in 1769.³⁶⁸ Yet, though the influence of this minor spat was to be delayed somewhat it was, nonetheless, to prove extremely significant in the later debate to which I now turn.

The Place of the People; Richard Price and the Debate on Population.

Like Brakenridge, Price's first discussion of population focuses upon London, and particularly its effect upon the whole country.³⁶⁹ Unlike his predecessor, however, Price's enquiry appeared to develop out of his work upon life insurance, and life expectancies, in which area he had already achieved considerable respect.³⁷⁰ Thus, although he remained within a fairly classical republican discourse - though admittedly, one seeking accommodation within a

³⁶⁸ [J. Mitchell], *The Present State of Great Britain and North America, With Regard to Agriculture, Population, Trade, and Manufactures* (London, 1767).

³⁶⁹ Price, 'Observations'.

commercial society, and with the needs of men *without* landed wealth at its heart - his argument rested not only upon its recourse to political commonplaces, but also upon Price's own generally acknowledged expertise within the field of political arithmetic. Unlike either Brakenridge or Forster, then, Price did not need to rely upon the authority of past eminences; he was his own authority, he span his arguments and his disciplinary position out of his own self.

Thus, when Price repeated the common belief that large cities, such as London, could only be drains upon the national population, he not only repeated an argument that still possessed great power, he also added to that power the legitimacy of his own reputation.³⁷¹ And though his claims may not have excited immediate interest, coming as they did within the limited arena of the *Philosophical Transactions*, when they were reprinted in a pamphlet, and then repeated in Price's *Observations on Reversionary Payments* two years later, they began to cause concern amongst the proponents of 'improvement'.³⁷² Thus Arthur Young, perhaps the most influential agricultural writer of the time, expressed the problem:

[Price] being a gentleman of considerable literary reputation, whatever is found in his book must carry a much greater weight than the same sentiments would have if found in inferior company. The

³⁷⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 89-93; it is Price's work on life expectancies and insurance that Buck places at the heart of his account of Price's transformation of political arithmetic from a tool of state power, into one guarantee of a republican political virtue: Buck, 'People Who Counted'.

³⁷¹ Price, 'Observations', pp. 118-9. And though so rigid an account of the city's parasitic dependence upon a constant supply of people from a more healthy countryside may now seem unreasonable, it remains remarkably close to modern accounts of London's dependence, in the eighteenth century, upon just such a dynamic: Wrigley, *People, Cities and Wealth*, p. 136.

³⁷² R. Price, *Observations on Reversionary Payments* (London, 1771). Glass, *Numbering the People*, p. 55.

consequence is, that the idea of our depopulation will become more general; clamours about engrossing farms, and the high prices of provisions, will be more riotous; and the old worn-out declamations be again common in the mouths of our politicians.³⁷³

This quote is fascinating for its representation of the literary public as a social gathering, for its prediction of ‘clamours’ over this issue leading to riot (thus linking Price’s abstruse speculations to a more dangerous, popular turbulence), and for its insistence upon the fundamentally private nature of agricultural knowledge and the irresponsibility of politicians. More than this, however, it demonstrates not only the extent to which Price’s move to address the public disturbed him, but also one of the most important contexts within which the population debates operated: that of the process of enclosure and engrossment, which, though it had been underway for more than a century, accelerated rapidly in the second half of the eighteenth century.

To display the connection between these two issues, it is perhaps helpful to return to an earlier essay, Bell’s *Dissertation on ... What Causes Principally Contribute to Render a Nation Populous?* published in 1756. Promoting a fairly classic civic humanist account of the relationship between land, liberty, and virtue, Bell insisted that ‘whatever is calculated to preserve a frugal simplicity of taste and manners ... is so far adapted to increase the populousness of a nation.’³⁷⁴ Such a ‘frugal simplicity’ was associated by Bell and by the civic humanist discourse within which he wrote with ‘agriculture and the more useful

³⁷³ A. Young, letter to *St. James’s Chronicle*, 28/3/1772, reprinted in *Political Arithmetic* (London, 1774), pp. 322-31; pp. 322-3.

arts', those employments, in other words, necessary to life; it was opposed by the 'arts of refinement', and the multiplication of imaginary wants which went with such luxurious employments.³⁷⁵ The growth of luxury, which Bell insisted always developed in 'some enormous and destructive city', would lead to a neglect of agriculture, and thus 'the scarcity of all things requisite to the subsistence of the people will inevitably be followed by a very considerable diminution of their natural increase'.³⁷⁶ Cities, commerce and luxury were thus clearly associated by Bell with 'vice and lewdness', the irrational, and the slow decay of population.³⁷⁷

Fortunately, the preventative to such a development was already to hand in the form of employment most suited to the maintenance of an innocent, healthy, and increasing population: 'were agriculture, and the more necessary arts, the general employment of a people, no cities could increase to so pernicious a size.'³⁷⁸ Only 'when a people are once become nearly as numerous as their territories can maintain, for want of subsistence they can increase no further ... without the introduction of commerce and the arts of refinement. This, therefore, *with regard to the Populousness of a Nation only*, seems the proper time to introduce them.'³⁷⁹ Of course, in a state such as Britain, there were already

³⁷⁴ W. Bell, *Dissertation*, p. 5.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 5, p. 12, p. 18.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 15, p. 13.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 18.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 16.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 26-7. It seems implicit in this quote that Bell considers the introduction of refinement at *any* point to be a politically dubious idea: 'under wise regulations they may now be made the means of adding much to the publick stock of subsistence, and giving room for still further increase of people. And so long as the importation of necessaries, and not the improvement of elegance, continues the chief object of their pursuit, so long they will in reality produce the desired effect. But when once their natural consequences begin to appear (as sooner or later they certainly must) in the production of a luxurious and debauched taste; the useful arts will quickly become in general despised and neglected; extravagance, scarcity, and want must soon succeed; and the numbers of people at length decrease' (p. 27).

several 'enormous and destructive' cities, not least London, and so Bell found it necessary to suggest policies to counteract their influence; most strikingly, he called for 'an equal division of lands', and the abolition of the right of primogeniture, for, 'where a great inequality has taken place, the laws of succession should have a tendency to divide the enormous acquisitions already made, among greater numbers.'³⁸⁰ Virtue, populousness, and a sustainable and 'real' prosperity were thus associated with the extensive practice of agriculture by a people with a more or less equal stake in the landed wealth of the nation.

Bell's argument was, of course, rapidly challenged by Temple, whose *Vindication of Commerce and the Arts* made the usual claims for commerce's capacity not only to produce wealth and protect liberty, but indeed, to produce - through the very propagation of 'Imaginary wants' that Bell had stigmatised so powerfully - a more civilised and productive society.³⁸¹ Those who, according to Bell, were the most virtuous and innocent members of an agricultural state, appeared in a quite different light in Temple's account:

Here a labourer may acquire all the necessaries of a family by his constant work. His ambition never rises above coarse food and rayment, and the means of a low debauch. If the lower class of people can acquire these necessaries by working three days in a week, they will not work four. Necessity must therefore be created before industry can be introduced and excited.³⁸²

³⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 15, p. 27, p. 28.

³⁸¹ [W. Temple], *A Vindication of Commerce and the Arts*, p. 20.

In a free country, then, in which labourers could not be actually compelled to work, it is necessary to raise the ambition of the people: 'To suppose then a great plenty and great industry to exist together, is absurd and repugnant to the very nature of things'; 'where a populace have the means of sloth and debauchery ... there it is morally impossible that they should be industrious, sober and temperate.'³⁸³ Fortunately, however, instilling this ambition in a highly commercial state should not be difficult, for, as Bell had claimed, one inevitable aspect of such a state was the propagation of desire, of 'imaginary wants'; it was merely that Bell did not understand properly the effects of these wants upon man's moral character. Thus Temple claimed:

Imaginary wants are ... so far from being injurious to mankind, that they are highly useful To want nothing is the existence of a post, or a God To want what may be innocently acquired is no crime. To be in pursuit of what is innocent, to strongly desire it, and to have a moral certainty of attaining it, is one of the highest degrees of human felicity. It is no hurt to have wants and desires, but to indulge and gratify irregular and vicious ones, at the expence of our own real happiness, and that of others.³⁸⁴

What is at stake in this argument, though neither writer directly introduces it, is the nature and effects of enclosure and engrossment. Bell approaches most closely to the subject, with his insistence upon the need for a

³⁸² *Ibid*, pp. 12-13.

³⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 14, p. 32.

more equal distribution of land; but in their differing accounts of the sources of population, prosperity and virtue, and especially in their different accounts of the character and motivations of human beings, both writers participate in a debate on enclosure, engrossment, and 'improvement'. This debate had its roots in the sixteenth century, and would continue into the early nineteenth century, when its exhaustion was the result more of the lack of further land to enclose, than a universal consent to the process of enclosure.

Jeanette Neeson, in her work on *Commoners* and the experience of enclosure, insists upon the inadequacy of modern historians' understanding of the value of the commons to those who lived off them, an understanding that has come 'not to be measured in the broad terms of the social relationships engendered by independence of the wage' but 'as no more than an *income* dependent on the quality of pasture ... and the regulation of open-field agriculture'.³⁸⁵ Neeson attempts to develop an understanding of the value of common land and common right through the examination of the contemporary debate over the commons. In particular, she seeks to draw attention to the extent to which protagonists of both sides of the debate in fact agreed as to the effect of enclosure: 'it turned commoners into labourers.'³⁸⁶ Her examination of the debate, then, turns upon the questions, first, as to what that transition was thought to mean, and secondly, as to how the debate was eventually won by those in favour of enclosure 'even when it *did* cause local distress.'³⁸⁷

³⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 20.

³⁸⁵ J. M. Neeson, *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England, 1700-1820* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 16.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 18.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 19.

As to the first question, that can be answered to a large extent through reference to the debate between Bell and Temple which, though limited in its impact, possesses great value as an exposition of the debate in miniature. For a writer such as Bell, the process of enclosure and the engrossment of small farms (dependent, as small farmers generally were, upon the added value that could be gained from exploiting the commons) tended to both depopulate and demoralise the countryside.³⁸⁸ Previously proud and free commoners were either driven from the land, to die an early death in the viciousness of the cities, or remained as a defeated rural proletariat, stripped of their independence, their manliness, of their English birthright of liberty. To these writers, it was the culture of proud independence which the commons bred among the rural poor which was of greatest importance; without it, without them, England (and later Britain) was stripped of its finest source of soldiers and sailors, and vulnerable to enemies both foreign and domestic.³⁸⁹

To Temple, however, and the tradition in which he wrote, a very different model of human behaviour was necessary to understand the effect of enclosure upon the rural poor. Pride and independence among the poor were to be understood, not as virtues guaranteeing British liberty, but folly and ignorance ('the existence of a post' perhaps; we can safely presume Temple did not consider the existence of the rural poor to be like that of 'a God').³⁹⁰ The liberty such attitudes guaranteed was more that of "the poor native *Indians*" of America, than of modern British subjects: though attractive in abstract, this

³⁸⁸ Bell wrote, as Neeson points out, within a long tradition that included figures as diverse as Thomas More, Sir Francis Bacon and Gerrard Winstanley; *ibid*, p. 18.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 20-1.

³⁹⁰ *Vindication of Commerce and the Arts*, p. 20.

liberty simply was not appropriate to the commercial British state.³⁹¹ Were the rural poor to be allowed to continue an existence that enabled them to remain to a certain extent outside the wage economy, beyond the reach of ‘imaginary wants’, of commerce and the arts, modern society would be failing them both materially and spiritually, for ‘*’tis commerce and the arts alone which humanize mankind, make the difference between the Moors on the Niger, and Britons on the banks of the Thames; and which lift brute nature to contemplations of Deity.*’³⁹²

Enclosure, and the forced dependence of the rural poor upon wage labour, would have a civilising effect upon them, rendering them both fit and productive members of the nation. And if Temple is willing to concede that such a policy, for all its gains in productivity, might not raise *reproduction*, he claimed that any gap could be filled by the encouragement of immigration: ‘it is evident to any man of common sense, that a police which will allure and induce foreigners in a country, may render it more populous in a year’s time, than the practice of all our author’s [Bell’s] maxims would in a thousand years.’³⁹³

Such a solution, however, though it may have provided a temporary escape route from the assertion that people are more likely to reproduce in conditions of material comfort and personal independence - an assertion given considerable weight by the rapid growth of population in North America - did nothing to address the troublesome association of political virtue with high rates of reproduction. Addressing this problem was one of the important innovations of John Howlett’s *An Examination of Dr. Price’s Essay*, which insisted that ‘the greater increase of labouring poor, and, in the end, of necessitous and indigent

³⁹¹ *Commoners*, p. 30, quoting W. Pennington, *Reflections on the Various Advantages Resulting from ... Inclosing ... Large Commons and Common Fields* (London, 1769), pp. 34-5.

persons ... is, I conceive, highly favourable to an augmentation of the general stock of our people.'³⁹⁴ Making no bones about the increase in poverty attendant upon the process of enclosure, Howlett claimed that this would in fact be an important *stimulus* to reproduction:

It is allowed, on every hand, that early and general marriage is of all things most conducive to this desirable purpose. But amongst whom does this most universally take place? Is it not among the lower and labouring part of mankind? [They] readily obey the suggestions of natural constitution, and embrace the first opportunity of an inseparable union with some one of the other sex. They are perfectly regardless of what they may meet with in their passage through their humble walk of life. Let the worst happen that may, it will be nothing more than what they have been enured to in their earlier years.³⁹⁵

If we ignore the little logical inconsistency through which Howlett can understand all members of a *growing* class of the poor to have been *bred* to that poverty, we can then see how the partisans of enclosure sought to secure the debate. Enclosure ensured the dependence of the poor upon the wage; it forced them into a civilising economy that disciplined them both in their social relations and in their work, as the promptings first of necessity, and later of emulation (the

³⁹² *Vindication of Commerce and the Arts*, p. xvi of Preface.

³⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 70.

³⁹⁴ J. Howlett, *An Examination of Dr. Price's Essay on the Population of England and Wales: and the Doctrine of an Increased Population in this Kingdom, Established by Facts* (Maidstone, [1781]), p. 27.

result of their being exposed to a humanising knowledge of ‘imaginary wants’) led them to ‘incessant industry’.³⁹⁶ The most important feature of this argument, however, was that enclosure, though it might expose the poor to greater hardship than previously, *would not* harm population growth. Productivity gains would enable the support of a greater population than before, and if enclosure was not able to guarantee an improved livelihood for the poor (and there were many writers who insisted that it would), that would not be sufficient to prevent the essentially thoughtless poor from reproducing rapidly, especially as ‘those of higher rank, and who have plenty of money, must help them forward, and afford them every necessary support.’³⁹⁷

As a rapidly growing population, well-supported by increases in productivity could only be good for the state, so the process of enclosure and engrossment - so obviously a matter of local and individual interest, so clearly a means to increase the profit of great landowners through the appropriation of what little land the poor might lay claim to - so that process became understood to be in the *national* interest.³⁹⁸ Private interest could thus be converted into the good of the public, into a ‘common-sense’ progressivism that, as Neeson points out, could rule out of court the ‘interest’ of the commoner, and certainly did choose to ignore the commoner’s experience and understanding of the value of his or her lot:

³⁹⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 27-9.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 37.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 29.

³⁹⁸ It is Neeson’s argument, pp. 42-52, that the argument about ‘national interest’, previously based in the importance of the liberty and independence of the rural poor, was ‘kidnapped’ (p. 46) from the defenders of the commons by the mid-1780s.

Commoners had little but they also wanted less. The result may have been that they lived well enough for themselves, but invisibly and poorly in the eyes of outsiders

Perhaps having “enough” was unimaginable to men who wrote about crop yields, rents, improvements, productivity, economic growth, always *more*, as it has been incomprehensible to twentieth-century historians living in constantly expanding market economics, albeit on a finite planet.³⁹⁹

The purpose of this brief exploration of the debate over enclosure and engrossment is not simply to place the population debate within a wider context, important as that context is. Rather, it is to develop several insights into the nature and purpose of that debate, which, viewed simply for itself, seems somewhat peculiar: for so much heat and noise to be generated over an issue so lacking any adequate means of evaluation appears simply perverse. Moreover, given what is known about the actual level of population growth in the second half of the eighteenth century (an increase of around a third in the forty years between 1761 and 1801), it seems almost incomprehensible that a debate over the tendency of population could be held at all. Understood, however, in the light of the debate over enclosure, and particularly with regard to the positions adopted by the various protagonists within the two debates, the interaction and logic of the two becomes somewhat clearer.

The first point to note, then, is that Price, the main proponent of the idea that England was demonstrably decreasing in population, was also powerfully

opposed to the process of enclosure and engrossment; Young and Howlett, meanwhile, major 'improvers' of agriculture, both wrote to insist that the population of England was in fact increasing.⁴⁰⁰ The less well-known William Wales, meanwhile, also fitted that same pattern: optimistic about the tendency of the English population, he was quite clear that while

With respect to the engrossing of farms, there can be little doubt, but that it has been a real grievance to many individuals ... so, likewise, has many other things been, which have proved very advantageous to the kingdom in general. Every considerable alteration in the internal policy and management of a state, whether it be for the better or worse, in general, must be a hardship to those individuals who are obliged, in consequence of it, to seek a new employment; but it does not therefore follow that every such alteration is for the worse ... it seems very absurd to employ more hands than are necessary, in cultivating the ground in states which depend chiefly on arts, manufactures, and foreign commerce for their support, as is the case with England at present. If that unhappy time should ever arrive when these are lost, farms will naturally subdivide themselves again, and become as small as they have been formerly.⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁹ *Commoners*, p. 41.

⁴⁰⁰ As well as the texts by Price already mentioned, see also *An Essay on the Population of England, From the Revolution to the Present Time* (London, 1780 - first published 1779) and *Observations on Reversionary Payments*, fifth edition (London, 1792), 'Postscript' pp. 297-347 (posthumously published).

⁴⁰¹ Wales, *Inquiry*, pp. 72-4.

The enclosure of farms was thus represented as both a political and *historical* necessity for so advanced a nation as England; though not an irreversible condition. Eden, finally, whose invaluable work on *The State of the Poor* will be discussed later, also united optimism with ‘improvement’ in his *Estimate of the Number of Inhabitants in Great Britain and Ireland*, the final instalment of the population debate, squeezing in as it did just one year before the first census closed down this arena for good:

Our towns are confessedly larger, and more populous, than they were forty years ago; but, even in this enlightened age, there are political economists, who gravely lament, that great cities are inimical to the multiplication of the species; that a devouring metropolis drains the country of its inhabitants; that the consolidation of small farms lessens the number of cultivators; and that, though trade and manufactures may flourish, the hardy stock of independant [*sic.*] yeomen, and industrious peasants, decays. Such complaints, to say the least of them, are unwarrantable, if not mischievous.

“Deserted villages” in Great Britain are now only to be found in the fictions of poetry.⁴⁰²

The debate over population, then, which can be seen as a debate over the virtue of state policy - the growth or decline of a population being understood as a natural, and indisputable index of that virtue - can further be understood as an

argument over the capacity to make judgements *on* state policy. The purpose of engaging in it was not so much to win the debate - as I have insisted, it was not a debate which either side could actually win, given the limited evidence available - rather, it was (at least in part) to compete for the ability to represent the nature of enclosure and engrossment; and by the time of the final entry to the debate, that capacity to represent was being contested according to the developing disciplinary logic which separated scientific from aesthetic truth. Thus, although earlier entries to the debate had dismissed the claims of pessimists as 'only a melancholy Dream', produced through allowing 'the weakness of his spirits, or the strength of his prejudices to mislead his judgment', thus giving a 'gloomy tinge to his representation', by the time of Eden's pamphlet such representations are no longer merely doleful dreams, the products of melancholy, but actual 'fictions'.⁴⁰³

A second point to note is the interaction of this debate with an argument about the national interest. In this argument, as Neeson has suggested, the tendency was to move from a concern for a rugged independence, stabilised by the poor's possession of a limited stake in the landed wealth of the nation, to a desire for productivity ensured by discipline and necessity, and stabilised by the increased dependence of the poor upon the wage, and the beneficence of the poor law. To do so required the coming together of commercial progressivism, an abstracted idea of the nation, and (most importantly) a method of representing the interests of the poor within polite discourse. Furthermore, that method had to be able to discriminate between apparent and actual interests: to marginalise the

⁴⁰² F. M. Eden, *An Estimate of the Number of Inhabitants in Great Britain and Ireland* (London, 1800), p. 48; *The State of the Poor; or, an History of the Labouring Classes in England, From*

explicit interests of the rural poor as sectional, backward, and ignorant, and to generate a representation of their 'true' interest harmonised with a transcendent national interest.

That method was to be found, of course, in political arithmetic. Mary Poovey, in her recent *History of the Modern Fact*, has claimed that:

unlike Petty, who would have counted everyone, so as to manage and tax them, eighteenth-century practitioners of political economy tended to devote the vast majority of their attention to what contemporaries called "the great body of the people."⁴⁰⁴

Whatever may be the truth of this with regard to other areas of political arithmetic, this would certainly seem to apply to the latter part of the population debate. Whereas the earlier debate had tended to argue about the elements likely to cause population (agriculture, frugality, a well-run state) and depopulation (excessively large cities, luxurious trade, the experience of war), and to question the value, and interpretation, of evidence, the later debate was quite explicitly interested in the condition of the poor.

This was, in part, a result of the principal evidence used to explore the level and tendency of population: the number of houses in the country, obtained from assessments for the window tax. Two major variables affected the validity of the figures obtained in this way: first, the size of the average family; secondly, the number of houses, not liable for the tax, omitted from the returns. Although

the Conquest to the Present Period (London, 1966 - facsimile of 1st edn., London, 1797), 3 Vols.
⁴⁰³ [Burrington], *An Answer*, p. 2; Howlett, *Examination*, p. 155; Eden, *Estimate*, p. 48.

much attention was paid to the first of these, with various multipliers being produced, and graded according to the geographical and economic situation of various parishes, it is the second that is of particular significance, as it was the decline in the number of houses recorded as *not* liable for the window tax which led Price to understand there to be a decline in population, brought about through the destruction of the lower classes by upper class luxury:

between the years 1761 and 1777 a destruction has taken place of at least 55,771 houses having less than 8 windows; which is equal to the loss of above a *quarter of a million* of those inhabitants who furnish recruits for our navy and army, and trading ships; and who, therefore, constitute the main strength of the kingdom

The increase in the higher classes of houses has been for some time obvious to every one. It may be imagined, that this implies such an increase of people in the middle and higher ranks of life, as makes amends for the depopulation among the lowest ranks. But the truth is, that no such conclusion can be drawn. One of the principal causes of this increase has been that very evil which has destroyed the common people, or the increase of luxury.⁴⁰⁵

Price's claim was attacked by his opponents both for its puritanical attitude to home-ownership (Wales ironically pointed out that 'there is a great number of houses, to my knowledge, which contain two, three, and some even four families

⁴⁰⁴ M. Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact. Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago and London, 1998), p. 160.

each ... and it is much to be wished, that many more families than do, had it in their power to indulge themselves in the LUXURY of a single house'), and, more importantly for this discussion, for its reliance upon dubious evidence.⁴⁰⁶

As every optimist in the population debate pointed out, the figures recorded for houses *not* liable for tax were notoriously unreliable, for obvious reasons: why bother collecting information of no use to the purpose at hand? This meant that much of the later population debate turned upon the extent of the absence of the poor from population statistics, and the need to achieve a better representation of a class of people previously omitted from the figures. This would seem to bear out Theodore Porter's claim, in *The Rise of Statistical Thinking*, that 'Implicitly, at least, statistics tended to equalize subjects. It makes no sense to count people if their common personhood is not seen as somehow more significant than their differences.'⁴⁰⁷

I would suggest, however, that we should be more sceptical of the capacity for statistics to promote a democratic vision. It has already been argued, and seems to be broadly accepted, that the trans-European 'discovery' of folk culture in the late-eighteenth century came about as the result of a gradual *disengagement* of elites from that culture, and their translation of that culture into an aesthetic object only properly understood within the cabinet of the tasteful gentleman.⁴⁰⁸ If the culture, the lives of individuals and communities is to be understood in this way, it seems unlikely that the mere counting of heads, without regard for the relationships actually obtaining between individuals, can give a very true or fair representation of the presence, or absence, of the rural poor from

⁴⁰⁵ Price, *Essay*, pp. 23-6.

⁴⁰⁶ Wales, *Inquiry*, p. 14.

the nation. Moreover, Porter's notion of 'common personhood' surely neglects the *function* of the persons absent from these statistics: they are to be labourers, soldiers and sailors, not voters; they are to be subject to taxation, not canvassed on the taxes they are to pay; which raises the question of whether their utility to the state can be equated to a concern for their 'common personhood'. And indeed, the history of the population and enclosure debates would seem quite clearly to bear out these reservations. The usage of political arithmetic by writers such as Young, Howlett and Wales, and (as Neeson points out), the further usage of those writers by a government seeking maximum productivity from the land in the period of the French Revolutionary Wars, in a manner contrary even to *these* writers' intentions, was intended from the first to undermine the customary practice and social relations of the rural poor, in the name of a national interest and of an English liberty increasingly dissociated from the ideal of an independent peasantry.⁴⁰⁹

This brings me to the peculiar denial, by Eden, of the decline of 'the hardy stock of independant [*sic*] yeomen, and industrious peasants' as a result of enclosure and engrossment.⁴¹⁰ I say peculiar, not only because it would seem to go against the evidence of the effects of enclosure, but also it would seem to contradict the generally accepted position of earlier proponents of enclosure, who were more than happy to predict precisely the decline which Eden denied. To understand Eden's position, it is necessary to turn to his massive work of 1797, *The State of the Poor*, in which he makes clear the political, economic, and

⁴⁰⁷ T. M. Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking 1820-1900* (Princeton, N. J., 1986), p. 25.

⁴⁰⁸ See above pp. 177-9.

⁴⁰⁹ Neeson, pp. 47-51 details the 'apostasy' of Young and Howlett, and their development of a 'class analysis of enclosure' - in private, at least - that rejected governmental policy and sought proper compensation for the loss of the commons (p. 47, p. 49).

disciplinary commitments which led him to deny the generally accepted consequences of enclosure.

In *The State of the Poor*, Eden sought ‘from motives both of benevolence and personal curiosity to investigate’ the condition of the poor throughout Britain.⁴¹¹ In doing so, however, he insisted he was involved in a work not of speculation, but of fact-gathering, a process he proudly represented as akin to severe physical labour:

The edifice of political knowledge cannot be reared without its “hewers of stone,” and “drawers of water.” I am content to work among them; and, whilst others prefer ... the more arduous task of architectural decoration, to assist in digging the foundation, or in dragging the rough block from the quarry The one may embellish the fabric; but without the labours of the other, it would never be reared at all. The industry of the peasant, and the ingenuity of the manufacturer, are the brick and mortar of the political structure; the raw materials which the Statesman must work with. He will always do well to recollect, that the “jutting frieze,” and the “Corinthian capital,” [*sic.*] generally owe their strength and solidity to the solid brick-work behind them.

For the inelegancies of style, which may be found in this Work, I deem it unnecessary to make any apology. I have endeavoured to be

⁴¹⁰ Eden, *Estimate*, p. 48.

⁴¹¹ Eden, *The State of the Poor*, vol. 1, Preface, p. i.

plain, simple, and perspicuous: but have never wasted that time in polishing a sentence, which I thought I could better employ in ascertaining a fact⁴¹²

Eden was not the first historian to represent his academic labours in such a manner, nor has he been the last to lay claim to a plain style in order to guarantee a certain authenticity, a plebeian lack of guile in his representations. He does, however, provide one of the clearest examples of just such an approach, as well as one of the most skilful manipulations of that position to perform the very act of interested critique he explicitly rejects.

One of Eden's clearest interests in the writing of *The State of the Poor*, going somewhat beyond his avowed benevolence and curiosity, was the value and virtue of the poor law, and the security it afforded to the poor, as it consumed more and more of the income of the middling sorts. In seeking to obtain information on the condition of the poor, Eden sought also to provide answers - which, as we have seen, he represented as having been discovered, not produced, by his labours - as to how the poor law might best be reformed so as to hurt the pockets of middling- and upper-class Britain rather less. Eventually, he came to the suggestion that 'a legal provision for the Poor ... (it seems to me,) checks that emulative spirit of exertion, which the want of the necessaries, or the no less powerful demand for the superfluities, of life, gives birth to'.⁴¹³ He therefore suggested that, instead of a national minimum standard of living (however grudgingly provided), the poor should be able to apply solely to 'private charity',

⁴¹² *Ibid*, pp. xxix-xxx.

⁴¹³ *Ibid*, Book 1, p. 448.

to which 'the modest and diffident Poor will willingly have recourse, although they would prefer languishing, and perhaps perishing, in obscurity, to the humiliating alternative of being relieved by a weekly pension from the parish-officer'.⁴¹⁴ The message is clear: the poor law produced as much distress as it relieved, and was not only incapable of differentiating between the deserving and undeserving, but actually drove away the most virtuous and respectable of the poor.

In order to make such arguments, however, it was necessary for Eden to abandon his explicit position of neutrality and, exploiting his own stylistic disclaimer, to write a tortuous prose capable of allowing him both to deny and display his position:

it has not unplausibly [*sic*] advanced by a writer, cited by Mr. Howlett, in his "Examination of Mr. Pitt's Speech," that the increase of our Poor's Rates is owing to the prodigious increase and growth of Methodism. Be this as it may, I shall not venture to assert, what I have frequently heard contended, that the establishment of many sects in religion is inimical to the progress of industry. Still less do I think my very limited enquiries warrant me in observing, (what might, perhaps, appear to some neither an uncharitable, an harsh, or an unjust surmise,) that, as manufacturers more commonly become Paupers than labourers in husbandry, and as they also are more

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid*, Book 1, p. 457.

commonly sectarian, among other causes of so striking a peculiarity, their religious differences are, probably, not the least.⁴¹⁵

In this disingenuous quote, then, Eden manages both to claim neutrality on the question of a relationship between the rise of Methodism and the decline of 'industry' (by which we must understand industriousness), and to state, seemingly with conviction, the very connection he refused to assert. Plain style, and a refusal to 'polish' sentences, can thus be seen in this instance as a means to allow Eden to do the very things he claimed he would not.

Thus Eden's work can be seen to bring together a belief in the progressivist nature of enclosure and economic liberalism, a concern with the burden of the poor law upon the middling- and upper-classes, and a commitment to an apparently objective, disinterested, *empirical* approach to a truth discoverable simply through the observation of manifest facts. In this last, he sought to oppose quite explicitly the 'fictions of poetry' which, he claimed, could be the only grounds for believing the countryside actually decayed as a result of enclosure, engrossment, and an increasingly liberal market system.⁴¹⁶ Like other such apologists of liberalisation, he sought to portray the misfortunes of labour as, in fact, the products of their own pride and folly (thus he castigates labourers in southern England for wearing shoes, rather than the clogs preferred by northerners; a criticism seemingly blind to the long, long tradition that associated shoes with English liberty, clogs with French slavery).⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid*, Preface, pp. ix-x.

⁴¹⁶ Eden, *Estimate*, p. 48.

⁴¹⁷ *State of the Poor*, Preface, p. viii.

All of which returns me to my earlier discussion of Easthope's suggestion that empiricism functions as an crucial discursive framework for English national identity, a framework he insisted should not be understood as hegemonic because of its inscription in the discourses manipulating, and manipulated by, all the English:

Englishness, so I shall argue, is inscribed in the various national discourses which *run across* Modern English whether it occurs in a written or oral form, as Standard English or "deviations" from it⁴¹⁸

I have already suggested that to argue this is to ignore the historical involvement of a Scottish discourse in the construction of modern Englishness, to repeat the forgetting of an important element of the national past. What I have sought to show in my discussion of the later population debate, however, is that it is not merely a non-English discourse that has been ignored in the identification of empiricism with Englishness; there has also been a forgetting of the extent to which political arithmetic was involved in a project to develop the idea of an abstract national interest capable of portraying the property rights of the rural poor to be an illegitimate sectional interest, reasonably over-ruled by a statistically-minded and patriotic elite. In the process of the debate necessary to achieve that forgetting, the rural poor were prised from their previous position at the representational centre of a Britain, or England, whose independence, prosperity and liberty was secured by the independence of its peasantry; now their value to the nation was to be measured by their capacity for disciplined

labour, their submission to good government, and their ability to reproduce: their function, not their spirit or character.

⁴¹⁸ *Englishness and National Culture*, p. 26.

6 - Liberty, Law and the Nation.

William Blackstone's publication, between 1765 and 1769, of the four volumes of his *Commentaries on the Laws of England* has been generally recognised as a major - perhaps *the* major - landmark in eighteenth-century legal culture.

Developed out of the course of lectures on English law that he had begun delivering in 1753, the *Commentaries* sought to achieve the awesome task of reducing the notoriously complex laws of England to:

a rational and coherent system. In a characteristic expression of eighteenth-century Enlightenment, Blackstone achieved for the laws of England what others had secured for the secrets of revealed religion or the mysteries of the natural world: a technical and arcane body of knowledge, previously the exclusive domain of a professional caste, had been reduced to first principles, elegantly displayed and rendered comprehensible for a polite audience.⁴¹⁹

This view of Blackstone as an Enlightenment thinker is somewhat excessive, yet there can be no doubting the achievement of the *Commentaries*, both theoretical and stylistic; easily supplanting previous expositions of English law such as Wood's *Institute*, 'the literary creation nearly consumed the identity of its

⁴¹⁹ D. Lieberman, *The Province of Legislation Determined. Legal Theory in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge etc., 1989), p. 32.

author', as Blackstone became known 'simply as "the learned Commentator on the Laws of England."'”⁴²⁰

As is equally well-known, the success of the *Commentaries* occurred in the context of an England in which profound faith was placed in the power of the law to maintain liberty.⁴²¹ However flawed the legal process might be in practice - and it was certainly notorious for its delays, abstruseness, and apparent perversity of judgement - it 'was held to be the guardian of Englishmen, of all Englishmen' and as such was understood to be the force which most powerfully united the nation.⁴²² It possessed this capacity for two prime reasons: first, it was one of the few truly national institutions, not only capable of touching (if not throttling the life out of) every subject in the land, but also requiring the involvement of all to ensure its maintenance, which must place it higher even than war and religion as a source of common experience; secondly, it was understood to be a peculiarly English system, quite different to the legal systems of the continent, with their reliance upon Roman law and Church law.⁴²³

Whether it be understood through a civic humanist lens, as the original contract of the free British people, or through a Gothicist, Montesquieu-inspired approach, as the migrant sole survivor of a previously general Gothic liberty, English law

⁴²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 31. T. Wood, *An Institute of the Laws of England* (London, 1720). The *Institute*, having gone through several editions in the century, received its last reprint in 1772 - three years after the publication of the final volume of the *Commentaries*.

⁴²¹ Though as J. W. Cairns argues, also within the context of a Europe in which such 'institutional' works - works in the vernacular, designed to educate young lawyers in their *national* law - were of a great popularity and importance: 'Blackstone, an English Instititist: Legal Literature and the Rise of the Nation State', *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* (1984), vol. 4, pp. 318-60; pp. 321-27 esp.

⁴²² D. Hay, 'Property, Authority and the Criminal Law' in D. Hay, P. Linebaugh and E. P. Thompson (eds), *Albion's Fatal Tree. Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1975), pp. 17-63; p. 35.

⁴²³ Though of course, the English legal system was, in fact, threaded through with various legal systems that were by no means native or peculiar to the island: civil law in Chancery, canon law in the Church courts, and equity in the courts of requests, for example.

was believed to be both the bulwark under which the liberties of English subjects sheltered from tyranny, and the greatest object of their solicitude, the idol for which the English would fight and die.

From this brief description of the functions of English law as an object of national identification there are certain features that begin to become apparent. First, then, for all the diversity of legal systems which *actually* made up English law, there was understood to be a co-ordinating principle at work capable of making these bits and pieces of the law cohere into a unique native system: this principle was, of course, the common law. Secondly, though this principle possessed an undoubtedly centralising tendency, it derived its authority for this from a notion of ‘custom’ which claimed to be rooted in the experiences, needs, and wisdom of the whole people, and which gave at least some weight to local tradition and practice.⁴²⁴ Thirdly, common to and enabling both English law’s pervasiveness and inclusiveness, and its peculiarity to the English, there came a historical consciousness, an understanding of how and why this came to be so, that firmly tied together English law, English history, and the English national character. What is more, this historical consciousness was as flexible as the system of law whose constitution it sought to explain.

The development of this understanding of history has been discussed most deeply by Pocock in *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*, which seeks not only to explore the importance of history to the ‘common-law mind’, but also the importance of a legally and politically inflected comprehension of

⁴²⁴ Obviously, the importance of local tradition often proved to be of greater importance to the rhetoric of law than to the practice of it, particularly given the gradual derogation of oral evidence when compared with the written word; yet it is precisely the rhetorical, rather than the practical, importance of the local that is important in a discussion of the law’s potential as a site of imaginative identification.

history to the development of the modern discipline of history in England. And if the *Ancient Constitution* is confined to an examination of the seventeenth-century 'common-law mind', Pocock's later essay 'Burke and the Ancient Constitution' has sought to show the persistence of that 'common-law mind' into the eighteenth century, insisting that though the idea of the ancient constitution may not have been so powerful in the eighteenth century as it had in the seventeenth, it nonetheless remained potent enough for Burke to base his defence of the unreformed British constitution upon it.⁴²⁵

In both accounts, Pocock pointed to a paradox at the heart of the common law: that as customary practice it was understood to be fundamentally immemorial, without knowable origin, yet at the same time, 'that custom was constantly being subjected to the test of experience, so that if immemorial it was, equally, always up to date'.⁴²⁶ Here, then, we have the prime paradox which lies at the heart of the common law's conception of history, and which helps explain the capacity of the law to function as a site for identification with the nation. Coke's identification of the common law with custom and the immemorial, articulated with ever greater refinement (though with no *material* alteration) through the declarations of the judiciary, came to represent that law as essentially unchanging and unchangeable, and thus not only ancient, but without any recoverable beginning. The common law pre-dated history, every documentary beginning being converted in the 'common-law mind' to a sign that the law had in fact always already been in existence, that document merely recording the pre-

⁴²⁵ J. G. A. Pocock, 'Burke and the Ancient Constitution: A Problem in the History of Ideas' in *Politics, Language and Time. Essays on Political Thought and History* (London, 1972 - first published 1960), pp. 202-32.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 213.

existing *practice* of the law by the people.⁴²⁷ The historian, then, in searching for the beginning of law, would inevitably be forced to dive further and further into the pre-history of Britain, only to emerge with the discovery that the law had no beginning, only origins.⁴²⁸

This is something of an extreme position, of course, and as such became easily subject to critique. Hobbes, perhaps Coke's most eminent critic, sought in his *A Dialogue Between a Philosopher and a Student of the Common Laws of England* to both undermine Coke's doctrine of 'artificial reason' (that reason displayed by the judges in their declarations of the common law, a reason that is not theirs, but is the fruit of the experience of generations), and to exploit the immemorial character of Coke's common law.⁴²⁹ The first Hobbes opposed through both an examination of the origins of the *authority* of the law (that authority, he claimed, came not from the succession of ages, but from the sovereign), and an examination of the nature of reason, which, he insisted, could not be divided into the categories of natural and artificial 'when the Law of Reason is Eternal': whole, perfect and indivisible, an attribute of God.⁴³⁰ However wise Coke was, it was not his wisdom which made him a judge, but the authority granted him by the King; nor was it his reason which made law (which Hobbes suggests is the *actual* meaning and function of the concept of artificial reason), but either the reason of Providence, which required certain laws, or the authority of the sovereign, which created the laws prior to and independent of their study by lawyers.

⁴²⁷ Pocock, *Ancient Constitution*, pp. 34-8.

⁴²⁸ Here I return to the distinction made by Said between an origin and a beginning - see above, pp. 152-57.

⁴²⁹ T. Hobbes, *A Dialogue Between a Philosopher and a Student of the Common Laws of England*, ed. J. Cropsey (Chicago and London, 1971 - first published London, 1681).

Hobbes then went on to exploit the immemorial character of Coke's common law by displaying the tendency of that approach to disappear into myth or - critically - into a speculative history both amenable to the use of reason, and itself fundamentally a part of that natural reason which Hobbes sought to emphasise at the expense of Coke's common law:

For the understanding of *Magna Charta*, it will be very necessary to run up into Antient times, as far as History will give us leave, and consider not only the Customs of our Ancestors the *Saxons*, but also the Law of nature (the most Antient of all Laws) concerning the original of Government, and acquisition of Property, and concerning Courts of Judicature. And first, it is evident, that Dominion, Government, and Laws, are far more Antient than History, or any other writing, and that the beginning of all Dominion amongst Men was in Families; in which, first, the Father of the Family by the Law of nature was absolute Lord of his Wife and Children. Secondly, made what Laws amongst them he pleased⁴³¹

Hobbes, therefore, making use of the Cokean tendency to trace the origins of laws back beyond the vanishing point of history, sought to discover there an ultimate foundation of common law not in the customs of the Normans, Danes, Saxons or British, but in the necessary disposition of power within the smallest unit of social existence, the family. Such an origin was reasonable, was

⁴³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 97.

⁴³¹ *Ibid*, pp. 158-9.

discoverable through the use of reason; it was also rational, obeying the laws of necessity *and thus of Providence*, of eternal Reason. It therefore followed that both the craft reason of lawyers (which could well be represented instead as mystification), and the slavish searching out of ancient precedents upon which to base modern judgements, could be rejected as unnecessary, irrational and, at worst, pernicious.

Hobbes's critique was later answered by Sir Matthew Hale, in his *History of the Common Law of England*.⁴³² This work had been foreshadowed by Hale's unpublished manuscript, the 'Reflections by the Lrd. Cheife Justice Hale on Mr. Hobbes his Dialogue of the Lawe', in which Hale sought to defend the concept of artificial reason, insisting that human reason could not, in fact, be understood as a single unified thing. Unlike Providence, men's wisdom was constitutionally imperfect, and it was only through the establishment of a form of institutionalised knowledge, such as that described by Coke, that complex social forms such as the Law could be understood.⁴³³

It was in his more significant (because actually published) *History of the Common Law of England*, however, that Hale developed his innovation upon the Cokean account of the common law, which can be seen to co-ordinate both elements of the paradox noted by Pocock. Hale begins by explaining precisely what was meant by the notion 'immemorial', or, more precisely, 'time out of mind'.⁴³⁴ To Hale, such a notion does not require that a law pre-date *all* legal

⁴³² M. Hale, *The History of the Common Law of England*, ed. C. M. Gray (Chicago and London, 1971 - first published 1714).

⁴³³ M. Hale, 'Reflections by the Lrd. Cheife Justice Hale on Mr. Hobbes his Dialogue of the Lawe', Appendix 3 in W. Holdsworth, *A History of English Law* (London, 1966 - first published 1924), 16 vols., vol. 5, pp. 500-13.

⁴³⁴ Or, as Blackstone most eloquently puts it, 'time whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary', *Commentaries*, I, p. 67.

record; rather, '*Time within Memory* is the Time of Limitation in a Writ of Right; which ... was settled, and reduced to the Beginning of the Reign of King Richard I ... who began his Reign the 6th of July 1189'.⁴³⁵ Thus the claim that the common law, being immemorial, was without beginning, could be understood to be entirely formal, as Hale's aside shows: '(what is *before* Time of Memory is supposed without a Beginning, or at least such a Beginning as the Law takes Notice of)'.⁴³⁶ Thus common law had no beginning, not because it was impossible to discover a documentary beginning, nor because it was assumed that such documents only gave evidence of a prior practice, but because a significant portion of that law - the '*Leges non Scriptæ*, or unwritten Laws or Customs' - had existed prior to the *formal* beginning of the common law in 1189.⁴³⁷

The immemorial character of the common law can therefore be seen to in fact apply to only one portion of that law, a portion which 'being Things done before Time of Memory, obtain at this Day no further than as by Usage and Custom they are, as it were, engrafted into the Body of the Common Law, and made a Part thereof.'⁴³⁸ Moreover, even this immemorial portion of the law was known to be not *truly* immemorial, for Hale was able to make a chronological distinction in that portion of the law, and to distinguish between 'First, Such as were made before the coming in of King William I. commonly called, The Conqueror; or, Secondly, Such as intervened between his coming in, and the Beginning of the Reign of Richard I.'⁴³⁹ Further chronological divisions could be made between laws within time of memory as well:

⁴³⁵ *History of the Common Law of England*, pp. 3-4.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 4.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 3.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 6.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 4-5.

I shall call those the *Old* Statutes which end with the Reign of King Edward 2. and those I shall call the *New* or later Statutes which begin with the Reign of King Edward 3. and are so derived through a Succession of Kings and Queens down to this Day, by a continued and orderly Series⁴⁴⁰

It should be quite clear, then, that Hale lays down strict boundaries for the operation of custom and the immemorial. In the four-stage history which he maps out here, they describe only the first two: the pre-Norman stage, and the period 1066-1189 (and only very provisionally in that second stage); the law originating after Richard I, and after Edward III, could no longer be considered customary, though it certainly incorporated the customary and immemorial within it (and not marginally, but at its very heart, as I shall explain shortly).

First, however, I want to briefly explore what appears to be a misreading of Hale by Pocock. In *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*, Pocock claimed that ‘There are sentences ... [in Hale] which seem to suggest that the history of law cannot be known If Hale has been describing the historical process only to leave its course at the last mysterious and irrelevant, he is after all only half a historian.’⁴⁴¹ In fact, I would suggest that Hale had gone a long way to providing precisely the kind of framework in which the history of the law could be studied: a chronology of change, divided into four stages that not only correspond to an improving level of documentary evidence, but also to dramatic

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 6.

⁴⁴¹ *Ancient Constitution*, p. 178.

shifts in the composition of the law signalled by the beginning of the reigns of the two great legislators, William the Conqueror and Edward III.

It would seem that Pocock makes his claim because of a belief that ‘Hale was trying to establish that written and unwritten law were essentially one.’⁴⁴² This does not seem to be tenable, however, as Hale makes it quite clear that the common law is *written* law, to which the unwritten law is ‘by Usage and Custom ... engrafted’.⁴⁴³ Moreover, Hale insists that the common law is superordinate to the unwritten law in two important areas: first of all, with regard to the particular customs of ‘Cities, Towns and Manors The Common Law does determine what of these Customs are good and reasonable, and what are unreasonable and void’; secondly, with regard to ‘the Laws Ecclesiastical, and the Civil Law’, whose position within English law can only be admitted insofar as they ‘are Part of the Statute Laws of the Kingdom, or else by immemorial Usage and Custom in some particular Cases and Courts’, it is to the common law to determine ‘the Limits and Bounds of their several Jurisdictions ... and in Case they do exceed their Bounds, the Courts at Common Law issue their Prohibitions to restrain them’.⁴⁴⁴

The origin of Pocock’s (mis-)reading of Hale would seem to be the fact that when Hale considers the beginning of English common law, he describes it as the selection, by Edward the Confessor, of various customs already extant in different portions of the nation, the utility of which had been tested by

⁴⁴² *Ibid*, p. 175.

⁴⁴³ *History of the Common Law of England*, p. 6.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 18, p. 19, p. 28. Civil and ecclesiastical law are considered unwritten law as ‘the King of England does not recognize any Foreign Authority as superior to him in this Kingdom, neither do any Laws of the Pope or Emperor, as they are such, bind here’; p. 19.

experience.⁴⁴⁵ The common law, then, was indeed *derived* from customary law; but it is important to recognise that at that point it lost its customary nature, to become a new body of law, common to the new nation it embodied (and here we must recall Edward the Confessor's position as a Saxon monarch, reclaiming the English throne from the Danish usurpation - as such, he could well be understood to be the inaugurator of a new nation). There was an interplay between the customs, the practices of the people, and the common law which produced order among the diversity of those practices; there is an understanding that the content of the common law may change over time, and indeed the suggestion that this change might largely be produced through the evolution of the customary element of the law; and there is, quite certainly, a sense that the common law itself is antique, and that the origins of the customs from which it has been developed are probably irrecoverable; but all this is not the same as to claim that Hale considered the course of the law to be 'mysterious and irrelevant'.⁴⁴⁶

In fact, what Hale is doing when he pronounces that the origins of the customs out of which the common law of Edward the Confessor had been made up cannot be discovered, is not so much to claim that the common law had no origin, as that the authority of the common law remained whole, entire, despite the undoubted influence of codes of law derived from beyond the island.⁴⁴⁷ That this is the case can be seen by the extent to which Hale stresses that the introduction of new customs is a result of the 'diverse Accessions from the Laws of those People that were thus intermingled with the ancient Britains or Saxons';

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 42. This, incidentally, creates a paradoxical position whereby the *actual* beginning of the common law, or perhaps of the idea of the common law, came before its *formal* beginning by some one hundred and fifty years.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ancient Constitution*, p. 178.

yet ‘tis very plain, the Strength and Obligation, and the formal Nature of a Law, is not upon Account that the Danes, or the Saxons, or the Normans, brought it in with them, but they became Laws, and binding in this Kingdom, by Virtue only of their being received and approved here.’⁴⁴⁸ And they were ‘received and approved’ for the simple reason that the various populations with which those laws were originally associated became mixed, became a community.⁴⁴⁹ Thus, when Hale insists that ‘They are the same English Laws now, that they were 600 Years since in the general’, it should be understood to signify the Englishness of the law as much as its unchanging character.⁴⁵⁰

Hale, then, would seem to be performing a similar operation to that of Defoe in *The True-Born Englishman*; explaining the legal history of England through genealogy, only to insist that the importance of that genealogy was not the pedigree of the law, but its origin in the customs of a mixed nation; that law gained its authority not from one national source or another, but from its acceptance by the community. The monarch remained important in Hale’s conception of the law; but not as the maker of the law. Instead, the monarch was the producer of the principle of a common law, derived from the various customs of the land, to which those customs should be subject in any disputes over jurisdiction (and it is this notion, that the monarch produced the *idea* of the common law, that makes Hale’s examination of the origin of the term ‘common law’ more than a mere piece of antiquarian speculation).⁴⁵¹ Coke’s immemorial

⁴⁴⁷ The complexity of the first half of this sentence perhaps displays as well as anything can how difficult it is to associate the English common law with a lack of origins.

⁴⁴⁸ *History of the Common Law of England*, p. 42, p. 43.

⁴⁴⁹ See *ibid*, p. 67, on the integration of the Normans into the English nation.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 40.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid*, pp. 36-7. Unsurprisingly, Hale considers the origin of this term ‘as undiscoverable as the Head of Nile’, p. 37.

ancient constitution, then, has been transmuted by Hale into a set of immemorial customs subject to the control of an overarching principle (the common law), derived from but not identical to those customs, the history of which can be written and explored, especially with regard to the actions of several law-makers. The one clearly reacts upon the other, without an obviously dominant interpretation available, creating a dynamic legal and historical framework for the imagination of an Englishness in which the customs of the meanest plebeian were connected to and (in a certain sense) productive of the judgements of the highest courts of the land.⁴⁵²

This, then, was the tradition from which the *Commentaries* developed, and to which it owed much of its force as an exposition of the law. Blackstone's clear indebtedness to Hale can be discovered early in his text, which once again makes use of a figure of miscegenation in order to explain the immemorial nature of the English common law:

Our antient lawyers, and particularly Fortescue, insist with abundance of warmth, that these customs are as old as the primitive Britons, and continued down, through the several mutations of government and inhabitants, to the present time, unchanged and unadulterated. This may be the case as to some: but in general ... this assertion must be understood with many grains of allowance; and ought only to signify, as the truth seems to be, that there never was any formal exchange of one system of laws for another: though doubtless by the intermixture

⁴⁵² Thus D. R. Kelley, in *The Human Measure. Social Thought in the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1990), insists that 'Ideologically, what is most significant about

of adventitious nations, the Romans, the Picts, the Saxons, the Danes, and the Normans, they must have insensibly introduced and incorporated many of their own customs with those that were before established: thereby in all probability improving the texture and wisdom of the whole, by the accumulated wisdom of divers particular countries. Our laws, saith lord Bacon, are mixed as our language: and as our language is so much the richer, the laws are the more complete.⁴⁵³

In this fascinating paragraph, therefore, Blackstone aligns law with history, genealogy, and language - perhaps the three most potent elements of any national identity - in order to produce the image of an England made 'richer ... more complete' through mixture.

Here, it will be valuable to briefly discuss the significance of Blackstone's comparison of English law with the English language. First, it is important to recognise that such a comparison would have been far more difficult earlier in the century, when Law-French and Latin remained alive amongst lawyers; though they may have been understood to be the most appropriate languages in which to comprehend certain complex legal notions, and may well have been represented as possessing a historical legitimacy that justified the apparent peculiarity of their persistence, they just as certainly marked the separation of the law, and the lawyers, from the broader culture of the nation.⁴⁵⁴ Only with their replacement

common law for the history of social thought is its instinctive, though eventually doctrinaire, insistence on the popular character of institutions', p. 173.

⁴⁵³ *Commentaries*, I, p. 64.

⁴⁵⁴ D. Leith, *A Social History of English* (London and New York, 1997 - first published 1983), records that 'An Act was passed in 1731 to limit its [Law-French's] use in this domain once and

by the vernacular could Francis Bacon's description of the development of English law and language move from being solely analogous, to being interacting strands of the national culture.

More interestingly, however, this transformation in the relationship between law and language, and the histories of their development, took place alongside a process of change, of standardisation and 'purification' (the natural product of a rapidly developing print culture), which began to re-write the English language and grammar.⁴⁵⁵ At the same time, the increased separation of vulgar from polite culture, and the increased reliance upon written, and distrust of oral evidence (also a product of developments in print culture) fundamentally changed the relationship of most of the population to the national culture of which they were supposedly part. In the very period in which the conduct of the law was to be made accessible to all through the introduction of the vernacular to the courts, that vernacular was coming to be subject to a series of rules designed to distinguish the polite from the vulgar speaker, and to degrade the value of oral evidence.⁴⁵⁶ Moreover, whilst earlier accounts of the development of modern

for all, along with Latin (which was also occasionally used for keeping records)', p. 45. He also makes the important point that the supremacy of English in the law courts need not be seen as a uniformly progressive measure; certainly, in Scotland and Wales it could be understood more as an imposition than a liberation (p. 156, p. 175). J. Davis, *Les Reports des Cases & Matters en Ley, Resolves & Adjuges en las Courts del Roy en Ireland* (London, 1674) - 'this is the true and onely cause why our *Reports* and other Books of the Law for the most part are not set forth in English, Latine, or the modern French, for that the proper and peculiar phrase of the Common Law cannot be so well exprest ... as in this speech [Law French], which is indeed mixt, and compounded of all these 3 languages', 7th page of Preface Dedicatory.

⁴⁵⁵ O. Smith, *The Politics of Language*, dates this development to the 1750s and 1760s - the decades that saw the publication of Harris's *Hermes* (1751), Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language*, and Bishop Lowth's *Short Introduction to the English Grammar* (1762); p. 3.

⁴⁵⁶ Of course, the relationship between the written and the oral could be extremely complex, and can by no means be understood as the simple replacement of one by the other, as is made clear by A. Fox, 'Custom, Memory and the Authority of Writing' in P. Griffith, A. Fox and S. Hindle eds, *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England*, (London, 1996), pp. 89-116, and A. Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England*. The value of the written for a largely illiterate population is extremely different from its value to a largely, or increasingly literate one; and, no doubt,

languages might tend to stress their corruption from an earlier purity, to which the language ought to return (the linguistic equivalent of the ancient constitution), this process of 'polishing' the language was considered to be the sign of that language's growing perfection, understood as a movement away from the vulgarity of its origins - origins that both descriptions of language's development could point to in the language of the vulgar.

In short, then, the common law by the time of the *Commentaries* had developed a complex conception of itself as the interaction of an over-arching principle and a body of customary practices, a conception that powerfully united its history to those of the English language and the British nation. In practice, it had also removed one of the most powerful barriers to a vision of the law as an integrated part of the national culture, accessible by anyone able to speak English. Yet, at the very moment in which this conception of the common law appeared to have achieved this potent position at the heart of the Anglo-British imagination, it began to unravel. It is this process of unravelling that I shall focus upon in the second half of this chapter.

Unreasonable Excess: the Need for Reform.

For all that Blackstone's *Commentaries* were evidently positioned as the culmination of more than a century's reflection upon the nature of the common law, it should not be assumed that they were simply a hagiography of that law; in fact, as David Lieberman has claimed, Blackstone intended the *Commentaries* to function not only as an exposition and celebration of the law, but also as a program of reform, or at least improvement of, that law. In particular, Blackstone wished the *Commentaries* to instruct the legislature in the correct manner in which to treat the common law:

Few features of the *Commentaries* have suffered such unfortunate neglect as Blackstone's stated aim that his work should furnish guidance to "such as are, or may hereafter become, legislators."

Legislative instruction figured as a major programmatic objective for Blackstone's celebrated law book⁴⁵⁷

That this is the case can most easily be shown through an examination of perhaps the best-known passage of the *Commentaries*, in which Blackstone seeks to compare the common law with

⁴⁵⁷ *Province of Legislation Determined*, p. 56. In claiming this, Lieberman goes further than Cairns dares in 'Blackstone, an English Institutist', which does not really consider Blackstone's text beyond the narrow confines of its institutional genre, though it does make a brief gesture towards the line of argument later developed by Lieberman: 'Blackstone is generally seen as giving a definitive account of the traditional common law just before the massive changes of the next century. It may even be plausibly suggested that Blackstone provoked and facilitated reform through his exposition of English law as an ordered whole', p. 358.

other venerable edifices of antiquity, which rash and unexperienced workmen have ventured to new-dress and refine, with all the rage of modern improvement ... frequently it's [*sic*] symmetry has been destroyed, it's [*sic*] proportions distorted, and it's [*sic*] majestic simplicity exchanged for specious embellishments and fantastic novelties.⁴⁵⁸

The context of this quote makes it quite clear that Blackstone is referring to the efforts of parliament to reform the law, for immediately before it, Blackstone had insisted that gentlemen in parliament 'are not thus honourably distinguished from the rest of their fellow-subjects, merely that they may privilege their persons, their estates, or their domestics'; rather, 'They are the guardians of the English constitution; the makers, repealers, and interpreters of the English laws', and it would seem that, up until the publication of the *Commentaries* at least, they had signally failed in their duties.⁴⁵⁹

The *Commentaries* must, then, be understood to function as an educative tool for the polite gentleman, a tool capable of supplying the elite with the knowledge required to produce a rational reform of the common law, as need arose. As such, it sought also to provide an account of the process of reason required to achieve such reform, a process which suggests that Blackstone cannot be understood to be quite so trammelled by tradition and precedent as he is often represented. In particular, David Lieberman points to the importance of Blackstone's use of natural law as a basis for the common law, most pungently

⁴⁵⁸ *Commentaries*, I, p. 10.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 9.

expressed in his insistence that ‘precedents and rules must be followed, unless flatly absurd or unjust’.⁴⁶⁰ Thus Blackstone developed a concept of the reason of law which - in a figure by now quite familiar - made use of two elements, principle and precedent (to adopt Lieberman’s terms), that were at best uncomfortable bedfellows but which, through a process of interaction and mutual refinement, produced a body of law flexible enough to cope with changing circumstances and social needs.

Yet it was precisely this capacity to respond to the changing circumstances and needs of eighteenth-century society (or at least, the lack of this capacity) that became the dominant theme of the many texts critical of the common law. It is the assertion of Tancred, for example, in an anticipation of Blackstone’s architectural metaphor, that the law was

not so well adapted to the Occasions of the Age we now live in, as to that in which they were first form’d: And ‘tis as absurd to think, that an ancient Structure of human Laws shou’d be as compleat as those of later Date, so much to be improv’d by long Experience, as that a House, contriv’d after the Old Fashion, can compare for Beauty and Conveniency with the present Modern Architecture.⁴⁶¹

Perhaps the two most consistent criticisms of the law were of the slowness of its administration and the uncertainty of its judgements. These both could easily be represented as a result of the complexity of the common law itself, which

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 70. See also Cairns, ‘Blackstone, an English Institutist’, p. 358, on Blackstone’s attempt to fuse equity and common law - in which he followed Mansfield.

is so prolix, and so widely scattered up and down in such a Number of Volumes ... the most material Objections to this Branch of our Law, are its Bulk and Uncertainty ... the study of the Common Law is more than the Business of a Man's whole Life; nay, when he has done all, he has got no further than the Boundary of Doubt, and very seldom reaches the Line of Certainty. What is the natural and unavoidable Consequence, in any Science, of intricate, inconsistent, and diffusive voluminous Arguments, but Error and Uncertainty?⁴⁶²

And this uncertainty could only be increased by one of the peculiar features of English law, the use of men with little or no legal training as Justices of the Peace, responsible for the administration of law at the local level. These officers were assisted in their duties, no doubt, by the publication of numerous legal manuals, designed to ensure that the administration of local law kept up to date with legal developments in the higher courts; yet, as one of the most important of these manuals acknowledged, 'in a matter of so flux a nature as the law, it is not to be imagined that any edition, however tolerable for the time, should long continue so, without submitting to alterations according to times and circumstances.'⁴⁶³ Worse than this, even the nominally professional men of law frequently possessed only so much knowledge of the law as they had been able to

⁴⁶¹ [C. Tancred], *An Essay for a General Regulation of the Law, and the More Easy and Speedy Advancement of Justice* (London, 1727), p. 9.

⁴⁶² J. Fitzsimmonds, *Free and Candid Disquisitions, On the Nature and Execution of the Laws of England, Both in Civil and Criminal Affairs* (London, 1751), p. 11.

⁴⁶³ R. Burn, *The Justice of the Peace, and Parish Officer* (London, 1756), p. x, from the Advertisement to the third edition.

gather up into 'Precedent Books', which held examples of the usual work likely to be faced by lawyers and attorneys:

What soon becomes evident is that most of their knowledge of the law was obtained in a very haphazard fashion Basically, the more precedents an attorney could amass on a given topic - he may even have inherited the books of his late father or master to whose business he had succeeded - the more qualified he was to judge and advise personally on that topic.⁴⁶⁴

Such uncertainty led, almost inevitably, to a situation in which 'the relative merits of the common law as measured against those of the English civil law courts or the common law as contrasted with equity, or even local against centralised justice, were all fiercely contested.'⁴⁶⁵ The most significant of these contests for the future of the common law were, obviously, those that took place at its heart, over the nature and direction of the common law in the modern commercial society of Britain, and I shall come to these shortly. Before I do so, however, it will be interesting to briefly explore a contest of a very different, and perhaps unexpected sort, though one which must certainly be seen as remaining within the general contest between the common law and its competitors.

According to Lieberman, one of the most significant features of the success of the *Commentaries* was Blackstone's stylistic achievement; and,

⁴⁶⁴ M. Miles, "'Eminent Practitioners": The New Visage of Country Attorneys c.1750-1800' in G. R. Rubin and D. Sugarman eds, *Law, Economy and Society, 1750-1914: Essays in the History of English Law* (London, 1984), Part B, pp. 470-503; p. 489.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 'Introduction - Towards a New History of Law and Material Society in England, 1750-1914', D. Sugarman and G. R. Rubin, pp. 1-123, p. 17.

though it ‘was of course more than an eighteenth-century best-seller’, its sheer readability was one of the features that placed it alongside the other great historical works of the eighteenth century.⁴⁶⁶ It is interesting, therefore, to compare it to one relatively minor work that sought to compete with the common law not only through its reasonableness and utility, but also through its style. William Hutton’s *Courts of Requests*, a discussion of the powers and purpose of the few local courts of equity in England, not only made explicit criticism of the vast numbers of legal volumes containing little more than ‘statutes, and abridgements of statutes, marshalled in alphabetical order Dry cores that nobody chuses to swallow’, but also would seem to make implicit criticism of Blackstone on stylistic grounds.⁴⁶⁷ Abandoning the high style of eighteenth-century prose so favoured by Blackstone and Gibbon, Hutton begins his work with a description of his sheer *desire* for law, for his role in the equity courts:

A powerful relish in the mind for any undertaking, will in some measure supply the defect of capacity. I have longed for Friday, as the school-boy for Christmas; nay, the practice of years has not worn off the keen edge of desire. I may be said to have spent a life on the Bench, which, though without profit, carried its own reward; for I have considered the suitors as my children, and when any of this vast family looked up to me for peace and justice, I have distributed both with pleasure.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁶ *Province of Legislation Determined*, p. 32.

But it is in his presentation of principles through cases that Hutton is most strikingly different to Blackstone and the common lawyers. Giving brief details of cases in an amiable discursive prose, rather than an abstract or analytical style, with titles such as ‘The Man deceived by Himself’, ‘The meek Husband and bouncing Wife’, or ‘The Living outwitted by the Dead’, Hutton moves away from the formality of eighteenth-century enlightened prose and seems to point forwards to the lightness and informality of Dickens’s *Sketches by Boz*.⁴⁶⁹ It would seem that not only a new form of law, but a new style for that law, is required by commercial society.

Clearly the most important contest over law, however, took place within the discourse of common law itself, as judges such as Lord Mansfield sought to adapt the common law to meet the needs of a commercial society. In particular, Mansfield sought to make use of remedies derived from the law-merchant, rather than the common law itself, when the common law appeared dubious, difficult, or simply irrational.⁴⁷⁰ Law-merchant had entered English law as one part of the law of nations, and so its use could be represented to be consistent with previous practice - merely the adoption of a previously under-used resource - just as Mansfield’s legal principles can be understood as an extension of, rather than a deviation from, Blackstone’s representation of the common law as a combination of principle and precedent, of immemorialism and equity.⁴⁷¹ The difference between the two was one of degree, and not of kind; yet still ‘Mansfield’s

⁴⁶⁷ W. Hutton, *Courts of Requests: Their Nature, Utility, and Powers Described, with a Variety of Cases, Determined in that of Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1787), p. 6.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid*, Preface, pp. vii-viii.

⁴⁶⁹ Titles of cases III, XXIX and XLVII respectively. C. Dickens, *Sketches by Boz* (London, 1995 - first published 1839).

⁴⁷⁰ *Province of Legislation Determined*, ch. 5.

⁴⁷¹ ‘Blackstone, an English Institutist’, p. 358.

innovations have often appeared as a foreign-inspired assault on English orthodoxies, threatening in this instance to undermine the separation of law and equity.⁴⁷²

This, certainly, was the position of the Wilkites as they sought to appropriate the law and its courts as a site for confrontation with government, and for identification with a much larger constituency of the 'men of small property' identified by Brewer, who suffered by the law.⁴⁷³ As Junius charged of Mansfield:

I see through your whole life, one uniform plan to enlarge the power of the crown, at the expence of the liberty of the subject. To this object your thoughts, words, and actions have been constantly directed. In contempt or ignorance of the common law of England, you have made it your study to introduce into the court, where you preside, maxims of jurisprudence unknown to Englishmen. The Roman code, the law of nations, and the opinion of foreign civilians are your perpetual theme;- but who ever heard you mention Magna Charta or the Bill of Rights with approbation or respect? By such treacherous arts, the noble simplicity and free spirit of our Saxon laws were first corrupted. The Norman conquest was not compleat, until Norman lawyers had introduced their laws, and reduced slavery to a system.⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷² *Province of Legislation Determined*, p. 131.

⁴⁷³ J. Brewer, 'The Wilkites and the law, 1763-74: a study of radical notions of governance' in J. Brewer and J. Styles (eds), *An Ungovernable People. The English and Their Law in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (London etc., 1980), pp. 128-71; p. 138.

⁴⁷⁴ C. W. Everett (ed.), *The Letters of Junius* (London, 1927), p. 178 (letter of 14/11/1770).

It was not possible, in this understanding of English law and English history, for the use of principles derived from equity to operate merely as refinements upon the substance of the common law in the manner suggested by Blackstone; instead, *any* innovation upon the common law was a fundamental challenge to it, one which, if admitted into the law, could scarcely be undone without undoing the entire fabric of the law: ‘One precedent creates another. They soon accumulate, and constitute law. What yesterday was fact, to-day is doctrine.’⁴⁷⁵

This rather hysterical intolerance of mixture in English law can thus be seen to depart significantly from the theoretical consensus established by Hale and Blackstone, which enabled English law to be perceived as the ongoing interaction of principle and precedent, and which was associated with a history of the English nation that stressed its mixed origins. It also, peculiarly, tended to undermine the sense, provided by the kind of architectural metaphor for which Blackstone is so well-known, that the common law was possessed of a proper extent, an appropriate limit, which could not be erased by innovations upon the law.

And as the Wilkite understanding of law departed from theoretical orthodoxy, so it also abandoned the historical understanding which went with it and, rejecting a British identity that relied upon the metaphor of miscegenation as a binding principle, insisted instead upon an English exceptionalism that was similarly intolerant of mixture. Thus, recalling George III’s famous speech declaring that ‘Born and educated in this country, I glory in the name of Briton’, Junius could claim that

When you affectedly renounced the name of Englishman, believe me, Sir, you were persuaded to pay a very ill-judged compliment to one part of your subjects at the expence of another. While the natives of Scotland are not in actual rebellion, they are undoubtedly intitled to protection, nor do I mean to condemn the policy of giving some encouragement to the novelty of their affections for the house of Hanover. I am ready to hope for everything from their new-born zeal, and from the future steadiness of their allegiance. But hitherto they have no claim to your favour. To honour them with a determined predilection and confidence, *in exclusion of your English subjects*, who placed your family, and in spite of treachery and rebellion, have supported it upon the throne, is a mistake too gross, even for the unsuspecting generosity of youth.⁴⁷⁶

It would seem that for Junius, then, to claim the identity of 'Briton' required the abandonment of Englishness, which cannot tolerate mixture.

Much has been made, quite rightly, of the importance of the separate traditions of English and Scottish law to the continuation of England and Scotland's distinct national identities.⁴⁷⁷ Here, however, we can begin to recognise that, in fact, the vision of English common law as provided by Blackstone can actually be understood to be the source not of English

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 'Dedication to the *English Nation*', p. 3.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 137-8, (To the Printer of the *Public Advertiser*, 19/12/1769). Emphasis added. George III's speech, given 18/11/1760, is quoted in a footnote to p. 137.

exceptionalism, but rather the potential grounds for an assimilation of the Scots into an Anglo-British identity - for, though Blackstone admits that 'the municipal or common laws of England are, generally speaking, of no force or validity in Scotland', he still notes, with Coke

how marvellous a conformity there was, not only in the religion and language of the two nations, but also in their antient laws ... he supposes the common law of each to have been originally the same⁴⁷⁸

It may well be, then, that English and Scottish law were very different, the result of their separate historical developments; yet they remained, at core, of similar provenance (Hale, indeed, had asserted that some Scottish law was 'derived from the Laws of England, as from their Fountain and Original').⁴⁷⁹ Moreover, as has already been suggested, Blackstone's conception of the English common law can be seen to incorporate elements - in particular, the law of equity - whose existence is more commonly associated with Scottish law. The 'celebration of the wisdom of the common law', meanwhile, need not be confined to the English legal tradition:

An eighteenth-century Scottish lawyer, for example, would have encountered much the same doctrines in Stair's *Institutions*. There

⁴⁷⁷ Though Kidd does raise an important dissenting voice here, insisting that the Scottish legal system during the eighteenth century was in fact more problematic to national identity than is generally recognised - *Subverting Scotland's Past*, ch. 7.

⁴⁷⁸ *Commentaries*, I, p. 95.

⁴⁷⁹ *History of the Common Law of England*, p. 132. It must be stressed here, however, that Hale's aim is not to assert the superiority of English law in Scotland, but to insist that English law is not derived from Scotland.

Stair likewise stressed the superior virtues of legal custom “wrought out from ... debates upon particular cases,” in which “the conveniencies and inconveniencies thereof, through a tract of time, are experimentally seen.” And as Kames was later to do, Stair immediately contrasted this with the situation in statute law, where “the law-giver must at once balance the conveniencies and inconveniencies,” and therefore “may, and often doth, fall short.”⁴⁸⁰

The differences between English and Scottish law - and, especially, the significance of those differences - may have been somewhat overdrawn by historians of nationalism, therefore, whose judgement of them are surely affected by more recent developments. The English common law may well have remained purely and particularly English, but for a moment in the eighteenth century it may have been possible to perceive it in quite other terms.⁴⁸¹

At the same time as the Wilkites sought to challenge Mansfield with an ultra-traditionalist reading of the common law, another, more original critique was in the process of construction. Jeremy Bentham, in his *Comment on the Commentaries*, and *A Fragment on Government*, began the project of legal exploration and criticism that was to occupy much of the rest of his life, and which remained unfinished at his death.⁴⁸² As is well-known, Bentham sought to take Blackstone to task - and with him, through him, the entire edifice of the

⁴⁸⁰ *Province of Legislation Determined*, p. 163.

⁴⁸¹ Which perhaps takes Cairns's insight into the nationalist nature of Blackstone's work one step further than he might have anticipated.

⁴⁸² J. Bentham, *The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham. Principles of Legislation* (London, 1977): *A Comment on the Commentaries*, composed 1774-5, first published 1928; *A Fragment on Government*, first published 1776.

common law - for his failure to express truly, accurately and concisely, the nature and condition of the common law, and the people's relationship to it:

Thus vague, thus deplorably vague is the most precise description that can be given of this branch of that great body which is intended to serve us for a rule of action {the Civil law}. We are sent to hunt for it through a body as extensive and as dark [as] that into which it is adopted. Judged by a standard the parts of which are every where and no where, commanded to do they know not what, and punished they know not why: such, O Legislators, is the state of uncertainty and distraction in which the people lie abandoned, while ye are sleeping!⁴⁸³

Bentham's response to this catastrophe of legislative uncertainty was (eventually, at least) to attempt to construct a perfect system of comprehensive, comprehensible law, based (of course) upon the principle of utility.

Here, however, I wish to concentrate upon Bentham's immediate response to the *Commentaries*, and in particular upon his *Comment on the Commentaries* as, though it remained unpublished throughout his life and was certainly of much less popular significance than the extremely successful *A Fragment on Government*, I would suggest it displays particularly clearly one dangerous symptom produced by the Blackstonean understanding of the common law. The first indication of this problem occurs in the full title of the work: *A Comment on the Commentaries or an Introduction to the Introduction being a*

review of that part of Dr. Blackstone's Commentaries on the Laws of England which is entitled Introduction to serve as a supplement to that work. Of course, this title is ironic, seeking to undermine the *Commentaries* even before engaging them; yet, as well as the irony of this title, the reader must be struck by its repetitiveness, its excess: twice a comment, thrice an introduction, and all this merely to serve as a supplement to another work.

It is not long before another example of this excess intrudes upon Bentham's text, as he explores Blackstone's definition of 'Municipal Law':

Of this sentence, every member almost that is separately significant has its separate explanation: and in truth it wants it: and that explanation wants another: and if he were to give another that would want a third: and if a third, that would want a fourth: and the more explanation he gave it, one might venture to say, the more would still be wanting.⁴⁸⁴

Again, Bentham finds Blackstone in need of further and further commentary, in a futile attempt to fix a meaning to his text; and though Bentham's text is again suffused with irony, we might begin to suspect that this irony does not so much display a mastery of Blackstone, as a *desire* to do so. In fact, Bentham's entire response to Blackstone seems to be reducible to this ironically expressed need to master, to engage in a project of explication and analysis only ended by his own death. After all, the entirety of the *Comment on the Commentaries* is confined to

⁴⁸³ *Collected Works*, p. 264.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 38.

a discussion of just the Introduction to Blackstone's work, while *A Fragment on Government*, which arose out of the Bentham's work on the *Comment on the Commentaries*, deals only with Blackstone's brief digression, in the *Commentaries*, on the subject of government. Later in the *Comment on the Commentaries*, Bentham announces that:

It costs us so many words, and that unavoidably, to do justice to our Author's various merits: to comment upon his commentaries, to introduce to his Introduction, to explain his explanations and now lastly in particular, to interpret his methods of interpretation, that I fear, the Reader will begin to think he has had enough of it⁴⁸⁵

Here, it seems likely that it is not only the Reader who begins to tire of Blackstone; Bentham himself seems unwilling to continue the profitless search for meaning in the *Commentaries*.

The *Commentaries*, then, seem to function almost as an intellectual cancer, proliferating endlessly beyond (and through) the attempts of Bentham to restrict them to determinate meaning. This effect, this inevitable and unstoppable inflation of meaning, would seem to be the textual counterpart of the actual empirical problem of the common law, the fact of its proliferation of statutes and judgements beyond the comprehension of one man, beyond, even, the comprehension of a corporate intelligence such as that represented by Coke's

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 118. And then, of course, there is the question of the 'Castrations' of the *Comment on the Commentaries*, those aspects of Bentham's analysis of Blackstone (probably on issues of sexual morality, and in particular, on homosexuality) which Bentham felt unable to publish - Bentham's response to the *Commentaries* might thus be characterised as both an injunction to

notion of artificial reason. Both aspects of this dilemma, however, the theoretical and the actual, would seem to be in some way the effect of the central paradox of the common law, as noted by Pocock: that the 'custom' which forms the bedrock of that law can be understood to mean *either* an unchanging, immemorial content, *or* an ever-changing practice. This can also be understood as the relationship between the English common law as precedent, and as equity, which I have sought to show can be understood to function through a metaphor of miscegenation: the diverse elements of the common law are derived from different areas, times, practices, and are naturalised into English law through their codification as 'the common law', a codification which ensures their subordination to an overarching principle of order.

It is this sense of the naturalisation of various forms of law into one common law that lies behind Hale's representation of the English common law as akin to 'the Rivers of Severn, Thames, Trent, &c. tho' they continue the same Denomination which their first Stream had, yet have the Accession of divers other Streams added to them in the Tracts of their Passage which enlarge and augment them.'⁴⁸⁶ It would seem, then, that the common law functions somewhat in the manner described by Barthes in *Mythologies* as 'inoculation':

One immunizes the contents of the collective imagination by means of a small inoculation of acknowledged evil; one thus protects it against the risk of a generalized subversion.⁴⁸⁷

speak, endlessly, and an interdiction upon that speech. The 'Castrations' are discussed in the *Collected Works*, pp. xxxiii-xxxvi.

⁴⁸⁶ *History of the Common Law of England*, p. 42.

⁴⁸⁷ R. Barthes, *Mythologies*, selected and translated by A. Lavers (London, 1973 - first published Paris, 1957), p. 150.

By admitting that some elements of the English common law - ecclesiastical law and the law merchant, for example - were in fact naturalised aliens within a body of law that remained essentially native, lawyers such as Hale and Blackstone were able to dodge challenges to the supposed national quality of that law. In particular, they were able to avoid the issue of the Conquest, and the imposition by William the Conqueror of new forms of law that would undermine the authority of the common law, by associating that authority with the acceptance of law by the community - a community as mixed in its origins as the law which ordered it.

This essentially dialectical understanding of 'custom' and the common law, however, was always vulnerable to the stressing of one aspect of it at the expense of the other, and this would appear to be the case towards the mid- to late-eighteenth century, as it became evident that the common law, as it stood, was not capable of dealing with the new commercial state of Britain. The opposed responses of Bentham and of the Wilkites to the attempts of the common lawyers, led by Mansfield, to reform the law, give a perfect example of this: for the Wilkites, to reform the law through recourse to precedents taken from equity courts was to subvert that law; for Bentham, to attempt to maintain the balance of principle and precedent was to maintain a tyrannical process of mystification which could only be dispelled through the principled use of reason. The feature of 'inoculation', therefore, which seemed to have guaranteed the capacity of the common law to maintain its authority through reference to a communal acceptance of the law, began to break down as equity (always associated with alien systems of law) began to transgress the boundaries set for it.

John Barrell, in the very different context of Thomas De Quincey's life and writings, has examined this feature of 'inoculation' rather further, in particular in relation to De Quincey's fear of the colonial encounter (a fear which mirrored an 'internal' fear related to his sister's early death from hydrocephalus):

The process of inoculation we have been examining in De Quincey's geopolitical schemata is rather less successful, however, than Barthes suggests. It never *immunises* against the infections of the East; at best it enables the patient to shake them off for a time, or gives him the illusion of having done so, but always with the fear that they will return in a more virulent form The process of inoculation involves simultaneously protecting someone against a disease and infecting them with it To be inoculated *against* the disease is at the same time to be inoculated *with* it⁴⁸⁸

De Quincey's psyche, in Barrell's analysis, attempts to cure itself of its twin fears - a dead sister, an Eastern threat - through a process of incorporation and rejection, of inoculation, but proves incapable of doing so in the long run, as those figures *keep coming back*, however often he writes them out. This, I would suggest, is somewhat akin to the process I have described occurring in writing on the common law.

It is notable that in Hale's representation of the reception of non-native law by the common law, great stress is placed upon the boundaries of that law,

⁴⁸⁸ J. Barrell, *The Infection of Thomas De Quincey. A Psychopathology of Imperialism* (New Haven and London, 1991), p. 16.

jealously patrolled by the common law: 'If they exceed the Bounds of that Reception ... The Common Law does and may prohibit and punish them'.⁴⁸⁹

This tends to suggest two features: first, that despite the supposed naturalisation of alien systems of law into the common law, that process is in fact incomplete, these systems remaining discrete and unincorporated; and secondly, that these systems pose a perpetual threat to the common law which, though it may tolerate their continued presence as a necessary evil, cannot accept their expansion or further integration into the wider system. And as Barrell recognises, in moments of great stress these 'internal aliens' of the self might prove to be dangerous lodgers:

It may be, however, that the "alien nature" is so very alien as to be the enemy of one's own, in which case it will have to be represented as beyond the *cordon sanitaire* which defines what can be accepted as one's own nature, and which constitutes that nature. But what if it won't go quietly? or what if it has the power of reproducing itself infinitely, so that as each alien nature is tamed, domesticated, recuperated, another appears in the very place, the very chamber of the brain, the very sanctuary which has just been swept, swabbed down, disinfected, fumigated?⁴⁹⁰

This would appear to be what Bentham discovered in the *Comment on the Commentaries*, though it undoubtedly also underlies the Wilkite paranoia over

⁴⁸⁹ *History of the Common Law of England*, p. 20.

⁴⁹⁰ *Infection of Thomas De Quincey*, pp. 18-19.

the extension of equitable judgements into the wider common law. So long as those alien systems of law remained within their bounds, they could be represented as, essentially, English by adoption. This representation could be assisted by a certain degree of neglect also - by a failure to explore or articulate their precise relationship to the overarching common law. During the eighteenth century, however, several things occurred to render their presence a much greater threat to the psychic health of English law: the growing sense of a need to reform the common law; the clear articulation of the common law as a system combining precedent and principle in a process of dialectical transformation (that articulation being intended, in part at least, to describe how the process of reform necessary might take place); and thirdly, the identification of the 'principle' element of the common law with systems of equity and natural law, systems that were considered not truly English.

Rather than functioning as a healthy dialectic, then, the common law came to seem increasingly paradoxical and unstable, its meaning increasingly unclear and subject to the kind of proliferation which so disturbed Bentham. Meanwhile, according to Donald Kelley (automatically reaching for the language of repulsion and desire which structures the technique of inoculation), the 'twin menaces' living inside/outside the common law, 'civil and canon law ... inspired a sort of fascinated horror in most Englishmen.'⁴⁹¹ And of course, such a disturbance in the representation of the common law was not a mere inconvenience: it struck at the very heart of the discourse on sovereignty, authority and nationhood that had been developed around the history of the common law. This is perhaps best evidenced by Bentham, who, in rejecting

Blackstone's account of the common law, makes his own recommendation for reading on the subject:

These Commentaries have not been translated into any foreign language. Foreigners are better furnished. They have Mr De L'Olme's short but excellent account of the British Laws, which contains the best of whatever our Author *has* said, with much that he should have said, but has not.⁴⁹²

Of course, it is both intriguing and (from a contemporary's point of view) somewhat mortifying that the best account of the common law which Bentham could suggest was written by a Frenchman: but more explosive even than this is the actual *content* of that account, which fundamentally re-writes the history of the English common law in a manner which could not endear Mr De L'Olme to many English patriots. First, then, De L'Olme undermined the Saxon contribution to the English constitution:

though our knowledge of the principal events of this early period of the English History is in some degree exact, yet we have but vague and uncertain accounts of the Government which those Nations introduced.

It appears to have had little more affinity with the present Constitution, than the general relation, common indeed to all the

⁴⁹¹ D. R. Kelley, *The Human Measure*, p. 175.

Governments established by the Northern Nations, that of having a King and a Body of Nobility.⁴⁹³

Here, De L'Olme challenges the usual account of English history in three different ways: first, he suggests that the knowledge of the period is too vague to disclose any special relationship to the present; secondly, he fails to distinguish between the various 'Northern Nations', which suggests that the rampaging Danes may well have had as much influence upon the English constitution as the liberty-loving Saxons; thirdly, he suggests that what *is* known of the early English constitution was far too general amongst the peoples of Europe to have much explanatory power when considering the liberty possessed by modern Britons.

Instead, De L'Olme offers an origin to the English constitution that must have been anathema to almost all thinkers within the common law tradition: 'It is at the era of the Conquest, that we are to look for the real foundation of the English Constitution.'⁴⁹⁴ He goes on to dismiss, in a footnote, the usual English account of the Conquest:

It has been a favourite thesis with many Writers, to pretend that the Saxon Government was, at the time of the Conquest, by no means subverted

⁴⁹² *Collected Works*, p. 124. In fact, Bentham was wrong to suggest that the *Commentaries* had not been published abroad - there were several French translations by 1823, and several in other parts of Europe also (see *Collected Works*, p. 124, fn. 2).

⁴⁹³ J. L. De L'Olme, *The Constitution of England, or an Account of the English Government* (London, 1775 - first English translation), p. 8.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 8-9.

But if we consider that the essence of a Government lies in the particular mode in which the public power ... is distributed in a State; and that a total alienation in this respect was introduced into England by the Conquest, we shall not scruple to allow that a new government was introduced. Nay, as almost the whole landed property in the Kingdom was at that time transferred to other hands, a new System of criminal Justice introduced, and even the language of the law altered, the revolution may be said to have been such as is not perhaps to be paralleled in the History of any other Country.⁴⁹⁵

The nightmare scenario of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century common lawyers had thus been established by De L'Olme: there *had* been a Conquest in England, one which fundamentally changed the laws of the land, and it had occurred without the consent of the nation. It was to avoid precisely this kind of argument that the myth of the common law had been so carefully built up, and which its potential collapse seemed to augur.

Interestingly, in fact, De L'Olme went on to outline an alternative explanation for the development of a system of liberty rooted in the consent of the nation, one which sought to contrast the fate of liberty in England and in France as a paradoxical result of the two countries' differing dispositions of power within the state. In early France, he suggested, power had been diffused across the nation in such a way that there was no sense of unity, 'only a number of parts, simply placed by each other, and without any reciprocal adherence'; in England, meanwhile, as the result of William the Conqueror's total monopoly

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid*, fn. to pp. 9-10.

upon power, the nation ‘by the pressure of its [the monarchy’s] immense weight, [became] consolidated ... into one compact indissoluble body.’⁴⁹⁶ As a result of these early developments in the structure of the nation, then, later crises in the state produced a total reverse in fortunes:

Liberty perished in France, because it wanted a favourable culture and proper situation ... having taken no root, it was soon plucked up It was the excessive power of the King which made England free, because it was this very excess that gave rise to the spirit of union, and of regulated resistance.⁴⁹⁷

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, few chose to follow Bentham’s advice, despite De L’Olme’s presentation of a history in which conquest is not permanent. The discourse of the common law, and its peculiar usage of the notion of custom, remained significant in English political and historical thought to the late-eighteenth century and beyond (even if its significance within *legal* thought and practice may well have diminished), though perhaps with an increasingly elite tendency, as plebeian notions of custom, and of the appropriate manner for recording and remembering customs, came to be either challenged or disregarded.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 17.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 22-3.

⁴⁹⁸ See previous chapter, and, of course, E. P. Thompson’s *Customs in Common*.

7 - The End of History? The French Revolution and the Rise of the Novel.

In my thesis, I have sought to develop several different arguments about the implication of the historical imagination in the construction of British national identity after the Act of Union in 1707. The early chapters aimed to describe the genre of historical writing almost as much as they did the acts and structures of imagination which this writing facilitated: thus they uncovered not only a variety of different figures and narratives through which the nation might be imagined, but also the implication of historical writing in an ongoing uncertainty over the truth of narrative, an uncertainty which tied the development of history in with the development of other narrative forms, such as the novel and the newspaper.

In these early chapters, attention was also paid - though in a necessarily incomplete and fragmentary way - to the use of history by individuals to help comprehend their relationships with British society. The reading, writing, and performance of various forms of history (history here being understood in extremely broad terms, thus escaping both the repetitious plagiarism of early eighteenth-century history writing and the *bellettrist* reputation of the later eighteenth-century writing) was, I suggested, one way in which all members of British society were encouraged to make sense of their lives.

In doing so, I have perhaps avoided two of the more obvious sites for a discussion of the Britishness under construction in this period: a Britishness based around religious homogeneity, or at least, around a shared Protestantism; and a Britishness based upon the experience of racial and cultural difference, as the new state responded both to a consistent French threat, and to the early growth, and changing nature, of the British Empire. I have also moved away

from what appeared, at the moment of Union, the most crucial and problematic relationship within the nation, that of England and Scotland. In large part, this has been a result of the evidence upon which I have mostly concentrated, neither empire nor Anglo-Scottish relations being particularly well illuminated by the eighteenth century's writing of pre-Norman British history; it has also been influenced by my growing belief, after Colin Kidd, that Scottish history was essentially subsumed under, rather than integrated with, its English cousin.⁴⁹⁹

But if this understanding of the writing of Anglo-British history can be seen to mark a loss in this thesis, it has also provided one of its more fruitful themes, as it demonstrates what appears to me a significant imaginative strategy employed for two other constituent elements of the British nation, and its historical narrative. The position of women and of the mob within the British historical imagination, an imagination I have claimed is structured by a narrative of miscegenation that has inevitably tended to implicate these two as actors, have been extremely important concerns throughout my thesis, and have been developed especially within the last three chapters. There I have sought to show that their representation within the nation was in fact based upon a process of incorporation similar to that which describes the fate of Scottish historiography.

In those chapters, however, I have also sought to show the development of British national identity within the context of two conflicting discourses upon the national character. In discussions both of the tendency of population (and its relationship to the process of enclosure), and of the nature and proper direction of the common law, discourses on custom and on political economy and improvement came into conflict. As well as claiming an insight into the British

⁴⁹⁹ C. Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past*.

national character, however, these discourses also undoubtedly claimed legitimacy as narratives of Anglo-British history, and especially the development of English liberty. The discourse of custom sought to assert a national community rooted in a set of legal practices and social habits derived from some immemorial origin, while that of political economy and improvement insisted that the liberty so prized by the British derived from the growth of luxury in the previous century, rather than from any pre-existing political or legal settlement. Of course, this history of improvement could be, and generally was, set within a much broader history of the development of luxury; yet it remained essentially a history of discontinuity, of stages of development, rather than of a continuous organic community.

These discourses are, clearly, in many ways antagonistic, and could not easily be reconciled in this period, even should the attempt to do so be made. In this final chapter, however, I want to indicate the outcome of these competing discourses of national character, of the various figures at the heart of the reproduction of the nation, as well as of the genre in which this discussion has been sited. In doing so, I will move from the more thematic, and essentially event-free exploration that has dominated my thesis, to provide a definitely event-saturated account of history writing at the end of the eighteenth century, and particularly within the context of the French Revolution, and the Revolutionary wars.

The French Revolution, despite strong competition, remains easily the most iconic event of the eighteenth century. Truly global in its impact, with its historical epicentre located at - according to taste - either the taking of the Bastille and the execution of the King, or the September Massacres and the

Terror, it has become perhaps the classic site upon which historians have sought to found the coming of modernity, in both its enlightened and its terrorist guises. It also, as Eric Hobsbawm has argued, provided a distinctive understanding of the nation, as the source of national legitimacy shifted from the monarch to his people, to a citizenry that now understood themselves as the origin of authority in the state.⁵⁰⁰ In doing so, it can therefore be understood to provide a direct theoretical challenge to the British nation still under the process of construction, in which political legitimacy definitely still rested with the king in parliament, and in the peculiar tension that existed between an imported monarchy and the definitely parochial tradition of liberty which that monarchy was brought in to defend. Moreover, given that both the Revolution of 1688 and the rebellions (to the British mind) of the 1640s, of 1745 and of America remained fresh within the British national memory, there was in Britain an ambiguity as to how to respond to, how to understand the French Revolution, at least in its early stages, that cannot perhaps be found elsewhere in Europe.

There was scarcely an aspect of British life left untouched by the outbreak of the French Revolution, and by the slow shift of the political elites from the cautious welcome of an event commonly perceived to echo the Glorious Revolution of a century before, to a relentless opposition to a regicidal nation. From the development of a raft of legislative measures (including the suspension of *Habeas Corpus*) designed to prevent revolt within Britain, to the calling up of an unprecedented number of men to fight on sea and land; from the desperate need of the political centre to measure the size, strength and nature of the nation's

⁵⁰⁰ E. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, 1990).

support, to the efflorescence of political debate and organisation (at least in the early stages of the Revolution) across an immensely broad social spectrum, the French Revolution transformed life in Britain less spectacularly, perhaps, but no less certainly than in France. And as Linda Colley has already made plain in *her* account of the development of British national identity, the Revolution (and particularly, of course, the Revolutionary wars) played a vital role in forging the disparate patriotisms of the British into a coherent national response to the Gallic threat.

The French Revolution as a political event, then - as an event which contemporaries, as far removed in their responses as Richard Price and Edmund Burke, understood to be 'the most astonishing that has hitherto happened in the world' - produced an immense response within Britain, not only to the external threat posed by an increasingly militaristic France, but also to the questions which the Revolution seemed to pose for British society and British history.⁵⁰¹ The nature of the political settlement achieved in Britain at the Glorious Revolution, and whether contemporary Britain should be understood as a fulfilment or a corruption of that settlement; the nature of the French Revolution, and the attempt to understand that Revolution through reference to the *British* past; the proper role of public opinion - an opinion that was now acknowledged to include the mob, however that inclusion might be understood - and the best means to address and manipulate it; all were central issues in the British debate over the French Revolution. I aim to explore these issues through the same form of textual analysis that I have adopted throughout this thesis, taking as my focus one of the most remarkable and productive British responses to the Revolution,

Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, whose conservative representation of the Revolution configured not only the British reaction to events in France, but also the response of sympathetic radicals, who found themselves having to deal with Burke's text before being able to put forward their own representations.

As is well known, Burke's *Reflections* sought to respond not only to the French Revolution itself, but also to the reception and representation of the Revolution by various radical groups within Britain. In fact, the most significant pre-text of the *Reflections* was surely Richard Price's sermon, *A Discourse on the Love of our Country*.⁵⁰² Intended to commemorate the Glorious Revolution of 1688, Price's *Discourse* sought to align that great event in the Whig history of England with the American Revolution and the early days of the French Revolution, detecting the same spirit of liberty in all three and ending with the pious hope that this liberty would now spread to liberate all Europe (including Britain, whose revolution had in fact proved to be incomplete). In his celebration of the Glorious Revolution, Price had asserted that three main principles of the British constitution could be deduced from its history: the right to liberty of conscience; the right of resistance; and (most significantly) 'the right to chuse our own governors, to cashier them for misconduct, and to frame a government for ourselves.'⁵⁰³ In doing so, he did little more than repeat the commonplaces of Whig argument about the nature of the British constitution; yet this was precisely the section of Price's *Discourse* which Burke took most exception to, and sought to challenge in the *Reflections*.

⁵⁰¹ E. Burke, *Reflections*, p. 92.

This he did primarily through what appears to be a deliberate misreading of Price's meaning, converting what seems a fairly clear argument that the Glorious Revolution provided the modern English (and later British) nation with a popular origin, and an implicit right to re-constitute that nation should it be threatened with subversion by any future monarch. The hereditary right of the Georgian monarchs was thus implicitly understood to be based upon a popular consent of greater power than that right. This understanding, however, Burke converted into a notion that the British crown was *elective*, that the right of each monarch to assume and maintain possession of the throne was *always* under scrutiny, always questionable, and indeed that the British people might choose to remove the monarch upon trivial grounds - an understanding which seems quite different from Price's intentions.⁵⁰⁴ In his hands, the Glorious Revolution involved no innovation upon, no departure from the past - it was, rather, a return to the '*antient* indisputable laws and liberties, and that *antient* constitution of government which is our only security for law and liberty.'⁵⁰⁵

Burke, then, sought to contest Price's understanding of the French Revolution through an apparent misreading of his understanding of the Glorious Revolution; but he did not stop there. Wishing to provide a reason for Price's understanding of the Revolution, Burke sought to align Price with another preacher: Hugh Peters, the regicide. Taking advantage of their adoption of an identical text ('*Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation*') in response to what Burke represents as similar events

⁵⁰² R. Price, *Richard Price. Political Writings*, ed. D. O. Thomas (Cambridge etc., 1991 - first published 1789), pp. 179-96.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid*, pp. 189-90.

⁵⁰⁴ See *Reflections*, pp. 97-121, but p. 112 especially: 'No government could stand a moment, if it could be blown down with any thing so loose and indefinite as an opinion of "*misconduct*."'

(Peters riding before King Charles I on his way to trial; the French king ‘led in triumph’), Burke insisted that behind Price’s deviant reading of the Glorious Revolution there lay a fanatical desire for the death of the king - whether French or English, Burke suggests, is no longer clear.⁵⁰⁶ Through this realignment of Price, of course, he was also able to realign the French Revolution, asserting that it obtained its fullest meaning through comparison with the earlier English Revolution, and was likely to reach the same end (as, he implies, were the executed Peters and his modern counterpart Price).⁵⁰⁷

What is important here, of course, is not so much the guilt or innocence, truth or falsity of these different representations; rather, it is the contest, which this exchange inaugurates, over the proper relationship to be observed between past and present. In this, the opening stage of the debate over the French Revolution and its meaning for Britain, two features are already evident: first, the significance of differing historical understandings to the debate; secondly, the slipperiness of historical representation within the debate, the potential for divergent readings to be layered upon each other. Thus there is argument over whether 1648 or 1688 provides the better context for the French Revolution; over the nature and meaning of 1688 to the British constitution; and over the period of the Revolution which best symbolises its tendency.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 117.

⁵⁰⁶ *Reflections*, p. 158; Price, *Discourse*, p. 195.

⁵⁰⁷ ‘Peters had not the fruits of his prayer; for he neither departed so soon as he wished, nor in peace. He became (what I heartily hope none of his followers may be in this country) himself a sacrifice to the triumph which he led as Pontiff.’, *Reflections*, p. 158. It seems a little difficult to give Burke’s hearty hopes much credit here, not least as he once more relied upon a wilful misreading of Price’s text. In a later edition of his *Discourse* Price disclaimed the ‘riot and slaughter at Versailles’, which Burke had claimed was at the centre of Price’s text; instead, Price insisted, his text referred only to the fall of the Bastille - *Discourse*, p. 177.

In seeking to answer this essentially historical controversy, however, Burke sought to turn the question from one of history, to one of national character, which he sought to appropriate as the foundation for the correct understanding of that history; and in doing so, as John Pocock has argued in two important essays, he made powerful and simultaneous use of the discourses of custom and of political economy.⁵⁰⁸ It is already well known that the *Reflections* relies heavily upon the English legal tradition as presented by Hale and Blackstone, with his insistence that a proper knowledge of the British constitution, and the Glorious Revolution supposed to embody it, would come from looking ‘in our histories ... records ... acts of parliament, and journals of parliament, and not in the sermons of the Old Jewry, and the after-dinner toasts of the Revolution Society’ being only the preliminary for an examination of the larger history of the law in England.⁵⁰⁹ In Pocock’s account, however, Burke’s reliance upon the more contemporary discourse of political economy (with slight adaptations to accommodate his interest in the language of manners) also becomes clear. In fact, Pocock does not appear entirely certain of the feasibility of the two discourses, preferring to understand them as different facets of ‘a multi-surfaced and translucent artefact’; I will seek to show, however, that in fact these discourses should indeed be read together, in an admittedly divided text.⁵¹⁰

Central to Burke’s account of the legal history of England is an assertion that, though Coke and Blackstone’s claims as to the immemorial pedigree of the English law may be overstated, the tendency that their works display (‘the

⁵⁰⁸ J. G. A. Pocock, ‘Burke and the Ancient Constitution’ and ‘The Political Economy of Burke’s analysis of the French Revolution’ in *Virtue, Commerce, and History. Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly In the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge etc., 1985), pp. 193 - 212.

⁵⁰⁹ *Reflections*, p. 117.

⁵¹⁰ ‘Political Economy’, p. 194.

powerful prepossession towards antiquity, with which the minds of all our legislators, and of all the people whom they wish to influence, have been always filled') is a feature of more importance than the mere truth of their claims.⁵¹¹

Burke claims, in other words, that there is a settled community of belief in England, and now in Britain, as to the proper tendency and source of authority of the law. That community is led by lawyers, to be sure; but it also consists of at least some of 'the people' (a 'people' that extends beyond parliament, as Burke's inclusion of 'legislators' alongside lawyers suggests), and potentially all of 'the people' whose minds are not perverted by the kind of subversive claims made by Price and his allies.

He goes on, in one of his best known descriptions of the common law's guarantee of liberty, to insist that the rights and liberties of the British are most securely held not through reference to the abstract reason which Burke perceives to animate Price's *Discourse*, but 'as an *entailed inheritance* derived to us from our forefathers, and to be transmitted to our posterity'.⁵¹² English and British liberty, therefore, is considered by Burke to be the produce of a particular history (one which, incidentally, the use of the language of inheritance renders unlikely to be transmissible to any other persons), now made over into a habit of mind which forms a community. The Anglo-British nation is thus bound together not only by a belief in their possession of liberty and in the practise of that liberty, but also in their understanding of the origins of that liberty - which, as it is the Anglo-British history, is also the origins of the community itself.

⁵¹¹ *Reflections*, p. 118.

⁵¹² *Ibid*, p. 119.

Law and history can therefore be seen to have been converted into property: ‘an *entailed inheritance* ... a sort of family settlement; grasped as in a kind of mortmain for ever’, they define the community they constitute, a community which would be unwise to enquire too closely into what is not only the pedigree of the nation’s laws, but of the nation itself - lest in that process of abstract speculation it should suffer its own dissolution (as in the case of Defoe in chapter two):

they [the English at the Glorious Revolution] preferred this positive, recorded, *hereditary* title to all which can be dear to the man and the citizen, to that vague speculative right, which exposed their sure inheritance to be scrambled for and torn to pieces by every wild litigious spirit.⁵¹³

In opposition to that abstract reason, and in support of his national community of common lawyers, Burke sought to adopt the notion of ‘artificial reason’, as developed by Coke and Hale, and - expanding its applicability by altering its sense - converting it also into a ground for the nation’s identity. Thus he claims that English policy at the Glorious Revolution was ‘the result of profound reflection; or rather the happy effect of following nature, which is wisdom without reflection, and above it.’⁵¹⁴

Coke’s and Hale’s notion of ‘artificial reason’, of course, was one designed for the legal profession, and for parliament; based upon the wisdom of

⁵¹³ *Ibid*, pp. 119-20, p. 118.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 119.

usage and custom, a wisdom to be discovered through the observation of communities as they lived the law, it was a wisdom that could only truly be possessed by those who observed. The practice of the law might thus define the national community - the *knowledge* of the law could not. Burke, however, in transforming this 'artificial reason' into 'nature ... wisdom without reflection', ensured that in fact the knowledge of the law was now guaranteed to all members of the national community, as it was now to be understood to require neither reflective reason, nor indeed the immense knowledge previously associated with legal wisdom, but instead that the individual be fully steeped in the spirit and practice of the national community.⁵¹⁵

It is this national achievement, the centuries-long harmonisation of a people to a national myth of liberties and the structure of feeling which this myth propagates, that speculation, and the abstract rights it searches out, threatened to undo by subjecting it to a tribunal in which communal privilege is challenged by individual right. That this tribunal should be imagined by Burke to be that of the law itself (that 'wild litigious spirit') is the irony of his historical position, as the discourse of common law came under increasing challenge from the needs of a commercial society.

Thus Burke adapted the idea of the common law, as expressed by Coke and Blackstone and, most importantly (though he is not in fact mentioned by Burke), by Hale, to express the broad community of the British, in possession of a set of liberties which they hold not out of natural right, nor as the result of an unchangeable ancient constitution, but as the expression of a national character or nature whose origins cannot be retrieved without destroying the thing itself. In so

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*

doing, Burke would seem to have abandoned the project of historical explanation which had appeared so important to him thirty years before, when writing the fragment 'An Essay towards an History of the Laws of England', in which he sought to criticise the account of the common law given by Coke and others on two particular points:

the first, a persuasion hardly to be eradicated from the minds of our Lawyers, that the English Law has continued very much in the same state from an antiquity, to which they will allow hardly any sort of bounds. The second is, that it was formed and grew up among ourselves; that it is in every respect peculiar to this island If these principles are admitted, the History of the Law must in a great measure be deemed superfluous. For to what purpose is a History of a Law, of which it is impossible to trace the beginning, and which, during its continuance, has admitted no essential changes?⁵¹⁶

He goes on to explore the various codes of law within England up to and including the Norman conquest, taking note in particular of Alfred the Great and of Canute (also the Great, in Burke's account), and largely dismissing 'the Laws of Edward the Confessor ... it does not appear that he ever made a collection', but finally concluding that 'The Norman Conquest is the great era of our Laws. At this time the English jurisprudence ... was all at once, as from a mighty flood,

⁵¹⁶ E. Burke, 'An Essay towards an History of the Laws of England', p. 323. See also 'Burke and the Ancient Constitution', pp. 224-29, on Burke's conversion to Coke's position.

replenished with a vast body of foreign learning'.⁵¹⁷ For Pocock, Burke here contradicts Hale's position on the common law by asserting the possibility of uncovering the history of the law; in fact, as I have suggested in my previous chapter, this need not be the case, as Hale's account is not truly averse to historical explanation, but rather seeks to explain how English law may accommodate alien traditions without succumbing to them.⁵¹⁸

Burke, by the time of the *Reflections* has, however, shifted his position somewhat, and - abandoning the historical exposition of the law - moved closer to the position Pocock describes Hale occupying. One major distinction between the two remains, however, in that Burke's adoption of 'artificial reason' sought to exclude a particular form of reasoning in general from the political community, whereas Hale's original conception aimed only to exclude it from the more limited arena of the common law, and to maintain the authority of the common law over other forms of law within the state. Burke's conception of law is thus far more intolerant of natural law or the law of equity than either Hale or Blackstone, both of whom were quite capable of imagining a place for those forms of law within the common law. Indeed, Burke, in his assertion of the organic nature of the British political community, insisted nonetheless that 'we have taken care not to *inoculate* any cyon alien to the nature of the original plant' - inoculation, as discussed in the previous chapter, would seem again significant, and threatening, in Burke's account of the common law.⁵¹⁹

But if the speculative reason of civil law and the law of equity should be a dangerous, potentially unravelling force within Burke's account of the British

⁵¹⁷ 'Essay towards an History of the Laws of England', p. 328, p. 331.

⁵¹⁸ 'Burke and the Ancient Constitution', p. 224.

national character, it can be seen to be also a necessary element of that account, as the second discourse identified by Pocock to be active in the *Reflections*, that of political economy, grew up within a tradition powerfully influenced by the discipline of jurisprudence, and thus precisely that quality of speculative legal reasoning against which Burke exclaimed. To understand the interaction of the two discourses, then, it would seem necessary to provide a brief account of Burke's counter-narrative of the French Revolution's economic corruption.

Having asserted that British liberty and British history were best to be understood as property, as 'an *entailed inheritance*', Burke also sought to connect that liberty and history *to* property, and especially to particular types and structures of property. For a state to be properly constituted, he claimed, it must observe a proper balance in its representation between what Burke describes as 'ability' and 'property' (and by this opposition, it becomes clear that 'property' here, as so often, means landed property); and that balance, he insisted, was not to be found in equality:

as ability is a vigorous and active principle, and as property is sluggish, inert, and timid, it never can be safe from the invasions of ability, unless it be, out of all proportion, predominant in the representation. It must be represented too in great masses of accumulation, or it is not rightly protected. The characteristic essence of property, formed out of the combined principles of its acquisition and conservation, is to be *unequal*. The great masses therefore which excite envy, and tempt rapacity, must be put out of

⁵¹⁹ *Reflections*, p. 117. Emphasis added.

the possibility of danger. Then they form a natural rampart about the lesser properties in all their gradations.⁵²⁰

For property to be protected, therefore, it must be over-represented in the constitution; and it must be great property which dominates that representation, in order to ensure the protection of the lesser men of property from the rapacious power of men of ability (ironically, men such as Burke).

British liberty, by this account, was understood to be the protection of property, maintained alongside the opportunity to accumulate; it was, as the Scottish whigs had suggested, less the product of a jealously guarded ancient constitution than the experience of a modernity guaranteed by commercial prosperity. This led Burke to compare the Revolutions experienced by Britain and France not only as a differing attitude towards a pre-existing constitution, but also as a different approach towards commerce and financial security:

The revolution of 1688 had been secured by the foundation of the Bank of England and a system of public finance which encouraged investment in the future of the new regime and stimulated the growth of its prosperity and power. A century later, the French Revolution was perceived as having seized upon the lands of the French Church and made them its security for the issue of a national loan whose paper *assignats* were to be made legal tender everywhere. Now it is not possible to read Burke's *Reflections* with both eyes open and doubt that it presents this action - and not assaulting the bedchamber

⁵²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 140.

of Marie Antoinette - as the central, the absolute and the unforgivable crime of the Revolutionaries.⁵²¹

Pocock overstates his case here - a great number of readers, both contemporary and more recent, have read the *Reflections* and found the bedchamber scene to be by far the most significant passage - yet his basic argument, that Burke viewed the Revolution to be one as opposed to sound principles of credit, commerce, and security of property as much as it is opposed to chivalry, tradition, and hierarchy, seems sound. Indeed, when Pocock goes on to refine his argument, he points out the close links established between manners and commerce, both within the classic Scottish whig accounts of commercial progress and Burke's own idiosyncratic analysis. If, for Hume and Smith *et al*, 'the growth of exchange, production and diversified labour [was] the motor force which created the growth of manners, culture and enlightenment', for Burke 'commerce can flourish only under the protection of manners, and ... manners require the pre-eminence of religion and nobility To overthrow religion and nobility, therefore, is to destroy the possibility of commerce itself.'⁵²² Thus the rape of the Church lands, and near-rape of Marie Antoinette, can be seen not as competing items of horror in the French Revolution's catalogue of corruption, but as analogical sins, committed against the persons of these two pre-eminent guarantors of manners, religion and nobility.

The coming of the era 'of sophisters, oeconomists, and calculators', then, by dividing commerce and the men of talents from land and the men of birth, by

⁵²¹ 'Political Economy', p. 197.

⁵²² *Ibid*, p. 199.

promoting speculation, both philosophical and financial, rather than solid investment, threatened to destroy all: 'Burke is presenting religion, chivalry and commerce as trodden down together by the hoofs of a paper-money despotism.'⁵²³ In making this argument, of course, Burke trod a difficult and potentially contradictory path, for this analysis is derived from the kind of civic humanist account of the progress of luxury in the state that was first deployed against the very Whiggish union of land and commerce which Burke sought to defend (and after all, one of the prime charges laid by Price against the unreformed British state was that 'Increased luxury has multiplied abuses in it. A monstrous weight of debt is crippling it').⁵²⁴

However, just as his representation of British liberty, and the British past, as possessions to be inherited by all the British required the guarantee of a proper political economy, to ensure a healthy balance between 'ability' and 'property', so Burke's understanding of commerce was underpinned by the characterisation of nature, and the national character, which he outlined in his discussion of the common law. By reversing the usual Scottish whig interpretation of commerce's effect upon society, making commerce instead dependent upon society and manners - which were themselves undoubtedly derived from the 'wisdom without reflection' which Burke outlined earlier - Burke re-asserted the vision of history he had developed out of his reading of the common law tradition. Burke

⁵²³ *Reflections*, p. 170; 'Political Economy', p. 200. Pocock's phrase is clearly based on Burke's own account of the likely outcome for 'learning' in this new era: 'Along with its natural protectors and guardians, learning will be cast into the mire, and trodden down under the hoofs of a swinish multitude', *Reflections*, p. 173.

⁵²⁴ 'Discourse', p. 194.

thus ‘anchored commerce in history, rather than presenting it as the triumph over history’, as Pocock believes Hume and others do.⁵²⁵

Yet as we have seen, Burke’s understanding of the English legal tradition required him to in fact abandon any attempt at historical analysis of the law, in order to protect his newly discovered notion of national character from its potentially debilitating effects. To then strip the analysis of commercial development of *its* capacity to explain historical change in order to assert that national character, is not so much to subject commerce to an historical account, as to detach the discourses of commerce and of custom from the body of historical experience and analysis, to render them an enclosed and circular system of representation in which the myth of the English or British national character can subsist securely.⁵²⁶ Achieving this enabled Burke to produce a text of peculiar richness and power (though it in fact took some time, and dramatic changes in the direction of the French Revolution, for this to be fully recognised, even by Burke’s supporters); yet it also came at a great cost, as not only did Burke’s rhetoric provide one of the most powerful stimuli to the production of a radical counter-culture, one involving working men and women as historical actors for the first time, but also, and more ironically, Burke in the *Reflections* himself had to compulsively imagine, time and again, the dissolution of this particular conjunction of custom and commerce, and with it monarchy and

⁵²⁵ ‘Political Economy’, p. 210.

⁵²⁶ Barthes’s account of myth’s relationship with history seems particularly apposite to the Burkean account of custom: ‘Myth deprives the object of which it speaks of all History. In it, history evaporates ... all that is left for one to do is to enjoy this beautiful object without wondering where it comes from. Or even better: it can only come from eternity: since the beginning of time, it has been made for bourgeois man Nothing is produced, nothing is chosen: all one has to do is to possess these new objects from which all soiling trace of origin or choice has been removed.’, R. Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 151.

European society itself, in an act of imagination as excessive as the revolution and revolution-principles he condemned.

Responses to the Reflections.

Burke's success in the unification of the discourses of custom and commerce, and his adoption of myth, rather than history, in the elucidation of the Anglo-British national character, is perhaps best demonstrated in the following extract:

In England we have not yet been completely embowelled of our natural entrails; we still feel within us, and we cherish and cultivate, those inbred sentiments which are the faithful guardians, the active monitors of our duty, the true supporters of all liberal and manly morals. We have not been drawn and trussed, in order that we may be filled, like stuffed birds in a museum, with chaff and rags, and paltry, blurred shreds of paper about the rights of man.⁵²⁷

Allying the bankrupt notes of the French government with the worthless declarations of the rights of man - declarations worthless because they lack any purchase upon people's hearts, appealing only to a bare and deluded reason - Burke's imagery here achieves a remarkable economy, asserting the importance of a structure of feeling to the maintenance of the body politic, without which not

only commerce and individual rights, but even people become mere objects of show. At the same time, however, he betrayed an anxiety about the security of this natural national body, this proper constitution of the English and British; for the process of ‘embowelment’ he feared so much, though not yet complete, was certainly underway, as the ‘paltry, blurred shreds of paper about the rights of man’ circulated almost as vigorously within Britain as they, and their economic equivalents, the *assignats*, did within France. Moreover, Burke was responsible not only for the compulsive imagining and re-imagining of this process, for giving it such powerful representation, but also for providing the most powerful stimulus to its growth.

The radical, and indeed, the moderate response to Burke - for at this point in the Revolution, even moderates found Burke’s denunciation of the French hard to swallow - was almost immediate. The *Reflections* was published in November 1790, going on to sell about 50,000 copies in the first six years of its publication; within a month, one of the most important radical responses to it, Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Men*, followed it into the public sphere, proving popular enough to be republished almost immediately.⁵²⁸ Other responses followed rapidly, with both Tom Paine’s *Rights of Man* and James Mackintosh’s *Vindiciæ Gallicæ* being published in the six months following: indeed, so rapid was this response that Stephen Blakemore, in his account of the Revolution controversy, seems to consider the radical writers to function almost as a corporate bloc, making use of ‘an ideological division of labor’ to assault

⁵²⁷ *Reflections*, p. 182.

⁵²⁸ M. Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. with introduction by J. Todd (Oxford etc., 1993 - first published 1790), pp. 3-62; p. xi.

Burke upon a variety of fronts.⁵²⁹ Again, these works proved remarkably popular, the *Rights of Man* achieving sales that ran into hundreds of thousands - a level quite unprecedented, and hugely worrying for British elites fearing a Jacobin threat in every hovel in the country.⁵³⁰ This list could be extended immensely, but probably contains the most significant radical responses to the *Reflections*, in terms of intellectual weight and influence. Before I begin to analyse them, however, it will be necessary to draw attention to another, less mature but ultimately more powerful development - the entry of the mob into the arena of political debate.

What it is crucial to recognise, at this point, is that the Revolution controversy generally, and the publication of the *Reflections* in particular, did not merely help produce a politicised reading public of unprecedented breadth; it also provided the space for lower class readers to become writers, speakers, and organisers, in other words, to begin to create a national community of feeling for themselves. E. P. Thompson, who discovered the origins of *The Making of the English Working Class* in the early years of the French Revolution, began that work with an account of the formation of the London Corresponding Society, its relationship with other such societies, and most importantly, its permeability for a lower class membership:

[features] which help us to define (in the context of 1790-1850) the nature of a “working-class organization”. There is the working man

⁵²⁹ T. Paine, *Rights of Man*; J. Mackintosh, *Vindiciæ Gallicæ*; S. Blakemore, *Intertextual War. Edmund Burke and the French Revolution in the Writings of Mary Wollstonecraft, Thomas Paine, and James Mackintosh* (London, 1997), p. 17.

⁵³⁰ Estimated figures on readership vary greatly, and are complicated by the likelihood of second-, third, and fourth-hand readers; but all figures suggest a very broad, and very large readership.

as Secretary [Thomas Hardy, a shoemaker]. There is the low weekly subscription. There is the intermingling of economic and political themes Above all, there is the determination to propagate opinions and to organize the converted, embodied in the leading rule: "That the number of our Members be unlimited."⁵³¹

As is well-known, other societies, equally open to the lower social classes, both preceded and followed the L. C. S., so that within a few years of the outbreak of the French Revolution there was, surely for the first time in Britain, a network of clubs and societies, open to all social classes and communicating with each other and amongst themselves both on the political and social issues of the day, and the more general and abstract principles that underlay those issues.

Meanwhile, as Olivia Smith has sought to show in *The Politics of Language*, texts on politics, written for, and sometimes by lower-class readers, began to circulate alongside the higher arguments of Burke, Paine and Wollstonecraft.⁵³² Making use of Burke's dismissive, indeed pejorative representation of the Parisian mob as 'a swinish multitude', these writers sought to develop a unified representation of the lower classes of Britain through the production of a new genre of what might be called 'Pig tales'.⁵³³ Both outraged by, and (Smith suggests) perhaps secretly acquiescing with Burke's characterisation of the mob as swine, these writers produced texts insisting upon the rights of these poor pigs to be subject to a good master, a master worth their having. How successful these texts may have been is doubtful - that they carry

⁵³¹ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1980 - first published 1963), pp. 23-4.

the freight of an essential deference within them is obvious - but they mark a growing sense of the importance of the lower classes, the mob, to political process and opinion: not only as the instruments of the polity's destruction, but also as a permanent class *within* that polity.⁵³⁴

The opinions of the lower orders, then, began to matter (and, perhaps most importantly, were acknowledged to matter) during the Revolutionary period. Not only did they matter to radicals in search of support for their programmes of political and social reform, but they began to matter to the government and its supporters in a manner that was, again, wholly new; for, though the newly active, organised and articulate lower classes certainly posed a threat to the establishment sufficient to cause the propagation of a raft of legislation (not least amongst which was the suspension of *Habeas Corpus*, the central plank of any eighteenth-century account of the British constitution) aimed at reining in the radical societies and their members, in the conditions of war they also came to be seen as crucial to the continued survival of the British state. This awareness led not only to Hannah More's project of propaganda, the Cheap Repository Tracts, which sought to replace the often scandalous chapbook literature of the poor with more wholesome fare, but also to the returns demanded by the Defence of the Realm Act of 1798, that remarkable exercise in listening highlighted by Linda Colley, which sought to discover not only who could, but who *would* fight.⁵³⁵

⁵³² O. Smith, *The Politics of Language 1791-1819*.

⁵³³ *Reflections*, p. 173.

⁵³⁴ *Politics of Language*, pp. 82-4.

⁵³⁵ On Hannah More and the Cheap Repository Tracts, see K. Sutherland, 'Hannah More's Counter-Revolutionary Feminism', in K. Everest (ed.), *Revolution in Writing. British Literary Responses to the French Revolution* (Milton Keynes and Philadelphia, 1991), pp. 27-63 and S. Pederson, 'Hannah More meets Simple Simon: Tracts, Chapbooks, and Popular Culture in late

This, then, was the context which the radical responses to Burke both existed within and were, in part, responsible for producing: a popular political culture in ferment, both eager and willing to engage in political debate over the past and future of the British nation. In response to this new political context, these radical writers sought to challenge the authority of Burke's text and language, and to provide new ways of writing both English and French histories. In doing so, they made clear the significance of *style* to the production of knowledge, both of the past and of the present.

It is as a failed work of history that Wollstonecraft, Mackintosh and Paine, for all their different textual strategies, seek to represent the *Reflections*; it is as a failed, indeed a duplicitous historian that they seek to represent its author. Insisting that the *Reflections* not only got the facts of the French and English Revolutions wrong, but also attempted to present them in a stylistically false manner, one which prioritised rhetoric and feeling over narrative and truth, for these writers 'the central theme of the Revolution' was, as Blakemore has claimed, 'the reformulation of the ancient distinction between illusion and reality'.⁵³⁶

At the heart of the *Vindication of the Rights of Men*, then, and central to her argument, there lies Wollstonecraft's claim that, as a rational, manly reader, she had neither 'leisure or patience to follow this desultory writer through all the devious tracks in which his fancy has started fresh game'.⁵³⁷ Instead, adopting the self-same genre as Burke - the letter form - she sought to undermine his writing through a process of mimicry, exploiting the gendered aesthetics he had

eighteenth-century England', *Journal of British Studies*, 25 (1986), pp. 84-113. *Britons*, pp. 289-300.

first developed in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* to demonstrate that the rhetorical force of Burke's arguments relied upon his representation of the *ancien régimes* of both France and Britain as beautiful, feminine objects, in need of protection from a sublime, manly, Revolution.⁵³⁸ His analysis, she suggested, is all the more damning for its accurate characterisation of the two forces that faced each other in 1790: for what rational person would choose to support beauty over reason? Only an effeminate man such as Burke, would seem to be Wollstonecraft's response, as she aimed to displace his authoritative account of the Revolution's history with her own account of a quite different history, one which she claimed showed Burke's true sensibility: his response to the Regency crisis of 1788, in which Burke had sought power for the Prince of Wales, and thus for the opposition of which Burke was then a part.

You were so eager to taste the sweets of power, that you could not wait till time had determined, whether a dreadful delirium would settle into a confirmed madness; but, prying into the secrets of Omnipotence, you thundered out that God had *hurled him from his throne*, and that it was the most insulting mockery to recollect that he had been a king, or to treat him with any particular respect on account of his former dignity.- And who was the monster whom Heaven had thus awfully deposed, and smitten with such an angry blow? Surely as harmless a character as Lewis XVith; and the queen of Great

⁵³⁶ *Intertextual War*, p. 21.

⁵³⁷ *Vindication of the Rights of Men*, p. 3.

Britain, though her heart may not be enlarged by generosity, who will presume to compare her character with that of the queen of France?⁵³⁹

Blakemore pejoratively describes Wollstonecraft here as crying ‘crocodile tears’; yet it would seem that she scores a very palpable hit against Burke’s rhetoric over the treatment of the French monarchy, and in particular his notorious eulogy of Marie Antoinette.⁵⁴⁰ Once again adopting Burke’s own textual strategies, Wollstonecraft thus responds to Burke’s exploitation of the slippage of historical context in his representation of Price’s *Discourse*, by herself re-contextualising Burke’s *Reflections* in the light of Burke’s own past.

If Wollstonecraft’s response to Burke had sought to undermine his style through a process of mimicry, Mackintosh’s approach to the *Reflections* was both far simpler and somewhat less ambivalent. Again drawing attention to Burke’s elaborate style, Mackintosh provided the best known description of its advantages to Burke, a description that simultaneously praised and damned his opponent:

Availing himself of all the privileges of epistolary effusion, in their utmost latitude and laxity, he interrupts, dismisses, and resumes arguments at pleasure It must be confessed, that in this miscellaneous and desultory warfare, the superiority of a man of genius over common men is infinite. He can cover the most

⁵³⁸ E. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. A. Phillips (Oxford and New York, 1990 - first published 1757).

ignominious retreat by a brilliant allusion. He can parade his arguments with masterly generalship, where they are strong. He can escape from an untenable position into a splendid declamation. He can sap the most impregnable conviction by pathos, and put to flight a host of syllogisms with a sneer. Absolved from the laws of vulgar method, he can advance a group of magnificent horrors to make a breach in our hearts, through which the most undisciplined rabble of arguments may enter in triumph.⁵⁴¹

Burke's style, Mackintosh recognised, *was* his argument - an argument more to do with a beautiful chivalric myth of French and European civilisation than of true history, aiming more to conjure up a community of sympathetic readers than appeal to the judgment of a rational and cosmopolitan public. Rather than viewing Burke's representation as one of civilisation, therefore, Mackintosh aligned the *Reflections* with precisely the condition which Burke perceived in the Revolution: an 'undisciplined rabble', a mob, perhaps even a 'swinish multitude'.⁵⁴² In opposition to this, Mackintosh sought to provide a careful definition of terms (in particular, to clear up the meaning of 'Revolution', which he shows to be quite ambivalent in Burke's text) and to examine the events of the French Revolution, thus providing an alternative 'rational' text to replace Burke's wild representations and deceptive style.

The richness of Burke's prose, therefore, seemed almost to prove his incapacity to represent historical truth - his work could thus only be the product

⁵³⁹ *Vindication of the Rights of Men*, p. 26.

⁵⁴⁰ *Intertextual War*, p. 67.

of ‘an ardent and deluded sensibility’, of ‘the fumes [which] mounting to your brain, dispel the sober suggestions of reason’, or of corruption.⁵⁴³ The true power of Burke’s text, as the radicals quickly realised (but as Burke’s supporters, according to John Barrell, seem to have never quite grasped) lay in its appeal to a quality other than reason and truth, that of imagination and imaginative sympathy, which Burke perceives as the foundation of modern civilisation.⁵⁴⁴ An attack on Burke’s mythic history, therefore, almost inevitably required an attack upon his style, and an attempt to assert an alternative style as a more truthful means of representation.

Perhaps the best-known example of this attempt is Paine’s *Rights of Man*, which sought to provide an entirely new kind of prose in which to discuss politics, one open to the widest possible readership. Using a simple vocabulary, homely metaphors, and allusions drawn mainly from the Bible and *Pilgrim’s Progress*, clearly marking the staging-posts of his argument, and adopting an authorial position ‘both intensely present and unusually self-abnegating’, the better to draw his readers along towards his conclusions without forcing them to a thoughtless assent, the *Rights of Man* did indeed appear ‘a style of thinking and expression different to what had been customary in England’.⁵⁴⁵

As with most other works opposed to Burke, Paine sought to challenge his historical representations: both of the French Revolution, of which Paine had the great advantage of personal knowledge, and of English history. In particular,

⁵⁴¹ *Vindiciæ Gallicæ*, pp. vi-vii.

⁵⁴² *Reflections*, p. 173.

⁵⁴³ *Vindication of the Rights of Men*, pp. 6-7.

⁵⁴⁴ J. Barrell, *Imagining the King’s Death. Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide 1793-1796* (Oxford etc., 2000), p. 9, p. 24.

⁵⁴⁵ O. Smith, *The Politics of Language*, p. 43; *Rights of Man*, p. 153 (Preface to Part 2). My reading of Paine is strongly indebted to Smith’s work.

he sought to challenge Burke's adaptation of 'artificial reason', and its claim that the inscrutable wisdom of ages was greater, and more valuable, than the reason of contemporary society. He did this in two ways. First, he insisted that there could be no authority for Burke's claims; that 'governing beyond the grave, is the most ridiculous and insolent of all tyrannies Every generation is, and must be, competent to all the purposes which its occasions require.'⁵⁴⁶ In doing so, he tends to undo Burke's alliance of wisdom with nature, returning it to a category of reason and so making it as amenable to individual conscience and decision as any other rational principle.

Secondly, and most famously, he explores the history which he considers to underlie Burke's traditionalism and reliance upon precedent. In doing so, of course, he performs precisely the same operation upon Burke as Burke had once performed upon Coke, insisting that far from being untraceable and unknowable, the history of English law was entirely discoverable. In fact, Paine insisted, it was not only discoverable, it was actually already known:

The English government is one of those which arose out of a conquest, and not out of society, and, consequently it arose over the people; and though it has been much modified from the opportunity of circumstances since the time of William the Conqueror, the country has never yet regenerated itself, and is therefore without a constitution.⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁶ *Rights of Man*, Part One, p. 42.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 72.

Paine therefore operated within the discourse of the 'Norman Yoke', examined by Christopher Hill; whatever may have been the situation prior to the Norman conquest, however the laws of England may have been constituted, the coming of William the Conqueror ensured the subversion of those laws and their replacement with an unnatural, alien system of laws. Paine did not deny that those laws had been mitigated over time - those mitigations were, in fact, what the English considered to be their constitution - but he considered them still to be the foundations upon which modern English society was built, and he considered them to be (like the man who brought them to the island) illegitimate.

This beginning of the English nation, however, was not merely the beginning of a history of legal usurpation, but of a mental oppression that could be perceived to control the kind of thinking which Burke represented. For those, like Burke, who believed that the English constitution was a truly existing thing, that it could be discovered in the rights and privileges established by English law, there could be no escape from a history rooted in conquest and usurpation, unless it be to the realm of fantasy, myth and self-delusion. In opposition to the fatalistic history offered, and the intellectual cowardice displayed by Burke, Paine produced a new myth of origins:

The error of those who reason by precedents drawn from antiquity, respecting the rights of man, is, that they do not go far enough into antiquity They stop in some of the intermediate stages of an hundred or a thousand years, and produce what was then done, as a rule for the present day. This is no authority at all. If we travel still farther into antiquity, we shall find a direct contrary opinion and

practice prevailing But if we proceed on, we shall at last come out right; we shall come to the time when man came from the hand of his Maker

We are now got at the origin of man, and at the origin of his rights.⁵⁴⁸

Rejecting Burke's immemorial rights - rights which were immemorial because they were untraceable - Paine provided his own, rights immemorial because sanctioned by God and also because present (this seems implicit to Paine's argument) in the original state of mankind on entering into society. In order for the English or British nation to properly constitute itself, therefore, it was necessary for it to return not to a particular time in the national past, but to the natural principles of society.

All these writers, then, were passionately concerned with the issue of the correct means to represent the past; yet it would seem that history, though still an extremely important source for the legitimisation or transformation of politics, was beginning to lose that power. After all, though much of the Revolution controversy was a debate over history, this debate was not only not won, it was virtually un-winnable without force. Both sides of the debate were incapable of asserting their reading and writing of history as the correct way to do so; both sides were, as both Blakemore and Barrell have suggested, profoundly implicated in their own representations of their opponents.⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 65.

⁵⁴⁹ S. Blakemore, *Intertextual War*, p. 22: caught in the same system of values of Burke, the radical writings display 'covert resemblances and identifications with their counterrevolutionary enemy'. J. Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death*, p. 94: claiming that Burke's speeches during the Regency crisis go beyond a mere desire to see the King's authority displaced onto his son, Barrell

One of the most intriguing responses to this situation is to be found in the profoundly loyalist John Reeves's work, *Thoughts on the English Government*.⁵⁵⁰ Although as committed to historical explanation as any other writer in his attempt to explain 'the manner in which French principles have insinuated themselves into this island', when it comes to the more common subjects of English and British history, Reeves proves to be unusually uninterested, even hostile.⁵⁵¹ Thus he discusses the vigorous celebration and remembrance of the Glorious Revolution:

What can be the cause of this mighty zeal? Whence does it originate, and to what does it tend? All this earnest demonstration of affection and devotion, without any apparent cause or occasion, is either ridiculous affectation, or signifies something that is not obvious to persons of common understandings. For we may ask them, Who has censured or cavilled at those proceedings, that should move these persons so violently to defend or extol them? And we may further ask, Who besides themselves say or think anything about them? They are recorded in our Statute Book, like other matters of equal importance, and are the objects of serious study and contemplation; precedents that are regarded with reverence and with gratitude towards those who made them, but which we hope never to

considers Burke at this moment to be involved in the very act of imaginative treason of which Burke sought to convict the radical cause after 1790 - 'What he had imagined with enthusiasm in 1789 he reimagined with horror from 1790 onwards, repeatedly atoning for his guilt, and, in the process, keeping alive the image of the king's death'.

⁵⁵⁰ [J. Reeves], *Thoughts on the English Government. Addressed to the Quiet Good Sense of the People of England* (London, 1795). Reeves was the founder of the ultra-loyalist organisation the Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers.

have occasion to follow. These are the sentiments which are suggested by GOOD SENSE on the view of these valuable memorials; and as they are never thought of without some mixture of concern and pain, we are always glad to lay them aside, and we rarely wish to recall them.⁵⁵²

This is a truly remarkable claim, that 'GOOD SENSE', which Reeves had earlier described as the bedrock of the English national character, led the English to wish, as far as possible, *to not remember* the great English past; or at least, to confine the remembrance of that past to hours of grave study and contemplation, rather than a living legacy in need of active commemoration and vigilance to maintain its true principles.⁵⁵³ For Burke, behind Price's representation of both the French and Glorious Revolutions there lay the spectre of the earlier English Revolution, the perverted principles of which threatened to corrupt the modern political settlement of Europe; but now, for Reeves, the threat which had previously been located in the English Revolution, however much it promised to infect *representations* of later, more respectable history, seemed to have been detached from its origins and was to be discovered in *all history*, even that believed to be the founding act of British society. Never had the study of history appeared so threatening.

History, then, for all that it was the source, subject, and legitimation of many of the contributions to the Revolution controversy, would seem to be increasingly incapable of performing the functions required of it. At the same

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 24.

⁵⁵² *Ibid*, pp. 39-40.

time as this conflict over history took place, however, new sources and forms of political argument, sensibility, and communal identification began to be developed: the Romantic poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge, certainly, but also the less well-known 'Jacobin' novel, as Gary Kelly calls it, upon which I shall focus particularly.⁵⁵⁴

By and large, these novels cannot be said to be wholly satisfactory, and unlike Wordsworth and Coleridge, little of their work has remained within the literary canon; perhaps only *Caleb Williams* remains likely to be read today for itself as a work of literature.⁵⁵⁵ However, their significance for this study greatly outweighs the question of their literary worth, as it is their historical position, during the moment of the rise of the novel - the actual, *quantitative* rise of the novel during the 1790s - that is of greatest interest to me.⁵⁵⁶ I have claimed in this thesis that the development of the modern genre of history is intimately bound up with that of the novel: that the two genres emerged from what Davis has described as the 'undifferentiated matrix' of print, in which the truth-claims made by factual, news-bearing prose, and fictional prose were uncertainly distinguished. I now want to suggest that in the 1790s - the period of the quantitative rise of the novel - the stylistic and generic crises which had been afflicting history earlier in the century as historians sought to establish some means of making the past present, of truly representing history, led to a position

⁵⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 2.

⁵⁵⁴ G. Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel 1780-1805* (Oxford, 1976). Among the most significant Jacobin novelists were Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, Elizabeth Inchbald, Thomas Holcroft, Robert Bage and Mary Hays, though there were, of course, many others.

⁵⁵⁵ W. Godwin, *Things As They Are; or, the Adventures of Caleb Williams* (Oxford and New York, 1982 - first published 1794). Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman: or, Maria. A Fragment* (Oxford and New York, 1998 - first published 1798), is certainly still read, though surely more as part of an overall study of Wollstonecraft's mind and thought than for itself. In fact, Wollstonecraft is perhaps the least accomplished of the 'Jacobin' novelists.

⁵⁵⁶ C. Siskin, *The Work of Writing*, ch. 6, discusses this more fully.

in which not only did historical representation begin to lose some of its connections to political power, but the novel began to supplant it, making its own, very different connections.

Wollstonecraft's *Vindications* had already seen her make use of a prose style highly indebted to the sentimental literature of the later eighteenth century, but it is in the most pessimistic of her non-fictional works, her *Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution*, that the best indications can be discovered of her awareness of the increasing failure of conventional historical representation to achieve its political aims.⁵⁵⁷ For all her opening claims to possess the 'cool eye of observation', the *Historical and Moral View* rapidly reveals itself to be as much inspired (or compromised, according to viewpoint) by Wollstonecraft's own sensibility as any of her earlier works; indeed, it could be argued that it is more so, for the *Historical and Moral View* allows this sensibility to not only direct its insights, but also to guide its narrative and style.⁵⁵⁸

This is perhaps most obvious in the following passage on the palace of Versailles:

How silent now is Versailles! - The solitary foot, that mounts the sumptuous stair-case, rests on each landing-place, while the eye traverses the void, almost expecting to see the strong images of fancy burst into life

⁵⁵⁷ M. Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution; and the Effect it has Produced in Europe* (London, 1794).

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid*, Preface, p. vi.

Warily entering the endless apartments, half shut up, the fleeting shadow of the pensive wanderer, reflected in long glasses, that vainly gleam in every direction, slacken the nerves, without appalling the heart; though lascivious pictures, in which grace varnishes voluptuousness, no longer seductive, strike continually home to the bosom the melancholy moral, that anticipates the frozen lesson of experience. The very air is chill, seeming to clog the breath; and the wasting dampness of destruction appears to be stealing into the vast pile, on every side.⁵⁵⁹

Here, Wollstonecraft seeks to conduct her reader through what can only be described as a Gothic pile; and though there remains within this passage an ironic return to the subject of the Revolution debates of a few years before, in her observation of the inevitable decline of any system in which ‘grace varnishes voluptuousness’, for the most part this passage can be understood simply to present the fall of both the old regime and the new into the Terror as part of a Gothic nightmare from which, Wollstonecraft hopes, France will shortly be woken.⁵⁶⁰ This Gothicism can be seen to return in Wollstonecraft’s posthumously published novel, *The Wrongs of Woman*, in which her heroine, Maria, begins the story entombed in a lunatic asylum, where her husband has had her committed that he may control her property.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 161-2.

⁵⁶⁰ Vivien Jones, ‘Women Writing Revolution: Narratives of History and Sexuality in Wollstonecraft and Williams’ in S. Copley and J. Whale (eds.), *Beyond Romanticism. New Approaches to Texts and Contexts 1780-1832* (London and New York, 1992), pp. 178-99, discusses precisely this usage by Wollstonecraft of the Gothic narrative to structure her history.

As its title suggests, *The Wrongs of Woman* sought to explore the subordinate position of women within society through the articulation of Maria's biography, written to educate the baby girl from whom she has been separated. As such, it reprises the themes of biography, education and selfhood - explored particularly with relation to women, the meaningful subjects *par excellence* of the eighteenth century - which have underpinned this thesis. Interestingly, however, her biography is supplemented with that of her lower-class attendant Jemima, who through the telling of her own story is enabled to return to the human community that her despair had seemed to deny her. It can be understood, then, as a fictionalisation of the arguments Wollstonecraft had developed in her second *Vindication*; but it also seeks to be a *realisation* of those arguments, and so can be understood to involve a turning-away from a particular kind of representation - one based largely upon analysis, and perhaps best comprehended by the word 'historical' - towards a fictional representation capable of proving its arguments through the fact of its existence, its successful production of human individuality in community.

In his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, generally considered the most complete expression of the radical philosophy of the period, William Godwin sought to develop 'an old observation, that the history of mankind is little else than a record of crimes', into an analysis of the political institutions - government and law - which structure human society, and which he considered to be both the result of historical developments and the method by which that history was perpetuated.⁵⁶¹ If history was to be understood, then, as a link to the

⁵⁶¹ W. Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, abridged and edited by K. C. Carter (Oxford, 1971 - first published 1793), p. 20.

past, as a system of precedent and custom out of which the modern world is to be built - the Burkean understanding of history - then history itself is the means by which modern society remains anchored in the brutality of the state of nature, though with the added violence of an organised elite, 'an unjust combination ... engrossing all ... [society's] advantages to a few favoured individuals, and reserving for the portion of the rest want, dependence and misery.'⁵⁶²

It is as an examination of precisely this identification of law and history, in its Burkean conception, that Godwin's novel *Caleb Williams* is best to be understood. Though Caleb greatly admires his master, Falkland, he nevertheless cannot resist the desire to find out his guilty secret: that his excessive sense of chivalry had led him to the murder of his brutal rival, Tyrrel. Although he has no intention of revealing that secret, his master's distrust of him leads to his persecution, and wrongful conviction for a crime, which forces him on the run. This is only ended when Caleb gives 'a plain and unadulterated tale', the 'artless and manly story' of his sufferings at his master's hands, which allows him to be readmitted to society, but which also damns Falkland both within that society and in his own eyes, and so leads to his death.⁵⁶³

This Caleb considers to be a 'hateful mistake'; for, instead of going to Falkland himself in an attempt to end the animus between them, he had insisted upon recourse to the very courts of law which had shown themselves to be the enemy of justice throughout the novel.⁵⁶⁴ Between them, then, law and history (in the shape of the excessive chivalry which led Falkland both to the murder of

⁵⁶² *Ibid*, p. 24. Here, of course, it is necessary to distinguish between the *practice* of history - which Godwin obviously considers to be a necessary element of analysis - and the *living* of it, the Burkean tendency to regard history as an unquestionable blueprint for modern life.

⁵⁶³ *Caleb Williams*, p. 323, p. 324.

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 323.

Tyrrel and to the persecution of Caleb, in order to protect his own good name) prove to be the two forces primarily responsible for the destruction of the human community that should have existed between Falkland and Caleb.

Conclusion.

The novel form can be seen to be used by Godwin and others to provide an antidote to the perversions of truth produced by precedent and custom institutionalised as history: through the articulations of a life and of a deep interiority found in *The Wrongs of Woman*, and the ‘plain and unadulterated tale’ of *Caleb Williams* (or of *A Simple Story* and *Nature and Art*, novels by Elizabeth Inchbald whose titles themselves seem to promise a particular relationship with truth).⁵⁶⁵ These novels were still less than entirely successful; yet they were early indications of a process of generic change that would shortly produce the first ‘historical novel’, Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent*, whose preface went a long way to insisting that the (fictionalised) private memoir had now come to be of far more interest and value to the public than the history could be:

Of the numbers who study, or at least who read history, how few derive any advantage from their labors! The heroes of history are so decked out by the fine fancy of the professed historian ... that few

⁵⁶⁵ E. Inchbald, *A Simple Story* (Oxford and New York, 1988 - first published 1791); *Nature and Art* (London, 1796).

have sufficient taste, wickedness or heroism, to sympathize in their fate. Besides, there is much uncertainty even in the best authenticated ancient or modern histories; and that love of truth, which in some minds is innate and immutable, necessarily leads to a love of secret memoirs and private anecdotes. We cannot judge either of the feelings or of the characters of men with perfect accuracy from their actions or their appearance in public; it is from their careless conversations, their half finished sentences, that we may hope with the greatest probability of success to discover their real characters.⁵⁶⁶

We are not, by now, very far from Catherine Morland, who expressed such a powerful aversion to history, which 'tells me nothing that does not either vex or weary me'.⁵⁶⁷

Obviously, this is hardly to claim that history suddenly disappeared from the map of the Anglo-British consciousness: it certainly did not do so, as the nineteenth-century rise of the discipline *as a discipline* testifies. It did, however, change radically in its form in so doing, losing both a great deal of its stylistic flexibility and its capacity to ground political knowledge and action: the first it lost to the novel, the second to the developing discourses of political science. Perhaps its most significant remnant, however, has been the mythology of national history which Burke provided in his *Reflections*, a mythology which still seems to exercise power today, in the seemingly anachronistic belief of many that

⁵⁶⁶ M. Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent. An Hibernian Tale Taken from Facts, and from the Manners of the Irish Squires, before the year 1782* (London etc., 1964 - first published 1800), p. 1.

the Anglo-British community in which they live is, somehow, still organically united to a pure Anglo-Saxon origin.⁵⁶⁸ It is a matter of continuing irony, then, that the most powerful formulator of this conservative myth should himself come from a despised Celtic fringe - not even part of a formally united nation at this point - while the most significant articulators of a more modern discourse on English liberty were the Scottish sociological Whigs, who sought to align themselves not with English history, but English prosperity.

But then, it has been the argument of this thesis that in fact the modern British national identity can best be understood to involve precisely the process of incorporation, appropriation and forgetfulness which these ironies imply. I have pointed to the presence of two figures at the centre of eighteenth-century histories of the nation - the woman and the mob - who have both been crucial to the construction of the nation, and profoundly threatening to it. Women, who embodied the process of miscegenation that Defoe, among many others, considered to be the defining feature of the English and British national past, the specific quality and virtue that had produced the modern nation and which would unite the peoples of Scotland and England into that nation, were nevertheless also understood as a threat to the purity of the line, and systematically excluded from what has been described as the public sphere.⁵⁶⁹ Mary Wollstonecraft

⁵⁶⁷ J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, p. 69.

⁵⁶⁸ The continuing power of this ossified view is well evidenced by Simon Schama's recent *A History of Britain. At the Edge of the World? 3000 B. C. - A. D. 1603* (London, 2000), which makes it clear in that the Anglo-Saxons are to be considered the true subjects of early British history; they, when faced with Viking incursions, 'would have had some difficulty in finding the Norsemen ethnographically fascinating, being too busy defending themselves against dismemberment or being dragged off into captivity', p. 56. Why the modern British should choose to identify in this way with the Anglo-Saxons rather than the Vikings, however, seems somewhat uncertain.

⁵⁶⁹ Even the most revisionist argument about women's participation in the public sphere cannot make them more than marginal figures within that sphere, nor eradicate the fact that their presence there is generally based upon their exceeding the usual boundaries of a more *private* sphere.

undoubtedly provided a powerful articulation of women's right to participation in that sphere, based upon the need for a reformed British state to ensure the interest of its mothers, the main educators of the British youth, in the maintenance of that state; but Wollstonecraft's fame did not long survive her death (with an awful irony, in childbirth), and her example was to prove highly effective in polemics against just such an argument for female political activity, and other threats to the boundaries between genders. Instead, the early nineteenth century saw the further development of the image of the domestic woman, as it became increasingly central to the developing class identities of both the middle and working classes.⁵⁷⁰ Thomas Malthus, meanwhile, sought to challenge what he considered the unrealistic optimism of writers like Godwin, whose political philosophy assumed an inevitable progress towards social perfection; and he founded his challenge upon the misery which he understood to be the inevitable result of an unchecked population growth, thus reasserting, though with a very different emphasis, the relationship between the bodies of the people and the body politic.⁵⁷¹

Such a point of view both required, and was in part a result of, the changing attitudes of the political elites to the people over which they ruled, and whom they increasingly sought to measure, map and canvass. The mob had always been understood to possess a crucial place within the public sphere that sustained government in Britain, as the agents capable of liquidating it *should it*

⁵⁷⁰ See L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (London, 1987) and C. Hall, 'The Tale of Samuel and Jemima: Gender and Working-Class Culture in Early-Nineteenth-Century England' in *White, Male and Middle-Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (New York, 1992), pp. 124-50.

⁵⁷¹ T. R. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population, as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society, with Remarks on the Speculations of Mr. Godwin, M. Condorcet, and Other Writers* (London, 1798).

be perverted by injustice; as Defoe claimed, in such a situation ‘the nation’s all a mob’, until the threat to the nation has been dealt with.⁵⁷² This is not to say that the mob, or the plebeians with whom it was commonly identified (with whatever justice), were viewed with any degree of comfort. In fact, the very nature of the mob’s legitimacy tended to guarantee its marginal position within the public sphere; the principle of destruction and reconstitution could hardly be allowed to reside at the heart of the public. Rather, the mob possessed a double character, an ambivalence, both valued and reviled; it possessed also an unsurprising ambiguity as to its constitution, for though it was consistently represented as a plebeian force, it was in fact known to comprise all ranks: was it not a peer of the realm who led the Gordon Riots?

Its plebeian character was, however, strengthened by the understanding that without society - for the mob was the representation of society’s temporary dissolution - there could be no distinction of ranks, no sense of the difference between a lord and his vassal. The mob was therefore understood to be part of the nation: but in a paradoxical sense, in that its exclusion from action within the public sphere was necessary to the continuation of the social settlement. It was thus most present in society *as an absence*, giving legitimacy to society by virtue of the fact that *it did not have to be invoked*.

The imagined community of the British that had been constructed by the end of the eighteenth century can therefore be perceived as a curious and not altogether convincing amalgam of custom and improvement, whose development and maintenance was largely founded upon the silent incorporation of several different and lesser communities (the Scots, women, the mob or the poor) within

⁵⁷² In *The True-Born Englishman* - see ch. 2 above, pp. 114-20.

an elite English identity. To the extent that a community was produced, it was so largely as Linda Colley has described, from top down, requiring its non-elite, non-English, non-male members to identify with an imaginative system whose constitution insisted upon their abnegation within that system, and their assent to a myth of national history which tended to prevent the scrutiny of its beginnings.

Such an identity was not built to last; as Colley realised, it was an identity that could only be expected to function properly under the extreme, perhaps somewhat hysterical conditions engendered by war - and with the enforced unification of Ireland with Great Britain in 1801, and the rapid development of working- and middle-class identities during the first half of the nineteenth century, it was soon to be caught up in a process of reformulation that does not seem yet to have found an adequate solution. Further work is certainly necessary to uncover the evolution of this network of concerns in Britain, particularly within historical discourse and (especially) practice, with the development and institutionalisation of the historical discipline during the nineteenth century.

What is certain, however, is that the history of Britain was to lose its actual foundational power for those reformulations, as it seems to have become stuck in a repetitive assertion of the supposed Anglo-Saxon origins of the British state and people whose racism is of little use to explain or facilitate the modern experience of a multicultural Britain.⁵⁷³ Meanwhile, the classic humanist account of history's importance to the formation of personal identity has undoubtedly lost

⁵⁷³ In this thesis I have not made more than the most tentative of explorations of the effect upon national identity of British encounters with racial others, in Africa, America, India and China, who should by now be considered very much part of the national self. This is a failing due, in roughly equal parts, to my focus on relations *within* Britain, to a sense that the racial difference of greatest *eighteenth-century* significance is that between the English and the Scots, to the belief that the structure of inclusion/exclusion of white others discussed here is in many ways analogical

ground to the psychological accounts of the self which have developed over the last hundred and fifty years: from having been a privileged site for the unfolding of exemplary lives to which students might aspire, history proper has become the poor cousin of biography, autobiography and the case history, as well as of the novel, all genres in which human interiority, both conscious and unconscious, may be explored.⁵⁷⁴

The principal aim of this thesis has been to explore and correct what appears to have been the misuse of Benedict Anderson's notion of the 'imagined community', which has been used by many to describe virtually *any* imagining of the nation, regardless of its tendency to coercion. In particular, I have argued that for a nation to truly be an 'imagined community', it must function in a far more utopian, dialogic manner than Britishness has. More a flag of convenience than a true sense of identity, a real personal possession, Britishness is perhaps being discarded as easily as it was taken up. Whether a national identity can be developed which more adequately expresses the personal identities of those it seeks to incorporate, able to hold a truer relationship to its own history, remains to be seen.

to (though certainly not identical to) that faced by racial minorities in Britain now, and simply to my own limitations.

⁵⁷⁴ Though even these seem now to be under threat from the twin challenges of genetics and of a romanticised 'post-modern' fluidity, and concentration upon eroticised surfaces, rather than depths. Between them, these discourses seem likely to empty the human interior of all meaning (other, that is, than those meanings that may be culled by the electron microscope).

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