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**The Struggle for the Authority of History:
The French Revolution Debate and the British Novel, 1790 - 1814**

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***The Struggle for the Authority of History: The French Revolution
Debate and the British Novel, 1790-1814***

Morgan Rooney

Thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the PhD in English

Department of English
Faculty of Arts
University of Ottawa

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the history of the British novel from 1790 to 1814, arguing that the struggle for the authority of history that took place over the course of the French Revolution debate is foundational to understanding the novel's development in the period. In the political tracts of the 1790s, the Revolution controversy begins as a representational contest over the status of one historical moment (1688) and then escalates into a broad ideological war over the significance of the past for the present and future. The era's various novelistic forms participate in this ideological war, with Jacobin and anti-Jacobin novels, for instance, representing moments of the past or otherwise vying to enlist the authority of history to further a reformist or loyalist agenda, respectively. As the Revolution crisis recedes at the turn of the century, new forms of the novel emerge with new agendas, but historical representation—largely the legacy of the 1790s' novel—remains as an increasingly prevalent feature of the genre. The representation of history in the novel, I argue, is initially used strategically by novelists involved in the Revolution debate, is appropriated for other (often related) causes, and ultimately develops into a stable, non-partisan, aestheticised feature of the form. The novel's transformations in the 1790s, 1800s, and early 1810s thus help to establish the conditions for the emergence of the historical novel as it was first realised in Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1814).

Chapter 1 reviews the political tracts of prominent contributors to the Revolution debate such as Edmund Burke, Richard Price, James Mackintosh, Thomas Paine, William Godwin, and Mary Wollstonecraft, demonstrating the widespread engagement with history characteristic of the period and the distinctive historical paradigms reformers and loyalists

invoke in support of their political positions. Chapters 2 and 3 examine how the historical discourses of the 1790s shape the anti-Jacobin and Jacobin novel, respectively. Using Charles Walker, Robert Bisset, and Jane West as its primary examples, chapter 2 argues that the anti-Jacobin novel draws heavily on Burkean historical discourse to develop a variety of tactics—including the representation of select historical moments and conscious attempts to “historicise” their works—whose goal is to characterise the reform movement as ignorant of the complex operations of historical accretion. Turning to Charlotte Smith, William Godwin, and Maria Edgeworth as its principal examples, chapter 3 shows how reformist novels appeal to the period’s discourses of history to respond in kind, contesting Burke’s logic by consciously travestying his tropes and arguments, by undermining and then re-defining the category of history, and by depicting in detail historical moments that challenge the Burkean paradigm. Investigating the work of Jane Porter, Sydney Owenson (Lady Morgan), and Walter Scott, chapter 4 demonstrates how early historical forms of the novel and, ultimately, the historical novel as it was realised by Scott emerge, in part, out of the legacy of the political novels of the 1790s. It argues that the novel experiences a generic shift in the early nineteenth century—one marked by continuity, re-deployment, and departure—whereby the political impetus for historical representation is ultimately displaced by aesthetic and, crucially, historicist concerns.

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INTRODUCTION

“So many remembrances of Edmund Burke”: The French Revolution Debate, the Discourses of History, and the British Novel, 1790-1814

Taking stock of British political and literary culture from the French Revolution to the current post-Waterloo moment of his *Biographia Literaria* (1817), Samuel Taylor Coleridge notes the continued, ghostly presence of Edmund Burke. “Our very sign boards (said an illustrious friend to me),” he writes,

give evidence, that there has been a TITIAN in the world. In like manner, not only the debates in parliament, not only our proclamations and state papers, but the essays and leading paragraphs of our journals are so many remembrances of EDMUND BURKE. Of this the reader may easily convince himself, if either by recollection or reference he will compare the opposition newspapers at the commencement and during the five or six following years of the French revolution with the sentiments, and grounds of argument assumed in the same class of Journals at the present, and for some years past.¹

Twenty years removed from Burke’s death, Coleridge asserts that Burkean “*principles*” (191) continue to inform British cultural discourse, supplying the “sentiments” and setting the terms of debate for his contemporaries. Just as the works of Tiziano Vecelli (“Titian”) left

¹ Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria; or Biographical Sketches of my Literary Life and Opinions*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 192. References are to this edition. The ironic depreciation of the present moment in Coleridge’s “illustrious friend”’s “Titian” analogy is, it should be noted, absent from the corresponding Burke analogy Coleridge goes on to develop.

their mark on painting, so “the speeches and writings” (191) of Burke have left their footprint on the political and literary landscape of early nineteenth-century Britain.

Beginning with an examination of Burke and his contexts in the 1790s (chapter 1) and then moving into a consideration of the broad effects and after-life of his discourse from 1790 to 1814 (chapters 2, 3, and 4), this study traces the phenomenon to which Coleridge gestures in ways that aim to be both historically sensitive and genre specific. First, while the dissertation takes seriously Coleridge’s claim that Burke remains relevant to early nineteenth-century British life and works to substantiate this assertion in some detail, the study also recognises the equally powerful, tacit presence of his opponents. As William Wordsworth’s celebration of the elder statesman in the final version of *The Prelude* (1850) implies, for instance, Burke’s speeches and writings necessarily call attention to the ideas against which he struggled as much as they do his own:

[...] he forewarns, denounces, launches forth,
 Against all systems built on abstract rights,
 Keen ridicule; the majesty proclaims
 Of Institutes and Laws, hallowed by time;
 Declares the vital power of social ties
 Endear'd by Custom; and with high disdain,
 Exploding upstart Theory, insists
 Upon the allegiance to which men are born—²

² Wordsworth, *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York and London: Norton, 1979), 255.

Encoded in Burkean discourse is the set of ideas to which it responds (“abstract rights,” “upstart Theory”); the continued presence of the one ensures that of the other. To speak of the political and literary culture of early nineteenth-century Britain as marked by “so many remembrances of Edmund Burke,” then, is to recall the larger controversy in which Burke and his opponents (such as Richard Price, James Mackintosh, Thomas Paine, William Godwin, and Mary Wollstonecraft) participated over the course of the 1790s: the French Revolution debate. Second, while this study begins with, and often returns to, a variety of “non-literary” forms of the kind Coleridge cites in support of his observation, it focuses in the main on a more self-consciously “literary” form³—the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century novel—observing the terms in which it registers the Revolution debate, and its own transformations as a consequence of its involvement in that controversy.

A foundational concept for my reading of the 1790-1814 period in Britain generally, and of the novel in this era specifically, is what I refer to throughout as the discourses of history, a broad cultural phenomenon whose origins and features are traced in chapter 1. Briefly stated, the phrase “discourses of history” (or “historical discourses”) refers to the ways in which participants in the French Revolution debate theorise the relationship between past, present, and future—the narratives they develop to explain, and the tropes and imagery they use to describe, the processes of history. Scholars generally acknowledge that the Revolution raised anxieties in late eighteenth-century Britain about how the nation ought to conceive of itself in relation to its past. In Britain, as Steven Blakemore observes, the

³ The distinction between “non-literary” and “literary” texts, as Paul Keen and others have argued, emerged in this period; see Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s: Print Culture and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Revolution debate “erupted into a great ideological war over the significance of the past, for the Revolution was, in many ways, a referendum on history.”⁴ In spite of such recognition, however, the subject has received little sustained attention. My study begins with a review of prominent political works of the Revolution debate to establish the remarkable and widespread engagement with history—understood variously as event (the past), as record (historiography), and as a mode of empirical knowledge—in the period. I describe this phenomenon, in which partisan writers contest each others’ political stances by appealing to distinctive historical paradigms, as a struggle for the authority of history. Chapter 1 maps out the ground on which this struggle unfolds or, more specifically, the historical discourses that characterise reformist and conservative responses to the Revolution, identifying the printing press and the notion of inheritance, respectively, as the master tropes for the adversaries’ historical visions. The former promotes a vigorously progressive model of historical development, in which ideas clash, errors are eliminated, and truth triumphs in a combative process that brings about an ever-more perfect state; the latter, by contrast, promotes an accretionary model of historical development, in which ideas tested by time and experience become part of an inviolable national stock bequeathed from generation to generation. Wary of the problems associated with what Kevin Gilmartin describes as “the tendency for literary scholarship to make the ideological disposition of the *Reflections* a simple index of conservatism,”⁵ the dissertation makes no claims about the representativeness of Burke’s

⁴ Blakemore, *Intertextual War: Edmund Burke and the French Revolution in the Writings of Mary Wollstonecraft, Thomas Paine, and James Mackintosh* (Madison and Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1997), 15.

⁵ Gilmartin, *Writing against Revolution: Literary Conservatism in Britain, 1790–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 8.

particular “conservative” vision. Instead, my examination in this chapter pivots around Burke precisely because of the prominent place of the past and its perceived importance for the present and future in his response to the French Revolution—a prominence which his opponents not only recognised but also, as the ensuing chapters amply illustrate, to which they often explicitly responded.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 consider, in turn, the ramifications of these competing historical discourses for the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century novel. A broad cultural phenomenon that had consequences for British politics and literature alike in the period, the struggle for the authority of history in the 1790s infiltrates the novel in a variety of ways and with specific consequences for the genre. At a fundamental level, novelists in this period attempt to enlist the authority of history—long viewed as a privileged genre, both by virtue of its place in the classical genre hierarchy and, in the eighteenth century, specifically by its association with empiricism—to shore up their ideological positions and to critique those of their opponents. As chapter 2 suggests, the anti-Jacobin novel registers the reformist position as an assault on the kind of historical consciousness with which anti-Jacobins associate Burkean discourse and the British order it is invoked to defend. In the anti-Jacobin novel, the reform movement is depicted as untenable because it devalues, or denies, history as a complex accretionary process. Conversely, chapter 3 argues that the Jacobin or reformist novel contests the loyalist position by re-casting the inheritance model as a deadly adherence to the past. The novel of reform represents the determining power of the past as a static force that condemns generation after generation to the same follies and errors. These chapters demonstrate the specific ways in which the historical discourses of the Revolution debate

shape the plots, imagery, and ideological positions of the more notable novelistic forms of the 1790s.

Chapters 2 through 4 of the dissertation also consider another, broader consequence of the struggle for the authority of history: the sustained—indeed, the increasing—interest in historical representation among novelists in this period. In the political treatises examined in chapter 1, the Revolution debate commences with competing versions of one historical moment (1688, or the “Glorious” Revolution) and its relevance for the present (1789 and beyond); that debate then escalates into a wider representational war over the relationship between past, present, and future. The novel as a genre experiences a corresponding historical turn as its practitioners depict in ever-increasing detail specific moments of the past in an effort to further their respective ideological positions. Bibliographical studies confirm the novel’s participation in the “self-consciously historicist literary culture” that James Chandler identifies as a characteristic of the period.⁶ In his inquiry into early historical fiction, for instance, Rainer Schöwerling lists 211 loosely “historical” novels published before Walter Scott’s *Waverley* (1814), 193 of which were produced in the years covered by this thesis.⁷ One goal of my study is thus to identify the particular historical conditions that account for this significant development in the novel, and so further to challenge the Lukásian argument

⁶ Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), xv.

⁷ Schöwerling, “Sir Walter Scott and the Tradition of the Historical Novel before 1814—with a Checklist,” in *The Living Middle Ages: Studies in Medieval English Literature and its Tradition*, ed. Uwe Böker, Manfred Markus, and Rainer Schöwerling (Stuttgart: Belser, 1989), 253–62.

that the historical novel emerges fully formed and without precursors from the pen of Scott.⁸

The 1790s' struggle for the authority of history provides a framework that allows us to understand the emerging historical (and, later, historicist) focus of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century novel in the context of its moment. As chapters 2 and 3 demonstrate, the political sub-genres of the novel in this period dedicate considerable attention to the historical discourses of the Revolution debate, generally, and to representations of the past, more specifically. Novelists from across the ideological spectrum align themselves, their works, and their ideological views with "history" in various ways. Both conservatives such as Charles Walker and radicals such as Charlotte Smith, for example, depict select moments of the past in order to elaborate their readings of the revolutionary present and critique the positions of their opponents. Anti-Jacobins such as Robert Bisset and reformers such as Maria Edgeworth pursue, in turn, different but complementary strategies, likening their works to historiography to assert their higher truth value or entirely re-defining the genre of history to enable a more thorough enlistment of its authority. In short, the novel in this period engages history—whether understood as event (the past), as record (historiography), or as a mode of empirical knowledge—specifically *as a consequence of* its practitioners' conscious

⁸ For studies in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British novel that challenge Georg Lukács on this point, see Schöwerling; Peter Garside, "Popular Fiction and the National Tale: Hidden Origins of Scott's *Waverley*," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 46, no. 1 (1991): 30-54, and "Walter Scott and the 'Common' Novel, 1808-1819," *Cardiff Corvey: Reading the Romantic Text* 3 (1999): n.p.; Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), chapter 3; Ina Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History, and the Waverley Novels* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), chapter 4; David H. Richter, "From Medievalism to Historicism: Representations of History in the Gothic Novel and Historical Romance," in vol. 4 of *Studies in Medievalism*, ed. Leslie J. Workman (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1992), 79-104; Anne H. Stevens, "Tales of Other Times: A Survey of British Historical Fiction, 1770-1812," *Cardiff Corvey: Reading the Romantic Text* 7 (2001): n.p.; and James Buzard, *Disorienting Fiction: The Autoethnographic Works of Nineteenth-Century British Novels* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), chapter 4.

participation in the Revolution debate. This study thus contends that the impetus to represent the past in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century novel emerges at least in part from its involvement in the Revolution debate—a broad cultural controversy in which the relationship between past, present, and future is simultaneously a point of reference *and* of disagreement.

While chapters 2 and 3 lay the groundwork for the above argument, chapter 4 pursues it explicitly and at length, contending that early historical fiction and, ultimately, the historical novel as it was realised by Scott emerges out of the legacy of the 1790s. For decades, scholars working on the British novel in this period have alluded to this relation. Margaret Anne Doody, for instance, suggests in passing that “[t]he modern historical novel, as Scott was to develop it, is really an offspring of those novels of the French Revolution and of the Revolutionary era.”⁹ But with important exceptions such as Ina Ferris, M. O. Grenby, April London, Katie Trumpener, and Nicola Watson,¹⁰ few students of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British novel have dedicated sustained attention to the relationship between its various sub-genres in this period: Jacobin and anti-Jacobin, National Tale, and “regional” and “historical” novel. This thesis addresses the nature and kinds of genre reciprocities that inform the reading and writing of British fiction between 1790 and

⁹ Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 318.

¹⁰ See Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, and *The Romantic National Tale and the Question of Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); London, “Radical Utopias: History and the Novel in the 1790s,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 16, no. 4 (2004): 783-802, and “Clock Time and Utopia’s Time in the Novels of the 1790s,” *Studies in English Literature* 40, no. 3 (2000): 539-60; Trumpener; and Nicola Watson, *Revolution and the Form of the British Novel 1790-1825: Intercepted Letters, Interrupted Seductions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

1814.

My dissertation also assigns these understudied forms a significant place in the history of the novel's development, arguing that its practitioners' experiments with history over the course of the Revolution debate introduce and make familiar historical (and, later, historicist) representation in the novel.¹¹ As the example of Scott illustrates, the representation of the past becomes a mainstream feature of the novel in the nineteenth century; as Ferris argues, the genre's association with history then allows it to achieve "literary authority" and thus secure entrance into the hierarchy of respectable genres. The political sub-genres of the 1790s, however, play a crucial, but insufficiently acknowledged, role in the novel's turn to historical representation. As chapters 2 and 3 demonstrate, the depiction of the past in the genre begins as one strategy in a broader ideological battle; as chapter 4 argues, it emerges with Scott in the early nineteenth century as a subject that novelists pursue in and of itself. Chapters 2 through 4 of this thesis trace the novel's turn from the use of historical representation as a strategy in an ideological struggle towards the depiction of the past as a legitimate province of the novel, a non-partisan activity, and, if Scott's contemporary popularity is any indication, a subject of abiding interest for its readers.

Ultimately, this history of the novel from the outset of the French Revolution to the defeat of Napoleon considers the ways in which the pressures of the historical moment are registered in the genre itself and how it, in turn, is transformed as a result of those pressures.

¹¹ Loosely "historical" forms of fiction (such as the Gothic) circulated prior to the 1790s, but their relatively few numbers before the revolutionary decade—a total of 18 productions from 1762 to 1789, according to Schöwerling (253-62)—do not suggest as widespread a generic shift as do the 193 relevant publications of the 1790-1814 period.

The representation of the past in the novel, I argue, emerges first as a consequence of its participation in the Revolution debate, a participation that inaugurates the conditions that ultimately make possible a work such as Scott's *Waverley*. Historical representation in the novel, in short, begins as a partisan activity but quickly develops into a stable feature of the genre—particularly with the historical novel—its political content having been submerged within aesthetic concerns. Or, to adapt the observation that Coleridge makes of Burke in the passage with which this introduction opens, the emergence of historical fiction in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries gives evidence that there has been a struggle for the authority of history in Britain.

CHAPTER ONE

Reading History in a Revolutionary Age: Reformist and Conservative Strategies for Interpreting the Past, 1789-94

In the earliest stages of what would become known as the Revolution debate, Edmund Burke shrewdly anticipated the historical terms of the controversy and made a preemptive first strike in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Writing in defence of the French Catholic clergy, which the National Assembly had stripped of its properties at the outset of the Revolution, Burke contends that history can be misused and abused. The revolutionary confiscators, he argues,

find themselves obliged to rake into the histories of former ages (which they have ransacked with a malignant and profligate industry) for every instance of oppression and persecution which has been made by that body [i.e., the Catholic Church] or in its favour, in order to justify, upon very iniquitous, because illogical principles of retaliation, their own persecutions, and their own cruelties. After destroying all other genealogies and family distinctions, they invent a sort of pedigree of crimes. It is not very just to chastise men for the offences of their natural ancestors; but to take the fiction of ancestry in a corporate succession, as a ground for punishing men who have no relation to guilty acts, except in names and general descriptions, is a sort of refinement in injustice belonging to the philosophy of this enlightened age. [...]

Corporate bodies are immortal for the good of the members, but not for their punishment. Nations themselves are such corporations. As well might we in England

think of waging inexpiable war upon all Frenchmen for the evils which they have brought upon us in the several periods of our mutual hostilities. You might, on your part, think yourselves justified in falling upon all Englishmen on account of the unparalleled calamities brought upon the people of France by the unjust invasions of our Henries and our Edwards. Indeed we should be mutually justified in this exterminatory war upon each other, full as much as you are in the unprovoked persecution of your present countrymen, on account of the conduct of men of the same name in other times.

We do not draw the moral lessons we might from history. On the contrary, without care it may be used to vitiate our minds and to destroy our happiness. In history a great volume is unrolled for our instruction, drawing the materials of future wisdom from the past errors and infirmities of mankind. It may, in the perversion, serve for a magazine, furnishing offensive and defensive weapons for parties in church and state, and supplying the means of keeping alive, or reviving dissensions and animosities, and adding fuel to civil fury.¹

Burke accuses the confiscators of Church lands of reading the past with an eye attuned solely to “every instance of oppression and persecution” in order to justify their present criminal course of action. All they find in history, because all they look for, is injustice. The result of this kind of selective reading is, for Burke, as ironic as it is mistaken: those who are most hostile toward “genealogies and family distinctions” employ hereditary concepts to condemn

¹ Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, ed. Paul Langford (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981-), 8: 188-89. Unless otherwise indicated, references to Burke’s writings are to this collection of his works.

history and then to “invent a sort of pedigree of crimes” for the past.

When figured in these reductive and interested terms, the patrimony of Western civilisation is reduced to crime, injustice, and folly; history becomes, as this passage suggests, a means for justifying new crimes, new injustices, and new follies. But to read history in this manner, Burke insists, is to misapply the notions of historical memory and inheritance, and the roles they play in the transmission of civil society from generation to generation: “[c]orporate bodies are immortal for the good of the members, but not for their punishment.” We inherit rights and privileges from our ancestors, as he argues elsewhere in the *Reflections*, but not their crimes. Burke provides no logical grounding for this argument beyond an appeal to the most fundamental and pragmatic of necessities: to read history in the “perverted,” unsympathetic terms of his opponents—to make history “serve for a magazine, furnishing offensive and defensive weapons for parties in church and state”—would be to justify the grounds for “inexpiable war” between all mankind, for all ages.

Burke’s elaborate manoeuvring in this passage—pointing to the “perverse” historical imagination and reading practices of his “enlightened” opponents while implicitly claiming a disposition that allows him to interpret history “properly”—is entirely characteristic of the Revolution debate in the early 1790s. As this chapter illustrates, the preoccupation with history and the historical imagination is correspondingly more complex and wide-ranging in its consequences than any simple disagreement over historical fact. Indeed, as most astute contemporary commentators would have conceded, the debate was destined to be almost entirely speculative precisely because of the instability and paucity of factual evidence. The writers discussed in this chapter—Burke, Richard Price, Mary Wollstonecraft, James

Mackintosh, William Godwin, and Thomas Paine—repeatedly engage the issues raised by the French Revolution by considering their relation to past, present, and future. Each of the respondents to the French Revolution discussed here claims a “proper” way of reading history; each, in the process, offers an evaluation informed by a sense of how history operates and how historical change occurs.

Admirers and opponents of the Revolution—the so-called “reformist” and “conservative” camps—contest each others’ representations of history as part of their attempt to undermine the others’ arguments.² While there are clearly shades of difference within and between the two camps, members of each tend to share common intellectual ground. Since the opponents are often responding directly to each other, they occupy the same heavily contested battlefields: they revisit the Glorious Revolution of 1688 either to claim or deny its lineage for 1789; they propose distinctive narratives of historical development to articulate their sense of history’s relevance for the present; and, more broadly, they outline their interpretative methods for reading history “properly.”

My goal in examining these writers’ historical representations is not to determine the accuracy or validity of their interpretations of a given historical event.³ Rather, I am

² While the terms “reformist” and “conservative” appear throughout this study without quotation marks, for purposes of ease of reading, I still wish to emphasise that these descriptive labels are imperfect and, at best, approximate.

³ Studies exist which allow us to assess the strengths and weaknesses of later eighteenth-century interpretations of, for example, an event such as 1688; see J. G. A. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law: A Study of English Historical Thought in the Seventeenth Century* (1957; repr., New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), and “Burke and the Ancient Constitution—A Problem in the History of Ideas,” in *Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (New York: Atheneum, 1971), 202-32; J. P. Kenyon, *Revolution Principles: The Politics of Party 1689-1720* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); and R. J. Smith, *The Gothic Bequest: Medieval Institutions in British Thought, 1688-1863* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

interested in the ways they read history, the values and judgments that inform those interpretations, and the underlying hermeneutics they endorse. The types of imaginative engagements with history they prescribe, the narratives they employ to explain the processes by which societies change, and the tropes and imagery they invoke to express their sense of the value of historical experience all inform their models for reading history. The problem of reading history “properly” in the early 1790s is, as is demonstrated below, one that preoccupied many major figures of the Revolution debate, regardless of political allegiance. Whoever could claim history as the ally of a particular reading of the French Revolution, as both camps seem to have intuited from the very beginning, would be claiming a powerful ally indeed.

THE LEGACY OF 1688: THE HISTORICAL IMAGINATION IN PRICE, MACKINTOSH, AND BURKE

Because the *Reflections* is often figured as the initiator of the Revolution debate, and because its full title (*Reflections on the Revolution in France, and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to that Event in a Letter Intended to have been Sent to a Gentleman in Paris*) is often shortened for convenience’s sake, it is easy to forget that Burke’s work is a response to an earlier text first delivered in November 1789 as a sermon commemorating the anniversary of the Glorious Revolution. Burke read Richard Price’s *Discourse on the Love of our Country* (1789) in January 1790 and, in reply, published the *Reflections* less than a year later in November 1790. In turn, many of the major reformist

tracts of the early 1790s—including Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790), Paine’s *Rights of Man* (1791-92), and Mackintosh’s *Vindiciæ Gallicæ* (1791)—were planned and written as part of an organised response to the *Reflections*.⁴

Burke’s reply to Price’s *Discourse* focusses, especially in its opening pages, on Price’s subversive reading of the Glorious Revolution. Price and, later, Mackintosh read into 1688 a failure to perfectly realise or understand the principles and rights relative to choice and election established in theory, if not in practice, by the Revolution. That Burke finds this reading disturbing is evident from the time he takes to refute it and from the flood of abuse he pours on the head of the Dissenting minister, a move contemporaries noted with indignation. “It was not the principle of revolution itself that divided the two men,” as George Watson notes, but rather “their sense of events themselves.”⁵ One of Burke’s first goals in the *Reflections* is to undermine Price’s reading, which he does, in part, by asserting that the Revolution confirms the principle of inheritance.

The contrast between these opposing readings of 1688 illustrates some of the more significant differences in reformist and conservative orientations toward history. Employing a hermeneutics of history defined in large part by inferential and teleological tendencies, Price and, more explicitly, Mackintosh develop an interpretation of 1688 informed by the eighteenth-century concept of imaginative “imitation,” or what we would today call translation or adaptation. The Glorious Revolution, they argue, established principles and

⁴ Soon after Burke announced (February 1790) in the House of Commons his intention to oppose the French Revolution in a forthcoming publication, his opponents began organising to respond. The potential respondents, who could anticipate some of the topics Burke would likely cover, divided up the task according to their areas of interest or specialty. See Blakemore, *Intertextual War*, 16-17.

⁵ George Watson, “Burke’s Conservative Revolution,” *Critical Quarterly* 26, no. 1/2 (1984): 87.

rights amenable to reason; those principles and rights were imperfectly realised at the moment of their articulation and are only now, at the end of the eighteenth century, beginning to be adequately understood. This position enables Mackintosh to argue that a “proper” reading of history requires an imaginative translation of the encoded, unrealised potential of the past. Burke, however, employs a hermeneutics defined largely by analogy and typology. For him, 1688 confirms the principle of inheritance; his reading of the Glorious Revolution, in turn, demands an imaginative figuration of history as an inheritance. To read history “properly,” in Burke’s terms, we must read it sympathetically, in the light of an inheritance.

I

Price’s *Discourse on the Love of our Country* is, in part, a celebration of the rights he and his fellow Dissenters within the Revolution Society believed Englishmen had gained at the time of the Glorious Revolution. Because the analysis of 1688 in Price’s *Discourse* is short and allusive, especially when compared to Burke’s sprawling consideration in *Reflections*, I read that work in tandem with Mackintosh’s more thorough consideration in *Vindiciæ Gallicæ*.⁶ Mackintosh presents this work, as its full title announces, as a “Defence of the French Revolution and its English Admirers against the Accusations of the Right Hon.

⁶ Although I limit my consideration of published defences of Price’s reading of 1688 to Mackintosh’s text, other examples exist; see, for instance, Catherine Macaulay’s *Observations on the Reflections of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke* (1790), Georg Rous’s *Thoughts on Government Occasioned by Mr. Burke’s Reflections* (1791), and Thomas Christie’s *Letters on the Revolution in France* (1791). In fact, as Gregory Claeys argues, few responses to the *Reflections* failed to comment on Burke’s “apparent opposition to the principles of 1688” (46); see Claeys, “The *Reflections* Refracted: The Critical Reception of Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* during the Early 1790s,” in *Edmund Burke’s Reflections on the Revolution in France: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. John Whale (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 40-59. For the most comprehensive bibliography of the textual wars of the 1790s available to date, see Gayle Trusdel Pendleton, “Towards a Bibliography of the *Reflections* and *Rights of Man* Controversy,” *Bulletin of Research in the Humanities* 85, no. 1 (1982): 65-103.

Edmund Burke.”⁷ His reading of 1688 in the fifth section of that work functions as a vindication and an elaboration of Price’s reading. For this reason, in spite of the original order of publication, I consider Price’s and Mackintosh’s readings together and then contrast them with Burke’s.⁸

The rights established during the Glorious Revolution, Price argues in his *Discourse*, are “[t]he right to liberty of conscience in religious matters,” “[t]he right to resist power when abused,” and, as every reader of the *Reflections* recalls, “[t]he right to chuse our own governors; to cashier them for misconduct; and to frame a government for ourselves.”⁹ In claiming these rights, especially the final trio that so aggravated Burke, Price voices an

⁷ Mackintosh, *Vindiciæ Gallicæ: Defence of the French Revolution*, ed. Edmund Garratt (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 1. References are to this edition. For Mackintosh’s later apostasy, see pp.25, note 20 below.

⁸ While recent scholarship has rightly challenged the idea that a handful of reformist and conservative writers determined the terms in which Britain discussed the French Revolution, and has raised awareness of other “vulgar” discourses of the 1790s, my decision to focus on Burke’s discourse is informed by his repeated use of the principle of inheritance; see Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992); Claey, “Republicanism versus Commercial Society: Paine, Burke and the French Revolution Debate,” *History of European Ideas* 11 (1989): 313-24; H. T. Dickinson, “Popular Conservatism and Militant Loyalism 1789-1815,” in *Britain and the French Revolution, 1789-1815*, ed. H. T. Dickinson (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989), 103-25, and “Popular Loyalism in Britain in the 1790s,” in *The Transformation of Political Culture: England and Germany in the Late Eighteenth Century*, ed. Eckhart Hellmuth (London: German Historical Institute; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 503-33; Mark Philp, “Vulgar Conservatism, 1792-3,” *English Historical Review* 110, no. 435 (1995): 42-69; Robert R. Dozier, *For King, Constitution, and Country: The English Loyalists and the French Revolution* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983); and Gilmartin, “Burke, Popular Opinion, and the Problem of a Counter-Revolutionary Public Sphere,” in *Edmund Burke’s Reflections*, ed. John Whale, 94-114.

⁹ Richard Price, *A Discourse on the Love of our Country Delivered on Nov 4, 1789, at the Meeting-House in the Old Jewry, to the Society for Commemorating the Revolution in Britain. With an Appendix, Containing an Account of the Population of France; and the Declaration of Rights by the National Assembly of France* (London: Printed by George Stafford for T. Cadell, 1789), 34. References are to this edition.

interpretation of the Revolution influenced by the Lockean notion of contract.¹⁰ In John Locke's account of the origin of society, men abandon the inconvenient state of nature after coming to the realisation that they must come together to form a contract with one another "for their comfortable, safe, and peaceable living one amongst another, in a secure Enjoyment of their Properties, and a greater Security against any that are not of it."¹¹ That contract, Locke argues, is founded upon common consent: "that, which begins and actually *constitutes any Political Society*, is nothing but the consent of any number of Freeman capable of a majority to unite and incorporate into such a Society."¹²

Price's argument that the Revolution affirms his three foundational political rights relies upon the unstated but controlling thesis of the *Discourse*: that 1688 established rights in theory which were imperfectly implemented in practice (because imperfectly understood) at the time. His historical method is defined, in part, by rational extrapolation and inference; for him, as Henri Laboucheix observes, "the lessons of history are illuminated by intellectual

¹⁰ Martha K. Zebrowski, among others, notes Price's indebtedness to Locke's contractarian account of the origin of society; see Zebrowski, "Richard Price: British Platonist of the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 55, no. 1 (1994): 17-35.

¹¹ Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett, 2nd ed. (1960; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 349.

¹² Locke, 351. J. C. D. Clark suggests that Locke's contractarian account of the origins of society was not widely subscribed to in the eighteenth century outside of the Dissenting community; Price's evocation of Lockean contract thus in and of itself signals, to some extent, the heterodox status of his reading of 1688. See Clark, *English Society 1660-1832: Religion, Ideology and Politics during the Ancien Regime*, 2nd edition (1985; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 126-64. The idea that Locke's contractarian account of the origin of society subverted the existing socio-political order had contemporary proponents; see Pocock, "Josiah Tucker on Burke, Locke, and Price: A Study in the Varieties of Eighteenth-Century Conservatism," in *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays in Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 157-91. Burke, critics agree, did not endorse Lockean contractarianism; see, for instance, Joseph Pappin III, "Edmund Burke's Philosophy of Rights," in *Edmund Burke: His Life and Legacy*, ed. Ian Crowe (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), 115-27.

intuition.”¹³ His reading of 1688 suggests that the achievement of the Glorious Revolution ultimately went unrealised: it articulated political principles and rights agreeable to reason, especially concerning election and choice, which it could not or did not actualise.

Thus, while celebrating “the happiness with which the Revolution has blest us” (33-34), Price also voices a powerful two-pronged critique, one that draws significantly upon aspects of the mid-century discourse of parliamentary reform.¹⁴ “I would farther direct you to remember,” he admonishes his audience, “that though the Revolution was a great work, it was by no means a perfect work; and that all was not then gained which was necessary to put the kingdom in the secure and complete possession of the blessings of liberty.—In particular, you should recollect, that the toleration then obtained was imperfect” (35). The failure to achieve complete religious toleration and the continuation of the Test and Corporation Acts, he argues, were serious shortcomings. “But,” he continues, “the most important instance of the imperfect state in which the Revolution left our constitution is the **INEQUALITY OF OUR REPRESENTATION**” (39): “The inadequateness of our representation has long been a subject of complaint. This is, in truth, our fundamental grievance; and I do not think that any thing is much more our duty, as men who love their country, and are grateful for the Revolution, than to unite our zeal in endeavouring to get it addressed” (41). For Price, men

¹³ Laboucheix, *Richard Price as Moral Philosopher and Political Theorist*, trans. Sylvia and David Raphael, vol. 207 of *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* (1970; Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1982), 125.

¹⁴ For accounts of the origins and development of a mid-century ideology critical of the Revolution establishment on a number of grounds, including the two issues raised here, see Dickinson, *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), 195-205, and *British Radicalism and the French Revolution 1789-1815* (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 1-9; and Claeys, *Thomas Paine: Social and Political Thought* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 6-18.

who “are grateful for the Revolution” must unite to redress its essential failings; those who understand the true principles of 1688 must necessarily understand the inadequacy of the religious toleration gained and the deficiency of the system of political representation established at the Revolution.¹⁵

The event Price has before his eyes while evaluating the achievements of 1688 is, as he announces at the end of the *Discourse* (48-51) and as Burke notes disparagingly in the *Reflections* (8: 61), the French Revolution. The events of 1789, he suggests, may in time enable a better understanding of the shortcomings of 1688. “But all attention to” the reformation of political representation in Britain, he laments, “seems now lost, and the probability is, that this inattention will continue, and that nothing will be done towards gaining for us this essential blessing, till some great calamity again alarms our fears, or till some great abuse of power again provokes our resentment; or, perhaps, till the acquisition of a pure and equal representation by other countries (while we are mocked with the shadow) kindles our shame” (41-42). France’s achievement, Price argues allusively, may in time “shame” Britons by showing them they are “mocked with the shadow” of the rights gained but imperfectly realised since the time of the Revolution. The rapturous conclusion of the *Discourse*, which so troubled Burke, reiterates this sentiment:

¹⁵ D. O. Thomas argues convincingly that Price’s goals for British reform were, in fact, limited to these two areas. Only Price’s occasional misstep—for example, his toast at the 4 November 1789 meeting of the Revolution Society, “The Parliament of Britain, may it become a National Assembly” (308)—and the (mis)representation of opponents such as Burke enabled a view of Price as a radical revolutionary who desired a complete revamping of the British constitution along the lines modelled by the French; see Thomas, *The Honest Mind: The Thought and Work of Richard Price* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977). For an account of another of Price’s missteps (i.e., his problematic defence of the final paragraphs of the *Discourse*), see Blakemore, “Misrepresenting the Text: Price, Burke, and the ‘October Days’ of 1789,” *Friend: Comment on Romanticism* 1, no. 4 (1992): 1-9.

What an eventful period is this! I am thankful that I have lived to it; and I could almost say, *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation*. I have lived to see a diffusion of knowledge, which has undermined superstition and error—I have lived to see the rights of men better understood than ever; and nations panting for liberty, which seemed to have lost the idea of it.—I have lived to see THIRTY MILLIONS of people, indignant and resolute, spurning at slavery, and demanding liberty with an irresistible voice; their king led in triumph, and an arbitrary monarch surrendering himself to his subjects.—After sharing in the benefits of one Revolution, I have been spared to be a witness to two other Revolutions, both glorious.—And now, methinks I see the ardor for liberty catching and spreading; a general amendment beginning in human affairs; the dominion of kings changed for the dominion of laws, and the dominion of priests giving way to the dominion of reason and conscience. (49-50)

The “glorious” French Revolution is figured here as the event that could actualise the unrealised rights of the Glorious Revolution. The omissions of 1688—namely, the failure to establish the supremacy of the rule of law and of private religious conscience—may be rectified in the wake of 1789. “Price is not calling for the British to imitate the French Revolution,” as Tom Furniss observes of this passage, “but rather for British patriots to renew their efforts to complete the work begun in 1688 so that Britain might realize the full potential and promise of its own revolution.”¹⁶ In addition to its prophetic qualities, the

¹⁶ Furniss, “Cementing the Nation: Burke’s *Reflections* on Nationalism and National Identity,” in *Edmund Burke’s Reflections*, ed. John Whale, 121.

reading of history Price elaborates here is also emphatically progressive and teleological: “a diffusion of knowledge” is undermining “superstition and error”; the “ardor for liberty” is “catching and spreading”; the progress of law, reason, and conscience are indicative of a “general amendment beginning in human affairs.” “[T]he dominion of reason and conscience”—the latter being, for Price, a precondition for the former—is on the horizon.¹⁷

James Mackintosh provides a parallel reading of the Glorious Revolution in *Vindiciæ Gallicæ*.¹⁸ Echoing Price’s arguments, Mackintosh also makes a distinction between the theoretical and practical achievements of 1688: “The Revolution of 1688 is confessed to have established principles by those who lament that it has not reformed institutions. It has sanctified the theory, if it has not insured the practice of a free Government. It established, by a memorable precedent, the right of the people of England to revoke abused power, to frame the Government, and bestow the Crown” (138). For Mackintosh, the Revolution established, in theory, the political principles and rights Price claims as the legacy of 1688.

Mackintosh draws upon the multiplicity of Whig Revolutionary discourse to

¹⁷ Price’s commitment to the individual’s right to private judgment, as Gregory I. Molivas and other critics argue, informs his belief in the right to political self-determination. For Price, “obedience to a law to which an individual had not given his assent was regarded as a degradation of human nature. Since God had implanted reason and will in man, he had enabled him from the day of Creation onwards to be his own governor, and this was a precondition for man being a morally responsible agent” (123); see Molivas, “Richard Price, the Debate on Free Will, and Natural Rights,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58, no. 1 (1997): 105-23. See also Thomas, “Richard Price 1723-91,” *Anglo-Welsh Review* 18, no. 41 (1969): 108-17: “Price’s political philosophy is, in effect, an extension of the rights of individual conscience” (112).

¹⁸ In suggesting that Mackintosh’s reading of 1688 is informed by Price’s, I do not mean to elide the differences between the two men. For a discussion of Mackintosh’s distinctive writing style, see James T. Boulton, *The Language of Politics in the Age of Wilkes and Burke* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), and “James Mackintosh: ‘*Vindiciæ Gallicæ*,’” *Renaissance and Modern Studies* 21 (1977): 106-18. For a comparison of the different discourses Mackintosh and other prominent reformers employ, see Lionel A. McKenzie, “The French Revolution and English Parliamentary Reform: James Mackintosh and the *Vindiciæ Gallicæ*,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 14, no. 3 (1981): 264-82.

strengthen aspects of Price's reading.¹⁹ He introduces, for example, the possibility of a radical disjunction between the actions and the words of the Whigs who oversaw the Revolution, a manoeuvre deeply subversive of Burke's account of the various parliamentary acts and royal declarations of the period. While the "conduct" of those Whigs "was manly and systematic," he writes,

[t]heir language was conciliating and equivocal. They kept measures with prejudice which they deemed necessary to the order of society. They imposed on the grossness of the popular understanding, by a sort of compromise between the Constitution and the abdicated family. "They drew a politic well-wrought veil," to use the expression of Mr. Burke, over the glorious scene which they had acted. They affected to preserve a semblance of succession, to recur for the objects of their election to the posterity of Charles and James, that respect and loyalty might with less violence to Public sentiment attach to the new Sovereign. (140-41)

His reading of 1688, he claims, penetrates the Whigs' obfuscating language; he lifts the deceptive "veil" to reveal that the principles and rights which he and Price claim as the

¹⁹ The range of opinions among the Whigs of 1688 was more heterogeneous than Burke's reading in the *Reflections* suggests. Given Mackintosh's interest in the subject (he later attempted, but never completed, a history of the Glorious Revolution), it seems likely he was well aware of this fact. James Conniff argues that "the *Declaration [of Rights] (1689)* originated in the desire of radical Whigs to enforce a contractarian version of the Settlement, was watered down to attain the support of conservatives and William, and yet retained some elements of its original purpose even in its final form. By concentrating his attention solely on the compromise wording of the official documents and on the formal explanations of them, Burke robbed them of much of their force and gave them a meaning that not all of their originators would have accepted" (81); see Conniff, *The Useful Cobbler: Edmund Burke and the Politics of Progress* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994). Kenyon and Pocock, however, maintain that the contractarian interpretation of the Glorious Revolution was held only by a minority; see Pocock, "Edmund Burke and the Redefinition of Enthusiasm: The Context as Counter-Revolution," in *The Transformation of Political Culture 1789-1848*, ed. François Furet and Mona Ozouf, vol. 3 of *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, ed. Keith Michael Baker (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1987), 19-36, and Kenyon.

unrealised ideals of the Revolution are, in fact, precisely those the Whigs of the period aimed to enshrine. The Glorious Revolution, he concludes, “was a *deposition* and an *election*,” as Price had argued; “all language of a contrary tendency, which is to be found in their acts, arose from the remnant of their own prejudice, or from concession to the prejudice of others, or from the superficial and presumptuous policy of imposing august illusions on mankind” (151).

Mackintosh’s reading is also notable for the explicitness with which he articulates his interpretative methods over the course of his analysis.²⁰ For him, the Glorious Revolution marks the beginning of Enlightenment thought, which is subsequently confirmed through the enactment of its political principles in the American and French Revolutions:

The Revolution of 1688 deserves more the attention of a philosopher from its indirect influence on the progress of human opinion, than from its immediate effects on the Government of England. [...] [A]bove all, Europe owes to it the inestimable blessing of an asylum for freedom of thought. Hence England became the preceptress of the world in philosophy and freedom. Hence arose the school of sages, who unshackled

²⁰ My consideration of Mackintosh is limited to the *Vindiciæ Gallicæ*. He later recanted the views he expressed in his youthful publication after privately seeking out Burke in late 1796. Drawing predominantly on his later writings, Mark Salber Phillips argues that Mackintosh, like other readers of history in the period, demanded of the historian a sympathetic engagement with his subject. For Mackintosh, most Enlightenment historians are too detached; Gibbon, he finds, is “unsympathetic in imagination” (Phillips, 201) and Hume, whom he most admired, lacks “a great power of throwing back his mind into former ages” (Mackintosh qtd. in Phillips, 201). In the *Vindiciæ Gallicæ*, however, Mackintosh is interested in history as a means of promoting change in the present, suggesting that his views of history, like his politics, shifted over the 1790s. See Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740-1820* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), chapter 8.

For accounts of Mackintosh’s “conversion,” see Seamus Deane, *The French Revolution and Enlightenment in England 1789-1832* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1988), 48-53, and William Christian, “James Mackintosh, Burke, and the Cause of Reform,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 7, no. 2 (1973-74): 193-206.

and emancipated the human mind; from among whom issued the Lockes, the Rousseaus, the Turgots, and the Franklins, the immortal band of preceptors and benefactors of mankind. They silently operated a grand *moral* revolution, which was in due time to meliorate the social order. [...] From this progress of opinion arose the American Revolution, and from this, most unquestionably, the delivery of France. Nothing, therefore, could be more natural, than that those who, without blind bigotry for the forms, had a rational reverence for the principles of our ancestors, should rejoice in a Revolution, where these principles, which England had so long suffered to repose in impotent abstraction, were called forth into energy, expanded, invigorated, and matured. [...] [T]he Revolution of 1688 may have had no small share in accelerating that progress of light which has dissolved the prejudices that supported despotism [...]. (154-55)

The trajectory of history as Mackintosh describes it moves from illusion to truth, darkness to enlightenment, youth to maturity:

The various fashions of prejudice and factitious sentiment which have been the basis of Governments, are short-lived things. The illusions of chivalry, and the illusions of superstition, which give splendor or sanctity to Government, are in their turn succeeded by new modes of opinion and new systems of manners. Reason alone, and natural sentiment, are the denizens of every nation, and cotemporaries of every age. [...]

Our ancestors at the Revolution, it is true, were far from feeling the full force of these sublime truths, nor was the Public mind of Europe, in the seventeenth

century, sufficiently enlightened and matured for the grand enterprizes of legislation. The science which teaches the rights of man, the eloquence that kindles the spirit of freedom, had for ages been buried with the other monuments of the wisdom and relicts of the genius of antiquity. (144)

Over time, man becomes progressively more aware of the “sublime truths” of politics, immutable truths confirmed by reason and analogous to mathematical principles.²¹ But since these develop only slowly, there is a lag between achievement and recognition that prevents the late seventeenth-century revolutionaries, for instance, from realising the full nature of their actions. Only the passage of time, the growth of human reason, and the progressive nature of history allow for a “proper” interpretation of the Glorious Revolution.

Mackintosh’s reading of 1688 makes a distinction between the principles that fuel the Revolution and the practical, historically-realised achievements of those principles. “[O]ur ancestors in 1688,” Mackintosh argues, deserve

veneration for their achievements [*sic*], and the most ample amnesty for their defects, for the first were their own, and the last are imputable to the age in which they lived.—The true admirers of the Revolution will pardon it for having spared abusive establishments, only because they revere it for having established grand principles. [...] Reverence for the principles, and pardon to the defects of civil changes, which arise in ages partially enlightened, are the plain dictates of common-sense.

²¹ Mackintosh uses geometrical imagery, for instance, in his defence of abstract reasoning: “Geometry, it may be justly said, bears nearly the same relation to mechanics that abstract reasoning does to politics. The *moral forces* which are employed in politics are the passions and interests of men, of which it is the province of metaphysics to teach the nature and calculate the strength, as mathematics do those of the mechanical powers” (57). That is, it is possible to develop a science of government that possesses the same exactness, rationality, and relation to truth as mathematics.

Admiration of Magna Charta does not infer any respect for villainage. Reverence for Roman patriotism is not incompatible with detestation of slavery; nor does veneration for the Revolutionists of 1688 impose any blindness to the gross, radical, and multiplied absurdities and corruptions in their political system. The true admirers of Revolution principles cannot venerate institutions as sage and effectual protection of freedom, which experience has proved to be nerveless and illusive. (155)

In this passage, Mackintosh outlines a significant aspect of his hermeneutics of history. The importance of 1688, he suggests, lies not so much in the completed actions or written words of ancestors—the progressive nature of history, in fact, forces an eventual awareness of their radical defects—but rather in their (perhaps unintentional, certainly obfuscated) articulation of principles and rights confirmed by reason. Those unrealised principles and rights, and not the testimonies of what our ancestors thought or claimed they were doing, motivate political change in the present:

Blind admirers of Revolutions take them for implicit models. Thus Mr. Burke admires that of 1688; but we, who conceive that we pay the purest homage to the authors of that Revolution, not in contending for what they *then* DID, but for what they *now* WOULD DO, can feel no inconsistency in looking on France, not to model our conduct, but to invigorate the spirit of freedom, we permit ourselves to imagine how Lord Somers, in the light and knowledge of the eighteenth century, how the patriots of France, in the tranquillity and opulence of England, would have acted. [...] Exact imitation is not necessary to reverence. We venerate the principles which presided in both events, and we adapt to political admiration the maxim that has long

been received in polite letters, that the only manly and liberal imitation is to speak as a great man would have spoken, had he lived in our times, and been placed in our circumstances. (162-63)

Invoking a notion of imitation or literary translation familiar to his contemporary readers, Mackintosh contends that the “purest” engagement with history is imaginative. Because the venerated principles are encoded in history, the past requires an imaginative translation or adaptation.²² A right reading of history, in Mackintosh’s terms, translates or adapts the unrealised potential of the past for its present readers.²³

II

Burke recognised the subversive tendencies of these readings of 1688, and, accordingly, devoted much of the *Reflections* to countering Price’s account. He employs a number of strategies to do so, but I limit my focus here to two that demonstrate the nature of his imaginative engagement with history.²⁴ First, he disparages the French Revolution and its

²² Pocock repeatedly invokes the notion of translation to describe the ways British reformers and conservatives figured 1789 through the existing but heterogeneous interpretations of 1688: “the English translated the text [i.e., the French Revolution] as it reached them into terms of their own which were already well established, and thereby contextualized it, subjecting it to the discipline of a discourse externally existing” (“Edmund Burke and the Redefinition of Enthusiasm,” 21). See also “The Varieties of Whiggism from Exclusion to Reform: A History of Ideology and Discourse,” in *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, 283.

²³ Such a hermeneutics, as Blakemore observes, enables an imaginative re-visioning of 1688: “Mackintosh and others did not invent a new historical paradigm; rather, they recreated an old one, reinvigorating it with new significance—an English revolution that received its definitive meaning from the revolution in France—the historical culmination of what the (suppressed) English revolution might have become. [...] Mackintosh ultimately reread the ‘real’ Glorious Revolution as a modern recovery, a recuperation of its suppressed significance through the texts that had been distorted by the dominant writers and readers of English history” (*Intertextual War*, 158-59).

²⁴ As his critics have established, Burke pursues a number of discursive strategies to discredit his opponents throughout the 1790s. For studies that examine Burke’s use of various discourses drawn from British history, see Frans De Bruyn, “Anti-Semitism, Millenarianism, and Radical Dissent in Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 34, no. 4

supporters by connecting them not to the Glorious Revolution, but to the regicide and disorder of the Civil War. His manoeuvre here is significant: instead of disinheriting the past to motivate change in the present, as he claims Price's reading of 1688 does, he limits and contains the dangerous potentiality of the present (1789) by assigning it a notorious genealogy. Second, he offers an orthodox reading of 1688 based on surviving historical documents in order to, as he writes, "recall their [i.e., the Revolution Society's] erring fancies to the *acts* of the Revolution which we revere, for the discovery of its true *principles*" (8: 67). In the process of articulating his reading of 1688, Burke, like his opponents, outlines a prescription for reading history "properly." That prescription is to read the achievements of our ancestors in the light of an inheritance.

In figuring 1789 as a typological manifestation of the 1640s and 1650s, Burke suggests that the French Revolution and its supporters derive a radical, regicidal inheritance from their spiritual ancestors, the Parliamentarians of the English Civil War.²⁵ "[H]e saw the revolution," as Blakemore notes, "ironically reproducing the 'past' it was supposedly burying."²⁶ Most passages to this effect occur in the opening pages of the *Reflections*, where

(2001): 577-600, and *The Literary Genres of Edmund Burke: The Political Uses of Literary Form* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); and Iain McCalman, "Mad Lord George and Madam La Motte: Riot and Sexuality in the Genesis of Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*," *Journal of British Studies* 35, no. 3 (1996): 343-67.

²⁵ In his study of Burke's use of anti-Semitic discourse, De Bruyn notes "Burke's habit, especially pronounced in the *Reflections*, of reading the events of his time typologically" (580); see De Bruyn, "Anti-Semitism, Milleniarism, and Radical Dissent." For a study of this widespread practice in the eighteenth century, see Paul Korshin, *Typologies in England, 1650-1820* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

²⁶ Blakemore, "Rereading the French Revolution: Burke and the Paradoxes of History," in *Edmund Burke: His Life and Legacy*, ed. Ian Crowe, 48. See also "Forbidden Knowledge: Intertextual Discovery and Imitation in the French Revolution," *Making History: Textuality and the Forms of Eighteenth-Century Culture*, ed. Greg Clingham (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1998), 142-

Burke responds to Price's *Discourse*. "That sermon," he writes of Price's text,

is in a strain which I believe has not been heard in this kingdom, in any of the pulpits which are tolerated or encouraged in it, since the year 1648, when a predecessor of Dr. Price, the Reverend Hugh Peters, made the vault of the king's own chapel at St. James's ring with the honour and privilege of the Saints, who, with the "high praises of God in their mouths, and a *two*-edged sword in their hands, were to execute judgment on the heathen, and punishments upon the *people*; to bind their *kings* with chains, and their *nobles* with fetters of iron." (8: 61-62)

Burke uses historical analogy here to associate support for the French Revolution with the social and political instabilities—the confiscation of property, the violence of civil war, and the murder of a king—created by their revolutionary counterparts in the 1640s and 1650s. His shrewd discursive strategy enables an imaginatively powerful (if not logically convincing) attack on Price's reading of 1688.

Price and those who adhere to his interpretation, Burke further claims, have confused their revolutions, invoking the sanction of one (1688) while actually mimicking the language and replaying the actions of those that came before (1648) and after (1789). "These gentlemen of the Old Jewry," he asserts, "in all their reasonings on the Revolution of 1688, have a revolution which happened in England about forty years before, and the late French revolution, so much before their eyes, and in their hearts, that they are constantly confounding all the three together" (8: 66). Those who subscribe to Price's reading of 1688 are, Burke charges, confused readers of history; they cannot keep straight matters of

historical fact (such as the dates of revolutions or the principles those revolutions established). Burke explicitly connects his opponents' muddled interpretative techniques with the macabre practices of their regicidal counterparts: "Do these theorists mean to imitate some of their predecessors, who dragged the bodies of our antient sovereigns out of the quiet of their tombs? Do they mean to attain and disable backwards all the kings that have reigned before the Revolution, and consequently to stain the throne of England with the blot of a continual usurpation?" (8: 73). In their confusion, Burke argues, these new Parliamentarians replicate, on the level of historical interpretation, the atrocities of their supposed seventeenth-century counterparts. The radical reading of history practised by Price and his ilk "disable[s] backwards" the legitimacy of every monarch before 1688, sacrilegiously digging up and "slander[ing] [...] the authority of the noble dead."²⁷

By aligning the Revolution of 1789 with that of the Parliamentarians of the Interregnum instead of the Whigs of the Glorious Revolution, Burke does more than score a rhetorical point. His strategy—damning the French Revolution by historical analogy²⁸—effectively denies 1789 any status as a culmination of historical processes set in motion at the Glorious Revolution. Instead, he limits and contains the French Revolution by

²⁷ David Bromwich, *A Choice of Inheritance: Self and Community from Edmund Burke to Robert Frost* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1989), 53.

²⁸ Ian Crowe observes that "historical analogy was such a crucial tool in Burke's explicatory method, and his historical imagination enabled him to avoid" a pitfall Burke often attributed to his opponents—"the creation of anachronistic political paradigms through overrationalization of the evidence" (14); see Crowe, Introduction to *An Imaginative Whig: Reassessing the Life and Thought of Edmund Burke*, ed. Ian Crowe (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 1-18. As early as 1791, however, Burke had become ambivalent about the validity of reasoning by historical analogy in the case of France: "One must not judge of the state of France by what has been observed elsewhere. It does not in the least resemble any other country. Analogical reasoning from history or from recent experience in other places is wholly delusive" (8: 367); see *Thoughts on French Affairs* (1791), 8: 338-386.

figuring it, typologically, as another manifestation of the regicidal, destabilising forces unleashed during the English Civil War. By drawing on historical precedents, Burke employs the idea and the language of inheritance to forestall and then ironically invert his opponents' attempts to trace the "political pedigree"²⁹ of the French Revolution back to the Glorious Revolution, a manoeuvre consistent, as we shall now see, with his defence of that principle throughout the *Reflections*.

The other, less abstract strategy Burke employs to discredit Price's reading is to present a "Whiggish" interpretation of the Glorious Revolution informed by a reading of a number of acts and declarations written primarily in the late seventeenth century. By attending to the language of the available historical documents (the language which Mackintosh subversively interprets as a "veil" that masks the principles to which he and Price lay claim), Burke develops a narrative in which the Glorious Revolution marks a rejection of election and choice as modes of succeeding to the crown and is instead an affirmation of "the inheritable principle" (8: 73). He acknowledges the undeniable fact that there was indeed "a small and a temporary deviation from the strict order of a regular hereditary succession" (8: 68)—namely, that the Protestant Mary and her husband William (and subsequently, in the event they should be without issue, the Protestant offspring of Sophia of Hanover) succeeded to the "abdicated" throne of James II in spite of the claims of his legitimate Roman Catholic children—without, however, drawing Price's conclusions about choosing, electing, and cashiering kings. For Burke, "[t]he gentlemen of the Society for

²⁹ Blakemore, "Rereading the French Revolution," 61. See also his "Burke and the French Revolution: Bicentennial Reflections," in *Burke and the French Revolution: Bicentennial Essays*, ed. Steven Blakemore (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 144-67.

Revolutions see nothing in that of 1688 but the deviation from the constitution; and they take the deviation from the principle for the principle” (8: 73). They read against the grain of their ancestors’ explicit declarations in order to establish their rights. The Whigs of 1688, he contends, attended to the principle of inheritance as scrupulously as circumstances would allow:

At no time, perhaps, did the sovereign legislature manifest a more tender regard to that fundamental principle of British constitutional policy, than at the time of the Revolution, when it deviated from the direct line of hereditary succession. The crown was carried somewhat out of the line in which it had before moved; but the new line was derived from the same stock. It was still a line of hereditary descent; still an hereditary descent in the same blood, though an hereditary descent qualified with protestantism. When the legislature altered the direction, but kept the principle, they shewed that they held it inviolable. (8: 72)

The Glorious Revolution, Burke argues, confirms “the inheritable principle”—that principle which, tested by experience and long usage, has “survived with a sort of immortality through all transmigrations” (8: 73) of English history—and not abstract principles and rights which some men in the eighteenth century call the laws of reason.³⁰ He denies, too, that history is a process in which political principles agreeable to reason are realised. “In Burke’s view,” as Ian Crowe argues,

³⁰ Burke believed (erroneously, Thomas argues) “Price to be asserting in company with the other radical reformers of his day that a man’s rights, whether moral, civil or political, can be determined completely independently of practical and historical experience, that the sum of moral and political wisdom is contained in a relatively small number of principles whose truth can be immediately apprehended by all rational men, and that all social and political institutions that do not accord with these self-evident *a priori* principles should be reformed” (*The Honest Mind*, 326).

neither 1215 nor 1688 was a step in the gradual perfection of political life. Each was, in itself, complete and self-contained. Only an unimaginative reliance upon the written word or positive law, or upon a rationalization of motivations, could create the illusion that each was just one stage in the unfolding discovery of “true” liberty, part of a chain of events forming a history of inevitable progress. If the episodes in the history of liberty mark a tradition, it is a tradition that has been built up by accident, through unrehearsed acts of resistance against unprecedented impositions.³¹

The failure of Price and other supporters of the French Revolution to understand that the Glorious Revolution affirms the principle of inheritance, Burke argues, mirrors the fundamental defect of their historical imagination—their refusal to look back upon their past sympathetically, to imagine that past in the light of an inheritance. “You began ill,” he writes of the early leaders of the French Revolution, “because you began by despising every thing that belonged to you. [...] Respecting your forefathers, you would have been taught to respect yourselves. You would not have chosen to consider the French as a people of yesterday, as a nation of low-born servile wretches until the emancipating year of 1789” (8: 86-87). He levels this same charge against British supporters of the French Revolution who read 1688 in Price’s terms. Price’s reading, he asserts, destabilises the accomplishments of their English ancestors, as his series of rhetorical questions makes clear:

Do they [i.e., the gentlemen of the Society for Revolutions] mean to invalidate, annul, or to call into question, together with the titles of the whole line of our kings, that great body of our statute law which passed under those whom they treat as usurpers?

³¹ Crowe, Introduction to *An Imaginative Whig*, 16.

to annul laws of inestimable value to our liberties—of as great value at least as any which have passed at or since the period of the Revolution? If kings, who did not owe their crown to the choice of their people, had no title to make laws, what will become of the statute *de tallagio non concedeno*?—of the *petition of right*?—of the act of *habeas corpus*? (8: 73-74)

Had Price and his supporters been desirous of maintaining, improving upon, and transmitting to posterity the advantages the British have gained over their long history, he argues, they would have realised “the obvious consequences of their doctrine” (8: 73). The inevitable result of a hermeneutics informed by what Burke thinks of as Price’s hostile historical imagination is, he suggests, a disinheritance of every historically accrued advantage enjoyed by Britain—every right, law, privilege, and even the constitution itself. Fuelled by such interpretative principles, Price’s reading of the Glorious Revolution “disable[s] backwards” every inheritance. In Burke’s reading of history, the principle of inheritance provides a “right” disposition towards the past which, in turn, enables a “right” reading of history. To read history “properly,” in Burkean terms, the accomplishments of our ancestors ought to be interpreted sympathetically; the best method to ensure a sympathetic disposition towards those accomplishments is, he suggests, to figure them, imaginatively, as an inheritance.

*

While the original function served by these readings of 1688 was primarily to bolster a given argument for or against the French Revolution, they are notable, I have argued, for another reason. In the process of interpreting the Glorious Revolution, the reformers and conservatives of the early 1790s discussed here prescribe distinctive ways of engaging

history. The idea of imaginative imitation, or what we today call translation or adaptation, that Mackintosh articulates in the course of his defence of Price's reading enables an interpretation of 1688 that purports to decode the suppressed potential of the Glorious Revolution; such an interpretation provides ideals that inspire political action in the present. In his reading of 1688, by contrast, Burke demands an imaginative figuration of history as an inheritance; reading history in the light of an inheritance, he argues, ensures a sympathetic disposition toward the achievements of the past and, thus, ensures their transmission to posterity.

Burke's assault on his opponents' misuse of history represents a reaction against the *kind* of historical reading he believes they practice. I began my examination of this reaction by considering the different ways Price, Mackintosh, and Burke imaginatively engage history through a comparison of their readings of 1688. In the next section, I suggest that Burke's comments on the abuse of history are symptomatic of a response to a hermeneutics that reflects, to his mind, the universalising, ahistorical tendencies of the progressivist, rationalist strains of Enlightenment thought. The narratives of history that Wollstonecraft, Godwin, Paine, and Burke construct, I argue, outline distinctive discourses of historical development that inform their readings of history in general.

THE RELEVANCE OF THE PAST: THE DISCOURSES OF HISTORY IN WOLLSTONECRAFT, GODWIN, PAINE, AND BURKE

Writers across the political spectrum in the early 1790s employ different strategies

and provide different paradigms for reading history “properly.” Their hermeneutics, however, also depend upon particular theories of historical development, theories that express their sense of the relevance and function of history. What is the value of historical experience? What is its relationship with the present? with the future? What purpose(s) does, and should, history serve for the living? Mary Wollstonecraft, to take one example, responds clearly to each of these questions. Answering Burke’s contention that the French National Assembly should have looked to their ancestors in framing their new government, Wollstonecraft argues that history provides the living with no positive models for strict imitation. In making this argument, she invokes the image of “light-houses” and the language of inheritance:

in settling a constitution that involved the happiness of millions, that stretch beyond the computation of science, it was, perhaps, necessary for the Assembly to have a higher model in view than the *imagined* virtues of their forefathers; and wise to deduce their respect for themselves from the only legitimate source, respect for justice. Why was it a duty to repair an ancient castle, built in barbarous ages, of Gothic materials? Why were the legislators obliged to rake amongst heterogeneous ruins; to rebuild old walls, whose foundations could scarcely be explored, when a simple structure might be raised on the foundation of experience, the only valuable inheritance our forefathers could bequeath? Yet of this bequest we can make little use till we have gained a stock of our own; and even then, their inherited experience would rather serve as light-houses, to warn us against dangerous rocks or sand-banks,

than as finger-posts that stand at every turning to point out the right road.³²

Historical experience, she argues, does not furnish models for the present but rather examples to avoid; the inheritances of “our forefathers” are “light-houses” “to warn us” and not “finger-posts” that “point out the right road.” The relevance of history, as Wollstonecraft figures it here through the imagery of the Gothic castle and the opposing languages of inheritance and Enlightenment, is purely negative: the “inherited experience” of our forefathers, their only “bequest,” instructs the present only by showing the errors of the past.

This section of chapter 1 examines the ways in which reformers and conservatives narrate historical change to determine their respective sense of the relevance of history. Drawing upon a representative body of literature—Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) and her *Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* (1794); Godwin’s *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793); Paine’s *Rights of Man* (1791-92); and a selection of Burke’s works, ranging from *A Vindication of Natural Society* (1756) and *An Essay Toward an Abridgement of the English History* (c.1757-60) to the *Reflections*—I argue these writers establish distinctive historical paradigms that provide the intellectual underpinnings of reformist and conservative models for reading history “properly.” Two oft-invoked images, each providing a master trope for historical change, emerge from the examination of these discourses: the printing press (the engine of Enlightenment that disseminates truth and explodes error) and the notion of inheritance (the

³² Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men, in a Letter to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke; Occasioned by his Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 2nd edition (1790), in *The Vindications: “The Rights of Men”; “The Rights of Woman,”* ed. D. L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1997), 75. References are to this edition.

principle of tradition that transmits historically-tested and -proven advantages, values, and structures).

Wollstonecraft's equation, in the passage quoted above, of past historical experience with "light-houses" and her subversive use of the idea of inheritance expresses, albeit in an extreme form, an interpretation of history largely affirmed by reformist writers of the early 1790s. Radical historical discourse is informed primarily by the Dissenting tradition, especially its emphasis on reason and its secularised narrative of historical progress. The influence of the progressive narrative of Scottish Enlightenment philosophical history is, as we will see, less direct. Drawing variously on these two traditions, Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and Paine construct teleological narratives of progress from a state of war and ignorance toward a utopian society governed according to reason. The narratives of historical development that inform their readings confirm the relevance of history: for them, historical change is defined by the slow exposure and destruction of the errors and crimes of the past. Reason is the hero of this narrative; the printing press—that vehicle which literally enables and symbolically represents this competitive process—is its defining image. To read history "properly" in this interpretative framework is to read it critically: only an awareness of the failures of the past enables a "right" reading of history. Correspondingly, present reason, and not past error, should supply political models and principles for the future.

In the *Reflections*, by contrast, Burke proposes a different interpretative framework. His view of history is, like that of his opponents, progressive, but it is more directly indebted than theirs to the Scottish Enlightenment, particularly its account of the evolutionary, accretionary nature of historical development. He is hopeful for a progressive trajectory of

history but is not convinced of its inevitability. Because his vision of history emphasises accretion more emphatically than that of his opponents, he is capable of sympathetically entering into the alterity of the past to a degree they cannot. For Burke, history does not primarily entail the exposure and erasure of past errors but the testing over time of past experience in order to confirm its value. Custom and prescription are the heroes of his narrative; inheritance is its defining image. Nor is it inappropriate, given his life-long interest in history, to suggest Burke believed he was familiar with his opponents' strategies for interpreting history even before they responded to his *Reflections*. In early writings such as *A Vindication of Natural Society* and *An Abridgement of the English History*, as in the later *Reflections*, Burke insists on a reading of history appreciative of its achievements, attuned to its accretionary nature, and sensitive to the influences of local experience. In the case of England and the wider European community of which it is a part, the most formative influence derived from historical experience is, he contends, the principle of inheritance.

I

While the arguments of reformers in the 1790s are sometimes described as ahistorical, it is demonstrably the case that some of the most significant reformist responses to the French Revolution—including Wollstonecraft's *The Rights of Men*, Godwin's *Political Justice*, and Paine's *Rights of Man*—articulate narratives that attempt to explain the course of history and the nature of historical change. Because these paradigms share a number of plot details and draw on similar discourses, I consider them as constituting an aggregate narrative of history. Inheritance, in this narrative, is ineffectual and even dangerous as a model for the transmission of cultural value and is most often invoked subversively. For these writers, the

competitive marketplace of print culture—that space in which ideas are articulated, made public, and become subject to contestation, refutation, or affirmation—provides a better symbol for explaining the processes of historical change.

Wollstonecraft's, Godwin's, and Paine's early responses to Burke and the French Revolution generally reveal the contours of the reformist narrative of history. The origins of government are, as they describe them, founded in crime and ignorance. "In the infancy of society," Wollstonecraft writes in the opening pages of *The Rights of Men*, "customs were established by the lawless power of an ambitious individual; or a weak prince was obliged to comply with every demand of the licentious barbarous insurgents, who disputed his authority with irrefragable arguments at the point of their swords" (40). The first governments, she maintains here and in the chapter on the "Progress of Society" with which she opens *An Historical and Moral View*, were nothing more than the rule of the strongest: "The first social systems were certainly founded by passion; individuals wishing to fence around their own wealth or power, and make slaves of their brothers to prevent encroachment. Their descendants have ever been at work to solder the chains they forged, and render the usurpations of strength secure, by the fraud of impartial laws."³³ Passion and self-interest, and not reason and justice, motivated those who founded the first governments and their systems of law; the law of inheritance entrenches this injustice, rendering the positions of "usurper" and "slave" hereditary.

These ignoble motivations inspired the earliest governors, Paine argues in his chapter

³³ Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution; and the Effect it has Produced in Europe* (1794), in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989), 6: 18. References are to this edition.

on “The Origin of the Present Old Governments” in the second part of *Rights of Man*, for the simple reason that all previous governments began in conquest and injustice. “It is impossible,” he writes, “that such governments as have hitherto existed in the world, could have commenced by any other means than a total violation of every principle sacred and moral. The obscurity in which the origin of all the present old governments is buried, implies the iniquity and disgrace with which they began.”³⁴ What is known of the more recent (and, hence, better documented) conquests—and here Paine points to the Norman invasion—only confirms this universal pattern of history. In his narrative of the origin of governments, the first governors are conquerors, and those conquerors are really only the leaders of “a banditti of ruffians” who contrive “to lose the name of Robber in that of Monarch” (220) once they have established their power. All past governments, Paine contends, were established upon these criminal foundations:

Those bands of robbers having parcelled out the world, and divided it into dominions, began, as is naturally the case, to quarrel with each other. What at first was obtained by violence, was considered by others as lawful to be taken, and a second plunderer succeeded the first. They alternatively invaded the dominions which each had assigned to himself, and the brutality with which they treated each other explains the original character of monarchy. It was ruffian torturing ruffian. The conqueror considered the conquered, not as his prisoner, but his property. He led him in triumph rattling in chains, and doomed him, at pleasure, to slavery or death. As time

³⁴ Paine, *Rights of Man. Part the Second* (1792), in *Rights of Man, Common Sense, and Other Political Writings*, ed. Mark Philp (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 220. References to Paine’s writings are to this collection of his works.

obliterated the history of their beginning, their successors assumed new appearances, to cut off the entail of their disgrace, but their principles and objects remained the same. What at first was plunder, assumed the softer name of revenue; and the power originally usurped, they affected to inherit. (220-21)³⁵

The only inheritance of the early conquerors, Paine suggests here, is a model for establishing governments that begets ever-new violence; the erasure of history occasioned by time ensures an end to their “entailed” disgrace while, at the same time, the fiction of inheritance allows them to hold their usurpation in perpetuity.

The criminal foundations of all existing European governments, in this narrative, ensure the entail of the violent means that first secured power. Paine repeatedly asserts throughout the second part of *Rights of Man* that all old European governments establish taxation schemes only to fund new conquests planned by their conqueror-kings: “All the monarchical governments are military. War is their trade, plunder and revenue their object” (212). Godwin also insists upon the violent nature of old governments in the second chapter of *Political Justice*, which provides a short survey of the “history of political society”: “the

³⁵ Paine’s strategy of re-defining words here is, as Blakemore argues, symptomatic of a larger struggle over linguistic meaning in the 1790s: “[b]ecause the revolutionaries questioned and challenged the meaning of the traditional European world, the debate over revolution and counterrevolution was often about the very meaning of that world and the language that sustained it. Revolutionary and counterrevolutionary writers [...] sensed that language and ideology are intimately intertwined and that whoever controls language controls not only the terms of the ‘war’ but the terms of ‘reality’ itself. It is this special linguistic self-consciousness that shapes their vision of the Revolution as, among other things, an astonishing linguistic event” (1-2). See Blakemore, *Burke and the Fall of Language: The French Revolution as Linguistic Event* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1988).

history of mankind,” he writes, echoing Voltaire, “is little else than the history of crimes.”³⁶ Godwin then proceeds to document slaughters and atrocities committed by several governments throughout history, much as Wollstonecraft chronicles the various absurdities and injustices of governments in her short summary of English history in the opening pages of *The Rights of Men* (40-43). In a move that would have left Burke feeling vindicated (had he read *Political Justice*), Godwin clinches his argument about the violence of all previous governments by citing a passage from the fourth part of Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) and then by referring, in a footnote, to Burke’s satirical *Vindication of Natural Society* (1756), “a treatise,” he argues, “in which the evils of the existing political institutions are displayed with incomparable force of reasoning and lustre of eloquence, while the intention of the author was to shew that these evils were to be considered as trivial” (3: 8n).³⁷

One of the most common features of this narrative is the notion of development guided by chance, present expediency, or the self-interested motives of governors. Each reformer discussed here relies on some version of this idea to establish a sense of the way political society has hitherto developed, but Mackintosh provides its fullest expression. None of the old European governments, he argues, developed in accordance with any identifiable laws of reason. Before 1776 and 1789, all government was “the produce of chance”; their

³⁶ Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), vols. 3 and 4 of *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, ed. Mark Philp (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), 3: 4. Volume 3 follows the 1st edition (1798); volume 4 reproduces the changes Godwin made to the text for the 2nd (1796) and 3rd (1798) editions. References are to this edition.

³⁷ In the *Reflections*, Burke accuses the new French legislators (and, implicitly, their supporters) of deriving their attitudes towards government and history “from the declamation and buffooneries of satirists; who would themselves be astonished if they were held to the letter of their own descriptions. By listening to only these, [they] regard all things only on the side of the vices and faults, and view those vices and faults under every colour of exaggeration” (8: 218).

development was little more than a slow accretion of errors, follies, and “imperfect good” (55). Generation after generation inherited this heterogeneous mass, each contributing new imperfections while striving to entail the old. “A Government of *art*,” he in turn argues,

reared on the immutable basis of natural right and general happiness, which should combine the excellencies, and exclude the defects of the various constitutions which chance had scattered over the world, instead of being precluded by the perfection of any of those forms, was loudly demanded by the injustice and absurdity of them all. It was time that men should learn to tolerate nothing ancient that reason does not respect, and to shrink from no novelty to which reason may conduct. It was time that the human powers, so long occupied by subordinate objects, and inferior arts, should mark the commencement of a new æra in history, by giving birth to the art of improving government, and increasing the civil happiness of man. It was time, as it has been wisely and eloquently said, that Legislators, instead of the narrow and dastardly *coasting* which never ventures to lose sight of usage and precedent, should, guided by the *polarity* of reason, hazard a bolder navigation, and discover, in unexplored regions, the treasure of public felicity. (55-56)

The governments established by the American and the French revolutions are the first in history to be directed by “the *polarity* of reason.” Mackintosh’s distinction here between governments of chance and of reason is one many radicals endorse. It enables Wollstonecraft, for instance, to ask the question echoed by many supporters of the Revolution: “What then is to hinder man, at each epoch of civilization, from making a stand, and new modelling the materials, that have been hastily thrown into a rude mass, which time alone has consolidated

and rendered venerable?” (*An Historical and Moral View*, 6: 21).

This aggregate narrative that I have been describing depends upon common assumptions about historical change, and upon shared attitudes toward the past that these writers derive primarily from two British traditions. First, reformists draw upon the discourse of Dissent, which enables a critique of government on rationalist grounds and which, somewhat paradoxically, also provides their narrative of history with a utopian point in the future. Second, these writers echo aspects of Scottish Enlightenment discourse—particularly the notion of the progressive stages of human society—although this relationship is, on the whole, less direct and sustained than the first. The result of this intermingling of ideas is a distinctively new discourse of history. The idea of a stadial progression from barbarism to commercial society, when it is invoked, promotes a sense of the radical alterity of the past. This insistence on the (decidedly negative) “otherness” of the past, in turn, reinforces a teleological narrative of secular history derived from the discourse of Rational Dissent and is maintained by invocations of the language and imagery of “Enlightenment.”

Contrary to Burke’s accusations, radical British thought in the 1790s, it is agreed, was not informed primarily by the *philosophes* of the French Enlightenment. Similarities exist between the discourses of history employed by the British reformers of the early 1790s and the French Enlightenment *philosophes* of the mid- and late-eighteenth century: both endorse the notions of continual progress, increasing rationality, and the essential goodness of mankind, and both share a sense of a barbaric, oppressive (medieval) past.³⁸ As Seamus

³⁸ For a survey of French Enlightenment views of history that stresses the above qualities, see Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern* (1983; repr., Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), chapter 13.

Deane and others have argued, Rational Dissenters and the French *philosophes* share a common ancestry, so the coincidence of their views is not surprising. Still, they developed into two distinctive traditions—one Christian or (at worst) Deist, the other Deist (at best) or atheist—and the former was more relevant to the British context. The British reformers—including Price, Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and Paine—owe more to this indigenous tradition of Dissent.³⁹

The rejection of Puritan rule at the Restoration led to a discrediting of “religious

³⁹ Deane argues the English Dissenters were “the most vociferous of all those who welcomed the Revolution [...]. Yet when we look more closely, we find that the affinities of English Dissent with the thought of the French Enlightenment [...] are superficial” (158); see Deane, *The French Revolution and Enlightenment*, 158-75. Philp contends that the tradition of Rational Dissent, and not the French Enlightenment, “provided a major part of the social and intellectual culture within which a domestic radicalism was fostered” (39); see Philp, *Godwin’s Political Justice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), chapters 1, 2, 6, 7, and 10. Pocock argues that the English tradition of Rational Dissent, already deeply anti-clerical in its outlook, did not require the radical (and often atheistic) scepticism of its French counterpart; see Pocock, “Post-Puritan England and the Problem of the Enlightenment,” in *Culture and Politics from Puritanism to the Enlightenment*, ed. Perez Zagorin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 91-111, and “Edmund Burke and the Redefinition of Enthusiasm.”

Price and Wollstonecraft were Unitarians and, hence, members of the Dissenting community. Price was the minister of Newington Green, the parish in which Wollstonecraft lived (1783-87), and the two were friends; see G. J. Barker-Benfield, “Mary Wollstonecraft: Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthwoman,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 50, no. 1 (1989): 95-115. Godwin, in spite of his later atheism, was a minister earlier in his life and continued to have ties with the Dissenting community. As Philp argues, Godwin “wrote, argued and thought largely in the language, culture and traditions of Rational Dissent. His choice of issues, his phrasing of arguments and his fundamental commitments and assumptions in his moral, and thus political, theory all indicate that he was deeply involved in this culture” (16); see Philp, *Godwin’s Political Justice*, chapter 1. See also William Stafford, “Dissenting Religion Translated into Politics: Godwin’s *Political Justice*,” *History of Political Thought* 1 (1980): 279-99, and Martin Fitzpatrick, “William Godwin and the Rational Dissenters,” *The Price-Priestley Newsletter* 3 (1979): 4-28.

Paine was not, strictly speaking, a Dissenter but the son of a Quaker who, by *The Age of Reason* (1794-95), had become a Deist; see Claeys, *Thomas Paine*, 101-04, and Clark, 385-96. Deane nevertheless notes that Paine “is very much in the Dissenting tradition in his millennial [*sic*] beliefs, his hostility to government, his distrust of religious establishments, and his belief that religion is a personal and solitary affair, not an institutional and coercive force” (166); see Deane, *The French Revolution and Enlightenment*, 164-67. See also Michael Payne, “Priestley, Paine, Blake, and the Tradition of English Dissent,” *Pennsylvania English* 10, no. 1 (1983): 5-13. Moreover, the connection between reformist politics, Rational Dissent, and the idea of a secular millennium in the 1790s is well established; see Philp, “Rational Religion and Political Radicalism in the 1790s,” *Enlightenment and Dissent* 4 (1985): 35-46, and J. F. C. Harrison, “Thomas Paine and Millenarian Radicalism,” in *Citizen of the World: Essays on Thomas Paine*, ed. Ian Dyck (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988), 73-85.

enthusiasm,” a corresponding attempt to ground religion in reason, and the development of the notion of a secular millennium.⁴⁰ In the years between the Restoration and the Glorious Revolution, the Anglican reaction to the Puritan legacy manifested itself, J. G. A. Pocock argues, in the development of “a rational religion, in which the apostolic and the prophetic were alike reduced in role.”⁴¹ In place of “inner light” and Calvinist notions of divine grace and election, Anglicans relied upon reason, which, Frederick C. Beiser argues, “proved to be the most effective weapon for the Church to establish its authority and legitimacy against its many enemies. It was reason that undermined the apostolic tradition of the Roman Catholics, that exposed the pretensions to inspiration of the enthusiasts, and that undercut the biblicism of the radical Puritans.”⁴² For the radical or “Rational” Dissenting groups who refused the idea of legitimate clerical authority, Christianity was also “coming to be identified with enquiry[,] with reason’s search after beliefs in which it could rest satisfied.”⁴³ The development of Rational Dissent over the course of the seventeenth century, Pocock argues, marks “the most revolutionary programme to have been formulated by any organized group of Englishmen [...]. Once Jesus Christ was spoken of as ‘the great spirit reason,’ the possibility existed and was recognized of extracting a revolutionary rationalism from a

⁴⁰ See Frederick C. Beiser, *The Sovereignty of Reason: The Defense of Rationality in the Early English Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); J. A. I. Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and its Enemies, 1660-1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); and Franco Venturi, *Utopia and Reform in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

⁴¹ Pocock, “Post-Puritan England and the Problem of the Enlightenment,” 100-01.

⁴² Beiser, 10.

⁴³ Pocock, “Edmund Burke and the Redefinition of Enthusiasm,” 24.

strictly theological debate.”⁴⁴ The discourse Rational Dissenters employed against the established Church, much like the discourse Anglicans employed against “enthusiasm,” appealed increasingly to reason; whereas the latter served as a defence of the Church establishment, however, the former was made to serve an increasingly secularist agenda.⁴⁵ And, paradoxically, although the prophetic and millennial strains of the more radical Protestant sects were “reduced,” they were not excised from either of these rationalist discourses but were instead adapted and reconfigured to further secularised ends. Anglican and Dissenting “concern for a rational religion,” Pocock argues,

led to a renewed exegesis of the prophets and the tradition of prophetic scholarship. In fact, it is from Anglicans of this generation, as well as from the mutation of English Presbyterianism into its Arian, Socinian, and Unitarian forms, that we can trace what Ernest Tuveson has studied under the title *Millennium and Utopia*: the development of the idea that human capacities would be millennially perfected by the providentially directed perfection of philosophy, science, and society in the course of secular history.⁴⁶

The prioritising of rationalism and the narrative of a progression toward a “millennially

⁴⁴ Pocock, “Edmund Burke and the Redefinition of Enthusiasm,” 25-26.

⁴⁵ The extreme result of this line of thought was the prioritising of reason over biblical revelation and, hence, the rise of Deism. Franco Venturi, among others, argues Deism contributed significantly to the development of the French Enlightenment; see Venturi, chapter 2.

⁴⁶ Pocock, “Post-Puritan England and the Problem of the Enlightenment,” 104. Pocock is referring to Ernest Lee Tuveson’s *Millennium and Utopia: A Study in the Background of the Idea of Progress* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1949).

perfected” secular world are characteristics of the discourse of Rational Dissent.⁴⁷

The historical paradigms of the reformist writers discussed here clearly represent different versions of secularised millenarianism: Price prophesies an age of “reason and conscience” (50); Wollstonecraft believes in the slow progression toward “that state of perfection necessary to secure the sacred rights of every human creature” (*An Historical and Moral View*, 6: 183); Godwin anticipates a moment in history when all decisions will be voluntarily decided in accordance with “reason” and “justice,” a moment which “must at some time arrive” if “[t]he inherent tendency of intellect [...] to improvement” is not restricted (*Political Justice*, 4: 332); and even Paine (who so often resists casual alignment with his reformist contemporaries) confidently predicts the approaching “political summer” that must follow the “spring” of 1789, in which the rights of man will be universally realised (*Rights of Man*, part two, 326). In whatever form it is expressed, the radical historical paradigm makes central reason and a utopian realisation of historical processes. Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and Paine describe an inevitable historical process that will culminate in the reign of reason and the perfection of humanity, variously constructed as a millennial utopia of reason and conscience (Price), a secular utopia of the “rights of man” (Wollstonecraft and Paine), or an anarchist utopia of “political justice” (Godwin).⁴⁸ That

⁴⁷ Examining the close relationship between the notion of unlimited progress and Christianity, David Spadafora documents the eighteenth-century process whereby the Christian notion of the millennium increasingly comes to accommodate the idea of a secularist as well as a spiritualist utopia; see Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), chapter 3.

⁴⁸ This point, however, requires careful qualification in the case of Wollstonecraft and Godwin, who later re-examined their progressivist accounts of history in light of the violent turn of events in France. In *An Historical and Moral View*, Wollstonecraft is more ambivalent about the inevitability of progress in the wake of the Terror, although most critics agree her gradualist vision still confirms (however tenuously) the earlier optimistic narrative of history. See Blakemore, *Crisis in Representation: Thomas*

these reformist narratives of history are, to different degrees, indebted to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century traditions of Rational Dissent and yet are not necessarily committed to any specific religious account of history is not surprising; rather, this fact confirms, as Pocock argues, the extent to which “their discourse emerged from various secularizations of the long struggle of non-conformity against establishment in church and state.”⁴⁹

Reformist conceptions of history also echo aspects of Scottish Enlightenment thought, although there is little evidence that Wollstonecraft, Godwin, or Paine absorbed much more than the general contours of the argument that societies develop from a state of barbarity to a polite, commercial civilisation.⁵⁰ The examination of past institutions, laws,

Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, Helen Maria Williams, and the Rewriting of the French Revolution (Madison and Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1997), chapters 5-8; John Whale, *Imagination under Pressure, 1789-1832: Aesthetics, Politics and Utility*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), chapter 3; Conniff, “Edmund Burke and his Critics: The Case of Mary Wollstonecraft,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60, no. 2 (1999): 299-318; Furniss, “Mary Wollstonecraft’s French Revolution,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 59-81; and Harriet Devine Jump, “‘The Cool Eye of Observation’: Mary Wollstonecraft and the French Revolution,” in *Revolution in Writing: British Literary Responses to the French Revolution*, ed. Kelvin Everest (Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1991), 101-20.

In his revisions of *Political Justice*, Godwin places more emphasis on societal stability—arguing that coercion in the name of collective security can be just, and providing a defence of property rights (Book 8, chapter 2)—and attacks attempts to force change through action; see Philp, *Godwin’s Political Justice*, chapter 7. Examining Godwin’s treatment of feudalism in his *Political Justice* and *Life of Geoffrey Chaucer* (1803), Rowland Weston argues that his “interpretation, practice, and deployment of history” (446) moves from a too-easy dismissal of the barbarous past to a more nuanced appreciation of the contemporary efficacy of past customs and institutions; see Weston, “Politics, Passion and the ‘Puritan Temper’: Godwin’s Critique of Enlightened Modernity,” *Studies in Romanticism* 41, no. 3 (2002): 445-70.

⁴⁹ Pocock, “Edmund Burke and the Redefinition of Enthusiasm,” 34.

⁵⁰ Of the three writers, Wollstonecraft was most familiar with the central texts and ideas of Scottish Enlightenment thought: see Daniel I. O’Neill, “Shifting the Scottish Paradigm: The Discourse of Morals and Manners in Mary Wollstonecraft’s *French Revolution*,” *History of Political Thought* 23, no. 1 (2002): 90-116; Claudia L. Johnson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*; and Jane Rendall, “‘The Grand Causes which Combine to Carry Mankind Forward’: Wollstonecraft, History and Revolution,” *Women’s Writing* 4, no. 2 (1997): 155-72.

Godwin invokes the “from barbarism to refinement” (3: 474) thesis briefly at one point in *Political Justice* and quotes David Hume and Adam Smith on a few occasions, but there is little evidence to

and manners which the Scottish thesis prompted, in fact, seems only to have reinforced radical doubts about the relevance of historical experience for the present.⁵¹ The reformist position thus conforms largely to the English narrative of progress in general, which, as David Spadafora argues, “ignored” the “temporal and cultural limits” of the Scottish narrative and “conceived of progress as indefinite in scope and duration.”⁵² Moreover, many reformers held beliefs about history and contemporary society that were in direct opposition to some of the central tenets of Scottish thought. The Scottish Enlightenment celebration of the eighteenth-century commercial Whig order and the system of manners it encouraged, for instance, is fundamentally at odds with rationalist critiques of the contemporary social order

suggest that he was particularly familiar with or interested in Scottish philosophical history: see William St. Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys: The Biography of a Family* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1989), chapter 5; George Woodcock, *William Godwin: A Biographical Study* (1946; repr., Montreal and New York: Black Rose Books, 1989), 40-44; and Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice*, 217-18.

The scant attention critics have paid to Paine's reading habits suggests he had little direct contact with Scottish thought, the notable exceptions being Adam Smith and William Robertson: see Claeys, *Thomas Paine*, chapter 4, and Caroline Robbins, “The Lifelong Education of Thomas Paine (1737-1809): Some Reflections upon his Acquaintance among Books,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 127, no. 3 (1983): 135-42.

⁵¹ Writers in the tradition of the Scottish Enlightenment had, to some extent, fostered the notion of the medieval Catholic past as barbaric and “other.” “Figures like David Hume, William Robertson, and Adam Ferguson,” Anthony S. Jarrells notes, “worked to relegate the pre-1688 society championed by the Jacobites to a distant, dark, and violent past” (22); see Jarrells, *Britain's Bloodless Revolutions: 1688 and the Romantic Reform of Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), chapter 4. In a similar vein, taking Hume's *History of England* as his touchstone, R. J. Smith argues “Hume's medieval history was [...] negative in intent; he aimed to show that the past had been unlike the present. [...] For Hume the Middle Ages were a matter of curiosity and not utility but his negative view of them presents his readers with a problem of interpretation. Hume was more concerned to show what had changed than what had endured, more concerned to destroy the shibboleths of his own day's history than to show where he concurred in their worship” (77, 79); see Smith, 74-85.

Scottish Enlightenment thinkers such as Robertson could nevertheless also appreciate the important civilising effects of some medieval institutions (such as chivalry, for instance) to a degree most reformers writing in the early 1790s could not; see Pocock, “The Political Economy of Burke's Analysis of the French Revolution,” in *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, 193-212, and the Introduction to his edition of Burke's *Reflections* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), vii-lvi.

⁵² Spadafora, 212.

articulated by Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and Paine.⁵³ Even Wollstonecraft's *Historical and Moral View*, which draws on Scottish thought to a greater extent than any other radical work discussed here, "was an attempt to rewrite the stadial history of manners that denied their necessary theoretical and historical connection to the progress of morals."⁵⁴ In other words, Wollstonecraft "shifts the Scottish paradigm," as Daniel I. O'Neill argues, to make it serve her agenda in *An Historical and Moral View*, which is to explain revolutionary violence as the predictable product of the corrupt system of manners fostered by the *ancien régime*. The Scottish narrative of history, in short, reinforces the radical sense of the barbarous alterity of the past and the progressive course of history, but ultimately, radical narratives of history in the early 1790s owe more to the English tradition of Dissent with its emphasis on reason and on a moment of utopian completion.

Drawing on these traditions in various ways, reformers such as Wollstonecraft and Godwin invoke the printing press, and not the Burkean principle of inheritance, as the trope that best explains the processes of historical development. These writers are committed not only to the printing press as an agent of historical change, but their narratives of historical development also depend on Enlightenment conceptions of the printing press. In these narratives, historical change occurs in ways that mirror the competitive processes of print culture: the ideas underpinning society's institutions, structures of power, customs, and so forth are made subject to discussion, and hence to contestation and refutation, and are finally

⁵³ Hume celebrates the effects of commerce and the corresponding cultivation of "polite" manners, for instance, in "Of Commerce" and "Of Refinement in the Arts," in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller, revised edition (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), 253-67 and 268-80.

⁵⁴ O'Neill, 116.

overturned and replaced. Historical development becomes in this narrative a combative process in which the errors and follies of the past are confronted and dismantled in the advance toward a better future.⁵⁵

Among the reformers examined here, Godwin is the most explicit proponent of the view that the printing press is responsible for many salutary social and political developments over the last few centuries of European history. Given his commitment to the sanctity of private judgment as expressed in *Political Justice*, where he argues that “the conviction of a man’s individual understanding, is the only legitimate principle, imposing on him the duty of adopting any species of conduct” (4: 86), his high estimation of the press is not surprising.⁵⁶ “Thus it is perhaps,” he writes while commenting on the progression of human knowledge, “that we ought to regard the introduction of printing as having given its full security to the emancipation of mankind” (*Political Justice*, 4: 137). The old system of education, which he condemns for limiting “the cultivation of the mind” to the aristocracy, is “a monopoly which the art of printing has at length fully destroyed” (*Political Justice*, 3: 262). He further describes the press as “an engine of so admirable a nature for the destruction of despotism” (*Political Justice*, 3: 284) because it aims to reform the unenlightened opinions that

⁵⁵ While Paine, unlike Wollstonecraft and Godwin, rarely invokes the printing press or celebrates it in familiar Enlightenment terms, his narrative of history nevertheless appeals to a similar logic of historical change: “The older they are,” he writes of “the forms and maxims of Governments” in the first part of *Rights of Man*, “the less correspondence can they have with the present state of things. Time, and change of circumstances and opinions, have the same progressive effect in rendering modes of Government obsolete, as they have upon customs and manners” (196).

⁵⁶ Arguing that “Godwin wished to turn conversation itself into a mediating institution, by giving it civic purpose and erecting it into a new customary order” (421), Victoria Myers suggests Godwin sees the press and the jury as important, necessary preludes that prefigure his final anarchical utopia, which is “the final triumphant merging of private judgment and public good” (417); see Myers, “William Godwin and the *Ars Rhetorica*,” *Studies in Romanticism* 41, no. 3 (2002): 415–44.

encourage citizens to submit to the palpable defects of present society. Other reformers express similar assessments. Wollstonecraft, like Godwin, praises the printing press as having “multiplied copies of the production of genius and complications of learning, bringing them within the reach of all ranks of men” (*An Historical and Moral View*, 6: 16). And Mackintosh, for his part, offers perhaps the most imaginatively powerful description of all: “The philosophers of antiquity did not, like ARCHIMEDES, want a spot on which to fix their engines,” he writes, “but they wanted an engine to move the moral world. The press is that engine, which has subjected the powerful to the wise, by governing the opinion of mankind” (59). The printing press, as it is imagined by these writers, ends the aristocratic monopoly on knowledge, enables the widespread dissemination of ideas and the reformation of opinion, and inspires a spirit of enquiry essential to the progression of human knowledge.

The press is thus recognised in these accounts as a radically new intervention into political society, one that ensures the progressive course of history. Because of the printing press, the reformist argument goes, advancements in knowledge are made secure at the same time that errors are permanently dispelled, and thus society can never return to its barbarous past. This position enables Wollstonecraft and Godwin to attack accounts of history that appeal to narratives of cyclical decline. “If at one epocha of civilization,” Wollstonecraft writes in *An Historical and Moral View*,

all the improvements which were made in arts and sciences were suddenly overturned, both in Greece and Rome, we need not inquire, why superficial reasoners have been induced to think, that there is only a certain degree of civilization to which men are capable of attaining, without receding back to a state of barbarism, by the

horrid consequences of anarchy; though it may be necessary to observe, that the causes which produced that event can never have the same effect again:—because a degree of knowledge has been diffused through society by the invention of printing, which no inundation of barbarians can eradicate. (6: 109)

The idea that a civilisation reaches a certain state of prosperity and then collapses under the weight of the corruption and luxury it produces is familiar from mid-century works such as John Brown's *Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times* (1757-58). (Burke did not support this declinist thesis—in fact, *The Annual Register*'s review of Brown's *Estimate*, if Burke wrote it, is far from flattering—but his opponents, extrapolating from his argument about the wisdom of the past, sometimes insinuated he did.⁵⁷) The permanent status the press accords human knowledge, Wollstonecraft and Godwin argue, circumvents the possibility of such decline. "The discovery of printing," Godwin contends,

gave an irrecoverable shock to the empire of superstition and implicit obedience.

From that time the most superficial observation can trace the improvements of art and science which may, without glaring impropriety, be styled incessant. Not to mention essential improvements which were wholly unknown to the ancients, the most important characteristic of modern literature is the extent of surface over which it is diffused, and the number of persons that participate in it. It has struck its roots deep, and there is no probability that it will ever be subverted. It was once the practice of

⁵⁷ For the review of Brown's *Estimate*, see *The Annual Register* (1758): 445-53. Critics agree that the 1758-65 period marked Burke's most sustained involvement with the journal. For an account of Burke's time on *The Annual Register*, see F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998, 2006), 1: 165-79.

moralists to extol past times, and declaim without bound on the degeneracy of mankind. But this fashion is nearly exploded. The true state of the fact is too gross to be mistaken. (*Political Justice*, 4: 213)

This insistence on the press's pivotal role in human development infuses many radical assessments of history, in which the processes of historical development come to mirror the logic that informs Enlightenment accounts of the press.⁵⁸ Increased discussion and examination of ideas (through the spoken or printed word) and the progress of reason over superstition, reformers argue, have demonstrated the folly of the past. Invoking Locke, Godwin argues that "[t]he human mind is a principle of the simplest nature, a mere faculty of sensation or perception. It must have begun from absolute ignorance; it must obtain its improvement by slow degrees; it must pass through various stages of folly and mistake. Such is, and could not but be, the history of mankind" (*Political Justice*, 4: 213-14).⁵⁹ Human

⁵⁸ Although Godwin intimated that, in the future utopian state he anticipates, all public institutions (the press included) will dissolve, his argument assumes that individual private judgment will have evolved to such a state that it will have internalised the functions of those institutions: "If juries might at length cease to decide and be contented to invite [i.e., to invite offenders to forsake their errors through rational argument], if force might gradually be withdrawn and reason trusted alone, shall we not one day find that juries themselves and every other species of public institution, may be laid aside as unnecessary?" (*Political Justice*, 3: 310). The press is ultimately written out of history in this narrative, in other words, but its function is internalised by the individual rather than abandoned.

⁵⁹ In the same passage, it should be noted, Godwin also shows an awareness of the complex historicity of human achievements: "the doctrine of necessity teaches us that all things in the universe are connected together. Nothing could have happened otherwise than it has happened. Do we congratulate ourselves upon the rising genius of freedom? Do we view with pride the improvements of mankind, and contrast with wonder, man in the state in which he once was, naked, ignorant and brutal, with man as we now sometimes behold him, enriched with boundless stores of science, and penetrated with sentiments of the purest philanthropy? These things could not have existed in their present form without having been prepared by all the preceding events. Every thing the most seemingly insignificant, the most loathsome, or the most retrograde, was indissolubly bound to all that we most admire in the prospect before us" (4: 213). Recognitions of historical continuity, however, are rare in radical historical discourse in the early 1790s, and even in this passage, Godwin's language ("loathsome," "retrograde") suggests an inability to overcome his sense of the past's alterity.

society, like the forces of opinion that support it, must proceed through “various stages of folly and mistake” in its progress toward perfection; this is, Godwin contends, the way history operates. Seen from this perspective, the Burkean argument about the wisdom of the ages becomes, for many reformist commentators, a seductive reformulation of an old, oppressive theme. “[I]f there is any thing like argument, or first principles, in your wild declamation,” Wollstonecraft writes of Burke’s *Reflections*, “behold the result:—that we are to reverence the rust of antiquity, and term the unnatural customs, which ignorance and mistaken self-interest have consolidated, the sage fruit of experience” (*The Rights of Men*, 38). In the early 1790s, the printing press, along with the related notions of discussion and conversation, is seen by reformist writers to model historical development more accurately than the antiquated and often deleterious notion of inheritance, which “entail[s] to the latest posterity” (Godwin, *Political Justice*, 4: 120) the errors and follies of past generations.

II

When Burke wrote his *Reflections*, he assumed a familiarity with the strategies for reading history that the revolutionaries and their British supporters adopted. In doing so, he was not remarkably prescient (or arrogant); rather, he viewed reformers, as Blakemore suggests, as merely replicating the rejected ideas of the past. This position also allows us to think of him not simply as responding to British radical thought of the 1790s in reactionary terms but, more broadly, as continuing to express a historical view that he maintained throughout his long career—one that resisted what he considered the worst tendencies of Enlightenment thought. Burke, of course, sometimes misunderstood and misrepresented his opponents’ views, as his enemies did his, but what is perhaps most significant about the

confrontational environment of the early 1790s is the way it forced him rigorously to re-articulate his historical vision.

Much like his opponents, Burke offers an interpretative framework for reading history “properly,” although it is one shaped by very different narratives and terms. In early works such as *A Vindication of Natural Society* and *An Abridgement of the English History*, or late ones such as the *Reflections*, he opposes what he sees as the universalising, ahistorical tendencies of Enlightenment thought with a historicism that emphasises continuity, accretion, and local experience. Such an approach allows him to engage the “otherness” of the past in a more sympathetic manner (at the same time, however, as it renders him vulnerable to charges of presentism). His ideas about history are, to a greater degree than his opponents’, indebted to the Scottish Enlightenment, although he too differs from his Scottish contemporaries on significant issues, such as the relationship between commerce and manners. Ultimately, in his discourse, inheritance—the principle that reconciles the twin historical necessities of change and continuity—underwrites the operations of historical development.

Burke provides no narrative of “origin” to match that of his opponents, no account of the probable beginnings of society such as those expressed by Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and Paine. His indifference to the question of origins results not from moral callousness but from his sense that there is little utility in such a suppositional exercise. Although he recognises that a society’s founding may have been violent or unjust, his primary interest lies with the efficacy of its present organisation. He can concede the issue of violent or unjust origin, in fact, because, for him, it does not provide the rational grounds for overthrowing a functioning, established order in the present. Burke makes this point in a letter he wrote

around the time he began composing the *Reflections*:

It is not calling the landed estates, possessed by old *prescriptive rights*, “the accumulations of ignorance and superstition”, that can support me in shaking that grand title, which supersedes all other title, and which all my studies of general jurisprudence have taught me to consider as one principal cause of the formation of states; I mean the ascertaining and securing of *prescription*. [...] It is possible that many estates about you were originally obtained by arms, that is, by violence, a thing almost as bad as superstition, and not much short of ignorance: but it is *old violence*; and that which might be wrong in the beginning, is consecrated by time, and becomes lawful.⁶⁰

The different components that make up a given society—its institutions, laws, and manners—are shaped and determined historically according to “prescription,” a term which, in its eighteenth-century context, refers to “[r]ules produced and authorised by long custom” or “custom continued till it has the force of law.”⁶¹ “Prescription” is thus, by definition, a historical concept. Burke does not justify or approve of “*old violence*,” but he believes it would be folly to use it as a pretext for re-ordering society in the present, since existing institutions and laws develop out of “long custom” that emerges subsequent to and independent of the original violence.

Burke had countered the argument from original violence, along with many of its

⁶⁰ Letter to Captain Thomas Mercer, 26 February 1790, in *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, ed. Thomas W. Copeland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958-78), 6: 95. References to Burke’s correspondence are to this collected edition.

⁶¹ Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (London: Printed for J. Knapton; C. Hitch and L. Hawes; A. Millar; R. and J. Dodsley; and M. and T. Longman, 1756), 2: n.p.

underlying assumptions, in his first publication, *A Vindication of Natural Society* (1756; 1757).⁶² The *Vindication* satirises the historical methods of Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke and the Deists. The noble author of the letter, Burke's Bolingbroke-like *persona*, offers a familiar Voltairian reading of history-as-violence:

The first Accounts we have of Mankind are but so many Accounts of their Butcheries. All Empires have been cemented in Blood; and in those early Periods when the Race of Mankind began first to form themselves into Parties and Combinations, the first Effect of the Combination, and indeed the End for which it seems purposely formed, and best calculated, is their mutual Destruction. All antient History is dark and uncertain. One thing however is clear. There were Conquerors, and Conquests, in those Days; and consequently, all that Devastation, by which they are formed, and all that Oppression by which they are maintained. (1: 142)

Burke's author goes on to document the atrocities of various governments throughout human history, in war after war, and to dismiss them all as "Tyrannies" (1: 166). He keeps a running death-toll throughout, which reaches "500 millions" or "upwards of seventy times the Number of Souls this Day on the Globe" (1: 151). This figure has been rendered suspect over the course of the narrative, however, as many of the noble author's "facts" turn out to be

⁶² The *Vindication* has not attracted the kind of scholarly attention it deserves; see Frank N. Pagano, ed., Introduction to *A Vindication of Natural Society* (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1982), xi-xxiii, and "Burke's View of the Evils of Political Theory: Or, *A Vindication of Natural Society*," *Polity* 17, no. 3 (1985): 446-62; Thomas William Sheehy, "Reason's Tragic Conflict with Tradition: The Aesthetic Dimension of Edmund Burke's Political Philosophy," PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 1998; Domokos Hajdo, "On *A Vindication of Natural Society*: Edmund Burke's Critique of Modern Political Rationalism," PhD diss., University of Maryland College Park, 1998; and Quentin P. Taylor, "On Edmund Burke's *A Vindication of Natural Society*," *Modern Age* 43, no. 3 (2001): 222-35. For earlier studies, see Clara I. Gandy and Peter J. Stanlis, *Edmund Burke: A Bibliography of Secondary Studies to 1982* (New York and London: Garland, 1983), entries 63, 455, 530, 746, and 1000.

largely guesswork, as he himself repeatedly calls attention to by mentioning his “want of Books” and his practice of “estimat[ing]” (1: 146). Indeed, one of the more ironic aspects of the *Vindication* is that it does little by way of vindicating “natural society”—a concept barely touched upon in the work—and turns out to be rather an assault on what the noble writer calls “*Political*” or “artificial” society (1: 139).⁶³

Burke’s critique of Bolingbroke’s historical methods in the *Vindication*, as Quentin P. Taylor points out, centres not just on the noble lord’s suspect “facts” but, more importantly, on his simplistic natural / artificial binary and his short-sighted historical vision.⁶⁴ He condemns all existing political arrangements as “artificial” or contrary to “nature,” but in the process of doing so, he (unwittingly) highlights a logical problem with his own argument: “The great Error of our Nature,” the Bolingbroke figure writes, “is, not to know where to stop, not to be satisfied with any reasonable acquirement” (1: 138-39). The noble author argues man should have stopped at the “natural” state of society, in other words, and yet his own definition of human nature acknowledges an impulse toward the “artificial.” Burke also takes pains to show that the noble writer’s view of history is obsessively myopic and his reading highly selective. While he meticulously tabulates the costs of “artificial” society, “he exhibit[s] a total lack of appreciation for the palpable *benefits*, *advances*, and *achievements* which have paralleled the crimes of organized peoples. This is perhaps the most spurious aspect of the *Vindication*’s abridged history: it is one-sided in the extreme, for it wholly fails

⁶³ Pagano, “Burke’s View of the Evils of Political Theory,” 451.

⁶⁴ See Quentin P. Taylor, 223-25 and 230.

to consider the palpable *advantages* of civilization.”⁶⁵

That Burke views the radical position in the early 1790s as a regurgitation of the methods he satirised in the *Vindication* is evident from some of his major works of the early 1790s. In *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* (1791), he collapses the problematic distinction between “natural” and “artificial,” upon which he believes much of the faulty historicism of Bolingbroke and his “free-thinking” ilk is founded, with one oft-quoted maxim: “Art is man’s nature.”⁶⁶ “The state of civil society,” he continues, “is a state of nature. [...] For man [...] is never perfectly in his natural state, but when he is placed where reason may be best cultivated, and most predominates” (3: 86). Similarly, the *Reflections* provides evidence to suggest Burke connected the traditions of radical Dissent, particularly Deism, with the French Enlightenment.⁶⁷ Discussing the French Enlightenment-influenced “philosophic” “cabal” whom he accuses of orchestrating the Revolution, Burke writes,

I admit that we too have had writers of that description, who made some noise in their day. At present they repose in lasting oblivion. Who, born within the last forty years, has read one word of [Anthony] Collins, and [John] Toland, and [Matthew] Tindal, and [Thomas] Chubb, and [Thomas] Morgan, and that whole race who called themselves Freethinkers? Who now reads Bolingbroke? Who ever read him through? Ask the booksellers of London what is become of all these lights of the world. (8:

⁶⁵ Quentin P. Taylor, 225.

⁶⁶ Burke, *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1861-72), 3: 86. References are to this edition.

⁶⁷ On this point, see Susan Manly, “Burke, Toland, Toleration: The Politics of Prejudice, Speculation, and Naturalization,” in *Edmund Burke’s Reflections*, ed. John Whale, 145-67.

140)

This alignment of the French revolutionaries (and, implicitly, their British supporters) with the Deists of old is clearly yet another manifestation of Burke's strategy of tracing reformist thought back to discredited traditions and movements. While the strategy is reductive, it nevertheless indicates his harsh judgment of "enlightened" historical methods. Some of these criticisms are re-stated in the *Reflections*. In the passage on the abuses and misuses of history (quoted in full at the beginning of this chapter [11-12]), for instance, he charges the French confiscators and their radical supporters with reading history with the same kind of myopic selectivity as the *Vindication*'s noble author. They ransack "the histories of former ages" with "a malignant and profligate industry" (8: 188), he writes, in order to justify a total upheaval of the *ancien régime*; on the question of advantages derived from the old order they rob and destroy, however, they are entirely silent.

Burke's historical outlook has its roots in the literary activities he engaged in early in his career.⁶⁸ In addition to the *Vindication*, he edited *The Annual Register* (1758-65), which involved writing reviews of works (including histories) and fairly long narrative accounts of the year's events; he completed about a third of *An Abridgement of the English History* (c.1757-60), which covers the period from 57 BC to 1215 AD; and, judging from the

⁶⁸ Whereas Burke pursued historical works early in his life, three of the five reformers examined in this chapter did so later in their lives. Mackintosh went on to write a *History of England* (1830-32) and an unfinished *History of the Revolution in England in 1688* (1834). Wollstonecraft wrote *An Historical and Moral View* (1794), which was intended to be the first volume in a longer history of the French Revolution. Although Godwin studied history throughout his life (St. Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys*, 53) and wrote reviews for the *New Annual Register* prior to 1789, he pursued his larger historical projects—including a *Life of Geoffrey Chaucer* (1803), a *History of England* (1806) for young readers, a *History of Rome* (1809), a *History of Greece* (1821), and a *History of the Commonwealth of England* (1824-28)—in the nineteenth century.

Fragment: An Essay Towards an History of the Laws of England (c.1757), he also contemplated writing a history of English law. His early studies convinced him of the complexity of history and fostered in him a keen interest in the intricate ways a society's institutions, laws, customs, and manners develop over time. The "theory of history" he developed in these years, as F. P. Lock observes, is driven by a "particularizing tendency" that seeks "to explain events as the products of unique sets of causes."⁶⁹ This "particularizing tendency" encourages him to trace the diverse processes of cultural accretion. In his *Fragment*, for instance, he refuses any simplistic account that suggests English law is static and wholly indigenous: "the present system of our Laws, like our language and our learning, is a very mixed and heterogeneous mass; in some respects our own; in more borrowed from the policy of foreign nations; and compounded, altered, and variously modified, according to the various necessities, which the manners, the religion, and the commerce of the people, have at different times imposed" (1: 325). He makes a similar argument about the "ancient constitution" in his *Abridgement of the English History*.⁷⁰ A review of Saxon laws and institutions, he argues, is "sufficient to shew of what a visionary nature those systems are,

⁶⁹ Lock, 1: 155.

⁷⁰ The *Abridgement*, like Burke's other early historical works discussed in this paragraph, has received scant scholarly attention; see John C. Weston, "Edmund Burke's View of History," *Review of Politics* 23, no. 2 (1961): 203-29; Pocock, "Burke and the Ancient Constitution"; Jeremy Black, "Edmund Burke: History, Politics and Polemics," *History Today* 37, no. 12 (1987): 42-47; R. J. Smith, 85-92; T. O. McLoughlin, "Edmund Burke's *Abridgement of English History*," *Eighteenth-Century Ireland* 5 (1990): 45-59; Conniff, *The Useful Cobbler*, 62-63; and Lock, 1: 125-64.

For other studies that consider Burke's historical outlook more generally, see Alfred Cobban, *Edmund Burke and the Revolt against the Eighteenth Century: A Study of the Political and Social Thinking of Burke, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey*, 2nd edition (1929; London: George Allen and Unwin, 1960), chapter 3; Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (1953; repr., Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1965), chapter 6; and Joseph Baldacchino, Jr., "The Value-Centred Historicism of Edmund Burke," *Modern Age* 27, no. 2 (1983): 139-45.

which would settle the ancient Constitution in the most remote times exactly in the same form, in which we enjoy it at this day; not considering that such mighty changes in manners, during so many ages, always must produce considerable change in laws, and in the forms as well as the powers of all governments” (1: 443). Burke’s historicism as expressed in these passages is sensitive to the complex, accumulative nature of historical development. The language of *concordia discors* enables him to reconcile the past’s “otherness” with the familiar, prosperous present: each strange twist and turn of history contributes to the greater, harmonious whole that is late eighteenth-century British society.

This sense of the accumulative nature of historical development infuses many of Burke’s later writings, including the *Reflections*, where he makes radical “contempt [...] of all ancient institutions” and adherence to “a sense of present convenience” or “inclination” (8: 76) central to his attack. The French Revolutionaries and their British supporters, he argues, lack a sufficiently historical perspective:

Europe undoubtedly, taken in a mass, was in a flourishing condition the day on which your Revolution was compleated. How much of that prosperous state was owing to the spirit of our old manners and opinions is not easy to say; but as such causes cannot be indifferent in their operation, we must presume, that, on the whole, their operation was beneficial.

We are but too apt to consider things in the state in which we find them, without sufficiently adverting to the causes by which they have been produced, and possibly may be upheld. (8: 129)

Burke argues here that the current socio-political order is, in effect, a function of its past.

Present manners, institutions, and laws are intimately bound up with what came before; while they develop and change over time, the indebtedness of their current state to their ancient foundations is uncertain. Historical development, as it is described here, is a complex process of accretion, of generation after generation building upon and adding to the nation's corporate inheritance. In this sense, Burke's understanding of history does not simply accommodate change but is, in fact, built around a recognition of its inevitability and, indeed, its necessity. "A state without the means of some change," he writes, "is without the means of its conservation. Without such means it might even risque the loss of that part of the constitution which it wished the most religiously to preserve" (8: 72). Burke's response to the revolution in France is not a reaction to the idea of change *per se* but rather to a theory of change that neglects or denies what he sees as the deeply interconnected, accretionary nature of human civilisation. As Pocock argues of the *Reflections* in particular, Burke consistently makes "the claim that human beings acting in politics always start from within a historically determined context, and that it is morally as well as practically important to remember that they are not absolutely free to wipe away this context and reconstruct human society as they wish."⁷¹ This insistence upon the "historically determined" nature of the present constitutes the heart of Burke's argument against the revolutionary maxim (best expressed by Paine in the first part of *Rights of Man*) that "[e]very age and generation must be as free to act for itself, *in all cases*, as the ages and generations which preceded it" (91-92).

Burke's attention to "manners and opinions," in the longer passage just quoted, reflects his familiarity with and, to some degree, his commitment to the historical outlook of

⁷¹ Pocock, Introduction to the *Reflections*, vii; see also xlvi.

leading figures of the Scottish Enlightenment. As Mark Phillips argues, “*manners* was immediately recognizable as the brief signature of the new concern with the social that set the interests of this period apart from those of its classical and Renaissance predecessors.”⁷² In a historical context, “manners” signalled the deepening interest in the culture, beliefs, and customs of past societies evident in the ways eighteenth-century historians expand their narratives to accommodate elements of the “social.” Writers such as Hume and Adam Smith thus measure progress in terms of the development of manners—typically, from a warrior culture of fierceness, rapine, and violence to a commercial culture of politeness, prosperity, and, indeed, feminisation. Burke’s use of the term “manners” in similar contexts reflects his larger commitment to aspects of Scottish historiographical thought.

A wealth of evidence confirms Burke’s familiarity with Scottish Enlightenment writers.⁷³ A survey of Thomas W. Copeland’s *Correspondence of Edmund Burke* demonstrates his friendship with Robertson and Smith, his knowledge of their works, and his approval of their attention to manners.⁷⁴ The correspondence also testifies to his life-long

⁷² Phillips, 147.

⁷³ Burke scholarship over the last 25 years has begun to examine this question seriously; see Pocock, “The Political Economy of Burke’s Analysis of the French Revolution,” and his Introduction to the *Reflections*; George McElroy, “Edmund Burke and the Scottish Enlightenment,” *Man and Nature* 11 (1992): 171-85; Conniff, *The Useful Cobbler*, chapter 3; Phillips, chapter 9; and Luke Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland: Aesthetics, Politics, and the Colonial Sublime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), chapter 7.

⁷⁴ Of Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Burke writes, “I own I am particularly pleased with those easy and happy illustrations from common Life and manners in which your works abounds more than any other that I know by far” (Letter to Adam Smith, 10 September 1759, 1: 130; for listings of the eight letters the two men exchanged, see 10: 130). Similarly, in his comments on Robertson’s *History of America* (1777), he expresses his sympathy with Robertson’s historical view generally and the Scottish thesis in particular: “The part which I read with the greatest pleasure is the discussion on the Manners and character of the Inhabitants of that new World. I have always thought with you, that we possess at this time very great advantages towards the knowledge [*sic*] of human Nature. We need no longer go to History to trace it in all its stages and periods. [...] now the Great Map of Mankind is

interest in history and historiographical methods, particularly in relation to questions of manners, customs, and cultural practices.⁷⁵ “An History of the Stage,” he writes in a letter to Edmond Malone composed soon after the publication of the *Reflections*, praising his new edition of the *Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare* (1790),

is no trivial thing to those who wish to study Human nature in all Shapes and positions. It is of all things the most instructive, to see, not only the reflection of manners and Characters at several periods, but the modes of making this reflection, and the manner of adapting it, at those periods, to the Taste and disposition of mankind. The Stage indeed may be considerd [*sic*] as the Republick of active Literature; and its History as the History of that State. The great events of political History when not combined with the same helps towards the Study of the manners and Characters of men, must be a study of an inferiour nature.⁷⁶

To study the political at the expense of the social, he argues, is to write bad history; only by attending to “the manners and Characters” of a people can the historian accurately capture a

unrolld [*sic*] at once; and there is no state or Gradation of barbarism, and no mode of refinement which we have not at the same instant under our View” (Letter to William Robertson, 9 June 1777, 3: 350-51; for listings of the five letters the two men exchanged, see 10: 171). Favourable reviews of works such as Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Robertson’s *History of Scotland* (1759), and Hume’s *History of England* (1754-62) also appeared in *The Annual Register* during Burke’s editorship (1758-65), which critics generally agree are probably his; see *The Annual Register* for the years 1758 (484-89 and 489-94) and 1761 (301-05), respectively.

⁷⁵ Burke had a particular interest in Irish history, for example. He aided and encouraged men such as John Curry, Thomas Leland, and Charles Vallancey in their endeavours to write more balanced accounts of the history of Ireland. For Burke’s letters to these correspondents, see 10: 118, 149, and 185-86, respectively.

⁷⁶ Letter to Edmond Malone, c. 29 November 1790, 6: 181.

nation's past.⁷⁷

British "manners" and "civilization," Burke insists, are intimately linked, and they depend upon the "two principles"—"the spirit of a gentleman, and the spirit of religion"—that have shaped them. As he argues in the *Reflections*,

Nothing is more certain, than that our manners, our civilization, and all the good things which are connected with manners, and with civilization, have, in this European world of ours, depended for ages upon two principles; and were indeed the result of both combined; I mean the spirit of a gentleman, and the spirit of religion. The nobility and the clergy, the one by profession, and the other by patronage, kept learning in existence, even in the midst of arms and confusions, and whilst governments were rather in their causes than formed. (8: 129-30)

Manners, customs, religion, and nobility: Burke consistently asserts that these ideas provide the historical foundations of European society. Only an adherence to these foundations, he believes, can ensure the preservation of European civilisation. He finds the French Revolution so menacing because he sees it as threatening to destroy this system of manners, the product of hundreds of years of historical experience. The Revolution, he argues, marks "the most important of all revolutions[,] [...] I mean a revolution in sentiments, manners, and

⁷⁷ Burke's *Abridgement*, in spite of the fact that much of the narrative is organised around the succession of kings, devotes considerable attention to the progress and development of English manners, customs, and social institutions. In Book 2, chapter 1, for instance, he dedicates much of the narrative to examining the organisation and the influence of the Druids (1: 349-59), arguing that they played a crucial role in civilising an "otherwise ungovernable people" (1: 350). Nineteenth-century commentators such as Lord Acton (1858) hailed the *Abridgement* as a balanced, sympathetic account of the Middle Ages because of its attention to such details; see John Emerich Edward Dalberg Acton (Lord Acton), *Essays on Church and State*, ed. Douglas Woodruff (London: Hollis and Carter, 1952), 455; Black, 42-43; McLoughlin, 45; and Lock, 1: 164.

moral opinions” (8: 131). Burke’s defence of chivalry (“the spirit of a gentleman”) is, then, not simply a nostalgic lament for an antiquated order but rather, as Pocock argues, a passionate (if histrionic) plea for the recognition of the complex historicity of the current order.⁷⁸ He fears the consequences of an attack on principles supportive of traditional European manners because, for him, they are inseparable from all the benefits of European order.

Burke’s insistence that ancient manners, customs, and opinions are connected to the prosperous, flourishing state of eighteenth-century Britain’s commercial order, as Pocock notes, marks a significant departure from the Scottish historians. The central issue here is the role of commerce in history. Scottish historians such as Hume, Pocock argues, view the classical republican past as war-like and therefore “economically underdeveloped”; their societies were organised around slaves and militarisation, and these conditions retarded any “refinement” of manners.⁷⁹ The advent of commerce, for many Scottish historians, provides the necessary preconditions for the refinement of manners and the movement away from the warrior ethic of civic humanism toward the polite, sociable, commercial ethic of modernity. For Burke, however, this narrative inverts the nature of the relationship between commerce and manners. In passages such as the (in)famous apostrophe to Marie-Antoinette in the *Reflections* (8: 126-27), Pocock argues, “Burke is asserting that commerce is dependent upon manners, and not the other way round [...]. He insists that commerce can flourish only under the protection of manners, and that manners require the pre-eminence of religion and

⁷⁸ Pocock, Introduction to the *Reflections*, xxxii-xxxv.

⁷⁹ Pocock, “The Political Economy of Burke’s Analysis of the French Revolution,” 195-96.

nobility, the natural protectors of society. To overthrow religion and nobility, therefore, is to destroy the possibility of commerce itself.”⁸⁰ Burke was not an enemy of commerce, nor did he fail to recognise its historical importance or its reciprocal relationship with manners. Far from it.⁸¹ He insists rather that the manners fostered by “the spirit of religion” and “the spirit of a gentleman” made commerce possible; as the historical foundations of modern Europe, these two principles ought to be protected and preserved instead of dismissed as the antiquated, redundant offspring of superstition and ignorance.

Burke’s understanding of historical progress, as some scholars argue, is also less sanguine than that of his Scottish Enlightenment contemporaries.⁸² As a defender of the Whig commercial order, he, like the Scottish historians, acknowledges the material and cultural advances of the modern world. But in the wake of the French Revolution and standing on what he imagines is the brink of the destruction of the old European order, Burke insists on the fragility of human civilisation and the tenuousness of progress. “[C]ommerce, and trade, and manufacture,” he writes in the *Reflections*, “certainly grew under the same shade in which learning flourished. They too may decay with their natural protecting principles [i.e., the spirit of nobility and religion]” (8: 130-31). The possibility of cultural decay or decline Burke articulates here is significant, for one of his recurring discursive strategies throughout

⁸⁰ Pocock, “The Political Economy of Burke’s Analysis of the French Revolution,” 199. See also his Introduction to the *Reflections*, xxxii-xxxiii

⁸¹ C. B. Macpherson’s *Burke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980) is the classic study of Burke’s economic views. Noting a tension between Burke, the reformer (in his writings on America, Ireland, India, and parliamentary reform), and Burke, the defender of hierarchical order (in his writings on France), Macpherson seeks “a resolution of this central problem of coherence” through Burke’s views on political economy (5); see especially chapter 5.

⁸² See John C. Weston; Conniff, *The Useful Cobbler*, chapter 3; and Gibbons, chapter 7.

the *Reflections* is to figure the revolutionaries' more violent acts in terms of a descent into primal savagery. Thus, for instance, he picks up on Price's supposed celebration of the events of 6 October 1789 (in which the French King is taken from Versailles and marched triumphantly to Paris) and, reading them through a gothic lens, re-imagines Price's revolutionary triumphers as savage North American natives.⁸³ "It was," Burke writes, "a spectacle more resembling a procession of American savages, entering into Onondaga, after some of their murders called victories, and leading into hovels hung round with scalps, their captives, overpowered with the scoffs and buffets of women as ferocious as themselves, much more than it resembled the triumphal pomp of a civilized martial nation" (8: 117). The storming of the Queen's bedroom and the attack on her person is described in terms that similarly suggest the decay of polite manners and a return to savagery. The men who rush into her chamber are represented as a "band of cruel ruffians and assassins, reeking with [the slain sentinel's] blood" while the triumphant procession to Paris advances "amidst the horrid yells, and shrilling screams, and frantic dances, and infamous contumelies, and all the unutterable abominations of the furies of hell, in the abused shape of the vilest of women" (8: 121-22).

⁸³ At the time, there was some debate about whether Price, in the *Discourse*'s celebratory passage about the French King being "led in triumph" (49), was referring to the events of 14 July 1789, or of 6 October 1789. Wollstonecraft and Price insisted he had meant the former; see Wollstonecraft, *The Rights of Men*, 57, note 2, and Richard Price, the Preface to *A Discourse on the Love of our Country, Delivered on Nov. 4, 1789, at the Meeting-House in the Old Jewry, to the Society for Commemorating the Revolution in Great Britain. With an Appendix, Containing the Report of the Committee of the Society: An Account of the Population of France: and the Declaration of the Rights by the National Assembly of France*, 4th edition (London: Printed by George Stafford for T. Cadell, 1790), v-viii. Blakemore examines this problem in his essay, "Misrepresenting the Text," drawing attention to the misrepresentations Price must make in order for this reading to square with the facts. For an analysis of Burke's use of gothic conventions, see De Bruyn, "Edmund Burke's Gothic Romance: The Portrayal of Warren Hastings in Burke's Writings and Speeches on India," *Criticism* 29, no. 4 (1987): 415-38.

Luke Gibbons sees the possibility of decay as a recurrent feature of Burke's writing that expresses "an abiding fear that the passage from lower to higher forms of society, enshrined in the Scottish Enlightenment's four stages theory of social development, may not be at all the inevitable product of civilization. [...] Burke was acutely aware of the possibility of 'regression', in which higher stages merged with archaic, 'primitive' forms of savagery."⁸⁴ Through his descriptions of the men and women who attack Versailles, Burke depicts this strange process of "merging" as the unleashing of the savage manners of earlier "stages" of civilisation onto the polite, Christian, commercial order of modern Europe. His fear of cultural decay, it is important to note, is distinct from John Brown's thesis of cultural decline, which revolves around a perceived threat to the civic humanist ethic from the increasing "luxury" and "effeminacy" of the modern world.⁸⁵ Civilisation is, for Burke, vulnerable to decay but is not necessarily destined to decline.

To make a "choice of inheritance" (8: 84), as he puts it in the *Reflections*, is the best defence of the historically accumulated advantages of European civilisation. To read history "properly," one must likewise figure the past, imaginatively, as an inheritance. Burke derives this affirmation of inheritance, I conclude, from his reading of English history. For him, the principle of inheritance is the product of England's unique historical experience; emerging over a long period of time, it has proven to be a source of order and stability in England and in Europe more generally. The propensity to view English civilisation in the light of an

⁸⁴ Gibbons, 203.

⁸⁵ See John Brown, *An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times*, 6th edition (London: Printed for L. Davis and C. Reymers, 1757-58).

inheritance is validated, Burke claims, by the fact that it is the defining narrative of English history itself.⁸⁶

A recurring feature of the *Abridgement of the English History* is an attention to the customs that have governed the transmission of kingship and property. Burke stresses that England was subject to perpetual upheaval as long as it lacked a principle of succession for the throne and for the transmission of property akin to the hereditary law of primogeniture.⁸⁷ The Romans failed to transmit their culture and system of laws because “[t]he lands granted to the [Roman] soldiers did not pass to their posterity [...]. From this defect the colonies were continually falling to decay” (1: 384). The Saxon principle for the transmission of property, gavelkind, Burke argues, was an improvement over its Roman predecessor (which he views as a lack of policy altogether), but it had disastrous effects. According to the custom of gavelkind, the sons (or, if there were none, the daughters) of an English nobleman inherited their father’s estate in equal portions. This division of property weakened the English nobility (1: 427) and was, Burke argues, “prejudicial” to the stability of the nation in general: “as government was annexed to a certain possession in land, this possession, which was

⁸⁶ Pocock touches upon this point in “Burke and the Ancient Constitution,” an essay which explores Burke’s relationship to the seventeenth-century school of common-law thought and which establishes “that he had achieved a genuine historical insight into the character of English political thinking. He says, quite explicitly, that it is the greatest accomplishment of our thought to have based our claim to liberty on an idea drawn from the law of real property; and historical inquiry seems to confirm that it was the influence of that law on political thought which had given rise to the very English way of thinking and behaving which Burke accurately describes, and with which he identifies himself” (212). Pocock examines, then, the genealogy and historicity of Burke’s claims. By contrast, I am more interested in the consequences of the identification between English liberties and property for Burke’s view of historical development and the role it plays in the contesting historical discourses of the 1790s.

⁸⁷ Burke’s practice of accessing the strengths and weaknesses of past customs and institutions by reference to the standards of the present renders him vulnerable, as some critics note, to charges of writing “Whiggish” history; see McLoughlin, 57-58, and Phillips, 221-22.

continually changing, kept the government in a very fluctuating state; so that their civil polity had in it an essential evil, which contributed to the sickly condition, in which the Anglo-Saxon state always remained, as well as to its final dissolution” (1: 453). From the defeat of the Saxons by the Normans under William the Conqueror until Magna Charta (1066-1215), the instability of property and succession “kept [the nation] continually fluctuating between freedom and servitude” (1: 551). The important change comes with Magna Charta and its “correct[ion]” of the grosser abuses of the feudal system through the formal recognition of England’s crown, landed estates, and liberties as hereditary:

the Preamble to the Great Charter [...] stipulated that the barons shall *hold* the liberties there granted *to them and their heirs*; from the *king and his heirs*: which shews that the doctrine of an unalienable tenure [i.e., a perpetual tenure granted by the superior and his heirs to the holder and his heirs] was always uppermost in their minds. Their idea even of liberty was not (if I may use the expression) perfectly free; and they did not claim to possess their privileges upon any natural principle or independent bottom, but, just as they held their lands, from the king. This is worthy of observation. (1: 544-45)

Magna Charta consolidates, for Burke, the analogous relationship between the English crown, property, and liberty, from that point rendered hereditary and unalienable. The foundation for the development of Britain’s stable order, Burke argues thirty years before he wrote the *Reflections*, is the principle of inheritance, which is without reference to any prior “natural principle or independent bottom,” such as natural rights established by way of reason.

The understanding of English history Burke outlines in the *Abridgement* establishes the context for his comments in the *Reflections*, where he again argues that historical experience confirms the central place of inheritance in England's development. His assessment of Magna Charta as a watershed moment in this regard has certainly not changed:

You will observe, that from Magna Charta to the Declaration of Right, it has been the uniform policy of our constitution to claim and assert our liberties, as an *entailed inheritance* derived to us from our forefathers, and to be transmitted to our posterity; as an estate specially belonging to the people of this kingdom without any reference whatever to any other more general or prior right. By this means our constitution preserves an unity in so great a diversity of its parts. We have an inheritable crown; an inheritable peerage; and an house of commons and a people inheriting privileges, franchises, and liberties, from a long line of ancestors. (8: 83)

From 1215 to 1688, he asserts, Englishmen have claimed their liberties, like their properties, as “an *entailed inheritance*”; “the stationary policy of this kingdom,” from Magna Charta to the Revolution to the present, lies “in considering their [i.e., the English people's] most sacred rights and franchises as an *inheritance*” (8: 82). Over the course of England's history, he argues here as in the *Abridgement*, no other principle has done more to ensure the peaceful succession to the crown or the orderly transmission of property (8: 75).

The fact that the English have long understood their crown, their properties, and their liberties in the light of an inheritance suggests, for Burke, that they have chosen to view England's historical development more generally as a process informed by the principle of

inheritance.⁸⁸ “The inheritable principle,” he argues, “is the spirit of our constitution, not only in its settled course, but in all its revolutions” (8: 73). It has provided for continuity amidst constant change, for preservation amidst progressive improvement:

the idea of inheritance furnishes a sure principle of conservation, and a sure principle of transmission; without at all excluding a principle of improvement. It leaves acquisition free; but it secures what it acquires. Whatever advantages are obtained by a state proceeding on these maxims, are locked fast as in a sort of family settlement; grasped as in a kind of mortmain for ever. By a constitutional policy, working after the pattern of nature, we receive, we hold, we transmit our government and our privileges, in the same manner in which we enjoy and transmit our property and our lives. (8: 83-84)

Burke argues, then, not just that English history testifies to the long-standing policy of securing the crown, landed estates, and liberties by reference to the notion of inheritance, but also that the English have long chosen to view the very nature of England’s historical development—the ways in which the country has changed and grown—as unfolding in a manner that mirrors the logic of inheritance. Individuals and even generations die; inheritance, which acknowledges the necessity of death and change, furnishes a principle that ensures at once stable growth and development over an indefinite period of time.

In Burke’s conception of history, inheritance supplies the defining principle of

⁸⁸ Yoon Sun Lee makes a similar point: “[w]ith the phrase, ‘choice of inheritance,’ [Burke] comes close to suggesting that England is in the ironic condition of having chosen its own limiting ideology, in the weaker sense of the word ‘ideology’ as a constellation of ideas and beliefs or a political culture” (56); see Lee, *Nationalism and Irony: Burke, Scott, Carlyle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), chapter 2.

historical change in the English and the broader European context. He rejects the reformist narrative, in which the errors of the past are successively discovered and destroyed, because it denigrates the achievements of the past and neglects to provide the means of order and stability—an accommodation between the twin historical necessities of change and continuity. “[T]he collected wisdom of mankind” (*Appeal*, 3: 112), the corporate inheritance of a society, is the carefully cultivated product of its long history; it is preserved, improved, and bequeathed through an adherence to the principle of inheritance. While he acknowledges the positive effects of print culture (the general diffusion of knowledge, for instance) and is aware of the violence and errors of the past, Burke remains nervous about the implications of a theory of historical development founded upon the reformist narrative. He fears what he perceives as the Enlightenment’s ahistorical outlook: a hostile disposition toward the past and a faith in present reason he feels it encourages at the expense of that past. To be considered valuable, opinion, for Burke, requires the authority of historical experience, which explains why, for instance, he scoffs in the *Reflections* at what he sees as Price’s desire to “propagat[e] [...] any opinions” (8: 63) and, in the *Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace* (1795; 1812), at the instability and ephemerality of the title and the views expressed in Lord Auckland’s *Some Remarks on the Apparent Circumstances of the War in the Fourth Week of October 1795* (9: 45-49). The press, certainly in the short term, he finds vulnerable to abuse; it may serve as a means of diffusing the temporary fashions and erroneous opinions of the misguided to a massive reading public that (Burke fears) is incapable of discriminating “between the sense and nonsense of mankind, [and that] know[s] nothing of the former

existence and the ancient refutation of the same follies” (*Appeal*, 3: 112).⁸⁹ Burke is no “ancient” in this new “battle of the books.” His position is, in fact, deeply historical: he doubts mankind’s ability to reason adequately without reference to history (a subject which few radicals, he often insinuates, know as well as they ought), and he is especially suspicious of opinions that contradict historical experience (not just the *status quo*). As a model for historical change, the narrative of the printing press rejects the experience of history for the promise of present reason. Burke sees this position as wholly inadequate because it denies English experience. The principle of inheritance accommodates change through the notions of improvement and reformation. Given the crisis which he feels is facing the ancient European order in the early 1790s, Burke’s main concern lies with securing the accumulated achievements of the English past—those institutions, laws, manners, customs, and dispositions which are the product of its unique historical experience and which have proven their worth over time.

⁸⁹ As Andrew Franta forcefully argues, “it is also misleading to argue that [Burke’s] criticisms of the corresponding societies amount to a repudiation of public opinion in general”; instead, “[t]he threat Burke perceives is that any opinion, simply by virtue of being publically represented as the view held by a group, might come to look representative. In the end, Burke’s critique of the corresponding societies does not undo his commitment to public opinion. Instead, it insists that the basis of public opinion must be individual judgment” (29, 33). See Franta, *Romanticism and the Rise of the Mass Public* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

CHAPTER TWO

Order under Siege: The Discourses of History in the Anti-Jacobin Novel, 1799-1800

Towards the end of George Walker's novel *The Vagabond* (1799), a group of "new philosophers"¹ stumble into a radical utopian experiment being played out in the wilderness of western America. Doctor Alogos, Frederick Fenton, and Stupeo—three converts to the new philosophy—take as their guide a man named Parecho. His account of the history and present state of his country soon establishes the disastrous consequences of organising a society around Godwinian principles, disillusioning in the process everyone but the irredeemable Stupeo. Before Parecho takes his guests on a tour of the once-great city, however, he brings them to his home:

"What you see here," said Parecho, "is only the fragments of what I once possessed—my whole property is divided, and of this house I only could claim two rooms, a chimney-sweeper, and several other equally important personages possessing the others; but since the mortality in the city, I am allowed my whole house—I had a library of ancient Syriac and Egyptian manuscripts, containing an account of the most early ages, together with thirteen thousand modern productions. But these enlighteners of the human race, during their struggle for liberty, and the promotion of general knowledge, being in want of cases for their fire-powder and

¹ For a schematic analysis of "the new philosophy" and its practitioners, see Grenby, chapter 3.

ball, condemned all the libraries to that purpose.”²

Anxious to draw attention to the relevant historical precedents for these actions and to confirm in his readers’ minds the proper network of associations, Walker, citing William Playfair’s *History of Jacobinism* (1795), appends to this passage the following footnote:

At Narbonne the books have been sent to the arsenal; and at Fontaine le Dijon, the library of the Fuillants has been thrown aside as waste, in the hall of old papers. Horace and Virgil have been condemned not only for acknowledging tyrants, but for having been often printed for the use of tyrants, and by the permission of tyrants. The *meridian circles* made by Butterfield, for the globes of Coronelli, and the *medals* which are at the national library, were calculated to amount to half a little cannon. At Lyons, Cassenet threw into the crucible 800 antique medals of gold. (225)³

In both of these passages, Walker argues that French-style radicalism is an assault on history and the media that preserve and transmit it. The role history is made to serve in the radical cause, he suggests, is (in a debased sense) entirely martial: the pages of books are made to act as “cases for [...] fire-powder and ball”; the scientific instruments and the ancient medals of a once-proud, prosperous nation are all melted down and, in a dramatic literalisation of Edmund Burke’s description of radical historical methods in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), forged into “offensive and defensive weapons” (8: 189)

² Walker, *The Vagabond*, ed. W. M. Verhoeven (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2004), 224-25. References are to this edition.

³ See Playfair, *History of Jacobinism, its Crimes, Cruelties and Perfidies: Comprising an Inquiry into the Manner of Disseminating, under the Appearance of Philosophy and Virtue, Principles which are Equally Subversive of Order, Virtue, Religion, Liberty and Happiness* (London: Printed for John Stockdale, 1795), Appendix T, 804-14, from which Walker lifts these passages verbatim.

to fuel revolution within and without. The smelting imagery of Walker's source is itself significant: radical historicism is, in the eyes of anti-Jacobin commentators, a destructive process of *undifferentiation*, of attempting to make the various aspects of the past fit into the mould of one oversimplified narrative. For his radical counterparts, Walker contends, history is valuable only insofar as it can be used to undermine the past they seek to repudiate and replace; whatever cannot be made to serve that end is cast off as an ideologically tainted product of that oppressive past. Hence the ancient manuscripts and modern productions of Parecho's library are alike destroyed in the name of promoting "general knowledge," and hence Horace and Virgil, two pillars of classical literature, are condemned for their association with the long nightmare of war, tyranny, and inequality called "history."

Walker's characterisation of radical historical methods is, as this chapter demonstrates, developed in various ways by anti-Jacobin novelists writing in the closing years of the eighteenth century.⁴ Novels such as Robert Bisset's *Douglas; or, The Highlander* (1800), Jane West's *A Tale of the Times* (1799), and Walker's own *Vagabond* register the perceived threat to Britain's socio-political order in the form of radical attacks on history and its media of preservation and transmission. Drawing variously on the ideas and narratives of the early 1790s, anti-Jacobin novelists stage critiques of the kinds of history they believe Godwin and his followers practice. Burke's representation of radical historicism and his

⁴ Grenby has identified 58 novels that are, to varying degrees, "anti-Jacobin"; the novels chosen for discussion in this chapter are therefore necessarily representative. For the most comprehensive bibliography of the novel in this period available to date, see Peter Garside, James Raven, and Rainer Schöwerling, *The English Novel 1770-1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

opposing notion of inheritance are central to their criticisms,⁵ even if, as Yoon Sun Lee suggests, his followers did not always understand the nuances of his position.⁶ Reformers are consistently figured in these novels as endangering the inheritances of Britons (land and moveable property) or the means of generational transference (daughters and wives who, in the eighteenth century, as Gary Kelly notes, “serve the economic function of transferring property from one man to another”).⁷ To achieve their destructive ends, however, radical villains first attempt to subvert the affective and social inheritances of their intended victims: traditional modes of behaviour and belief. Affirming Burke’s assessment of 1789 as “a revolution in sentiments, manners, and moral opinions” (8: 131), anti-Jacobin novels register the radical assault on Britain’s “historically determined” order⁸ primarily as an assault on inherited forms—British manners, morality, religious beliefs, familial structures, and so on. In the world of the anti-Jacobin novel, one’s ability or failure to adhere to those forms determines whether one’s fate is comic or tragic.

The competing historical discourses of the 1790s prove to be fruitful resources for anti-Jacobin novelists, providing them with materials for emplotment, characterisation, and,

⁵ Critics have, of course, previously observed the phenomenon of “Burkean fiction,” but usually only in passing: see, for instance, Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, 2nd edition (1975; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), chapter 4, and Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), chapter 1. Recent studies of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century novels, however, provide more detailed treatments of the issue: see Grenby, chapter 2, and Lisa Wood, *Modes of Discipline: Women, Conservatism, and the Novel after the French Revolution* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 2003), chapter 2.

⁶ Lee, chapter 2.

⁷ Kelly, *Women, Writing, and Revolution 1790-1827* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 5.

⁸ Pocock, Introduction to the *Reflections*, vii.

ultimately, social commentary. In Walker's *Vagabond*, Alogos and Fenton witness the disastrous consequences of the radical devaluation of history and, embracing the wisdom of historical experience, are finally reconciled to Britain's social order. In *Douglas*, Bisset draws on the notions of inheritance and "manners" in order to align his narrative—and, ultimately, his anti-Jacobin cause—with a historical understanding he denies his opponents. And in West's *A Tale of the Times*, the decline of the Monteith marriage is registered in terms drawn largely from the revolutionary decade's discourses of history: Geraldine's fall is the consequence of her adoption of a disposition toward those closest to her which, as we will see, has all the supposed hallmarks of the radical view of history. In each of these novels, the radical threat to order is perceived as an assault on the kind of historical consciousness Burke invokes in his defence of British society; in each, the radical attitude toward history is revealed to be inadequate, dangerous, and, ultimately, fatally compromised by its own interestedness.

In conjunction with this larger critique, some of the anti-Jacobin novelists examined here align their fictions with the larger project of history by drawing on the generic conventions of historiography. In his narrative, Walker uses the Gordon Riots to stand in for the French Revolution, for instance, and this sleight-of-hand allows him to assume the kind of detachment historians assume when representing completed actions. Similarly, Bisset takes a number of steps—casting his narrator as a historian of "manners," situating his characters in familiar historical contexts, and inserting his novel into a hierarchy of historical genres—to suggest an alliance between his novel and historiography. As I suggest here and explore in more detail in chapter 4, the anti-Jacobins' attempts to "historicize" their works

anticipate the increasingly historical interests of the early nineteenth-century novel—particularly, the proliferation of historical representations in the novel of that period and the widespread efforts of the form’s practitioners to liken their works to that of historiographers.

*

I want to preface this discussion of anti-Jacobin novels with a brief word about the long-neglected form itself. Marilyn Butler’s ground-breaking *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (1975) serves as a useful starting point in this respect as it articulates an earlier critical consensus that is becoming increasingly untenable. “[T]he anti-jacobins,” Butler writes, “can scarcely be considered except as a group. No novelist on the conservative side who matured in the 1790s had a distinctive talent. Each of them wrote to a formula [...]. Novel after novel unashamedly used the same structure, the same incidents, the same caricatured figures.”⁹

One of the principal motivations for this study is the belief that much previous literary criticism of anti-Jacobin writers is, understandably, so hostile toward some of the positions its practitioners represent that they too often define individual texts by invoking, uncritically and summarily, the category with which they are identified.¹⁰ The most palpable defect with this approach is its inherent circularity: the evaluative judgment (i.e., anti-Jacobin novels are

⁹ Butler, 88. See also J. M. S. Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800* (1932; repr., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), chapter 8, and Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen*, chapter 1.

¹⁰ Other critics have made similar observations: see Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen*, xxi; Grenby, 3; and Wood, 21-23.

indistinguishable) determines the conceptual framework, which in turn re-confirms the initial aesthetic judgment. Using this model, critics seek, and find, precisely what they expect—that is, positions characteristic of the “anti-Jacobin” philosophy, whatever that broad label might be meant to include or exclude—and then flag anomalies that do not conform to those expectations. These anomalies often become primary sites of interest and speculation in themselves; more often than not, they are read as signs of a submerged radical position, of a protest against a hegemonic anti-Jacobin norm.¹¹

While “anti-Jacobin” as a label is undeniably useful—and, indeed, inescapable¹²—we need to be wary of the undifferentiating tendency such categories encourage if cited uncritically. Few anti-Jacobins, it will be found, conform exactly in their opinions on a variety of topics; although they unquestionably hold some ideas in common (as Grenby and Lisa Wood, for example, have demonstrated), the notion of a monolithic anti-Jacobin philosophy that unites these writers becomes more and more elusive as we encounter the nuances of their thought. If we are surprised by some of the positions they hold—whether

¹¹ Ian Haywood problematises this trend in recent Hannah More scholarship, for instance, arguing that “the feminocentric quality of [More’s] popular writing (itself over-rated [...]) is fully compatible with her conservative political and social ideology” (57); see Haywood, *The Revolution in Popular Literature: Print, Politics, and the People, 1790-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), chapter 3.

¹² As Grenby observes, “it seems much clearer that many novels were regarded as either Jacobin or anti-Jacobin when they were first produced, no matter how much modern scholars have sought to problematise their taxonomy. [...] Those contemporary reader-responses to which we have access proclaim that an awareness and acceptance existed of two literary camps, conservative and radical” (4). Grenby is replying, in part, to critics such as Kelly, who contends that “[t]he opposition between Jacobin and Anti-Jacobin novel was, then, to a large extent, a false one. For the Jacobin and Anti-Jacobin writers together represent the range of ideological attitudes of the rapidly expanding and increasingly powerful professional middle class, as that class was in the process of clarifying its own values, blending with while subverting the hegemonic gentry class, and defending its increasing power and privileges from attack from ‘below’” (292); see Kelly, “Jane Austen and the English Novel of the 1790s,” in *Fetter’d or Free?: British Women Novelists, 1670-1815*, ed. Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (Athens, OH, and London: Ohio University Press, 1986), 285-306.

supportive of, ambiguously disposed toward, or openly critical of some of the tenets usually associated with “anti-Jacobinism” that most offend modern sensibilities—it may well be because the diversity of anti-Jacobin thought has too often been the victim of an overly-simplistic categorising impulse. To account for this variety, we must discard the notion of a monolithic anti-Jacobin philosophy, a construct which, though often invoked by critical approaches that interrogate positions usually associated with it, continues to frustrate attempts to historicise it. The methods and beliefs of the anti-Jacobin novelists studied in this chapter are as every bit as heterogeneous (and, I would add, interesting) as those of their more-studied reformist counterparts; the only surprise is that it has taken critics so long to entertain the idea that this might be the case.

A WORLD WITHOUT HISTORY: GEORGE WALKER’S *THE VAGABOND* (1799)

Like so many anti-Jacobin novels, Walker’s *The Vagabond* has until quite recently been relegated to the margins of literary histories of the period. The earliest studies, always slightly embarrassed about the artistic “inferiority” of the genre, sought primarily to reclaim the novel from utter obscurity.¹³ Butler’s historicist inquiry in *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* forced scholars to confront a fact that, previously, had seemed almost inconceivable—that is, that the supposedly worthless novels of Austen’s contemporaries,

¹³ Tompkins, 1; see also chapter 8. Other studies of this variety include Allene Gregory, *The French Revolution and the English Novel* (1915; repr., Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1965), 135–44; B. Sprague Allen, “The Reaction against William Godwin,” *Modern Philology* 16, no. 5 (1918): 57–75; Hugh H. MacMullan, “The Satire of Walker’s *Vagabond* on Rousseau and Godwin,” *PMLA* 52, no. 1 (1937): 215–29; and A. D. Harvey, “George Walker and the Anti-Revolutionary Novel,” *Review of English Studies* n.s., 28, no. 111 (1977): 290–300.

Walker's included, played an important role in the formation of Austen's technique—but few scholars working immediately in its wake were convinced that anti-Jacobin novels ought to become the objects of serious study. Feminist studies such as Claudia L. Johnson's *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (1988) gave some consideration to anti-Jacobin novelists, Walker among them, but the result was far from satisfactory. Johnson's interests were limited largely to women novelists, to begin with, and her contempt for anti-Jacobin politics is evident in polemical and often unfair assessments of the novels. Kelly's survey, *English Fiction of the Romantic Period 1789-1830* (1989), had only a brief consideration of anti-Jacobin novels and neglected to discuss such significant male practitioners of the genre as Walker and Bisset, but it nevertheless registered a growing scholarly consensus that the historical place and importance of the genre could no longer be explained by way of a footnote.¹⁴ With the recent work of critics such as Grenby, W. M. Verhoeven, and London,¹⁵ however, it is now possible to consider a work such as Walker's *Vagabond* as something other than an embarrassingly didactic novel written by a hack in the service of a reactionary government—to argue, as I do here, that it creatively configures elements of the debate over history registered in many novels of the period.

The central crisis of *The Vagabond* revolves around the conversion of two of the novel's "anti-heroes," Frederick Fenton and Doctor Alogos. Fenton descends from a

¹⁴ Kelly, *English Fiction in the Romantic Period 1789-1830* (London and New York: Longman, 1989), chapter 2.

¹⁵ See Grenby; W. M. Verhoeven, "'New Philosophers' in the Backwoods: Romantic Primitivism in the 1790s' Novel," *Wordsworth Circle* 32, no. 3 (2001): 130-34, and the Introduction to his edition of *The Vagabond*, 11-43; and London, *Women and Property in the Eighteenth-Century English Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), chapter 11, and "Novel and History in Anti-Jacobin Satire," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 30 (2000): 71-81.

prototypically good English family—his parents, he confesses with shame, “have great landed possessions, that is, are great tyrants,” and they educated him in what he contemptuously calls “the superstitions of the Protestant church” (64)—but his encounter with radicalism prior to the novel’s beginning has led him to despise, and reject, that cultural inheritance. Similarly, Alogos is the descendent of a gentry-class family that (apparently) supported the Protestant settlement of 1688—his house is described as “a neat-looking mansion, with high chimneys and heavy cornices, which declared it to have been erected in the time of William the Third” (62)—but, having embraced radicalism, he too detests society’s present constitution. Walker’s novel recounts these two characters’ growing disenchantment with the new philosophy and their eventual reconciliation with their British heritage. That heritage is figured, crucially, in terms that emphasise the historicity of the elements of British culture that anti-Jacobins perceive as being threatened by radicalism: long-standing commitments to, for example, hierarchical social structures and religion. *The Vagabond* thus tells the tale of two radicals who realise at the novel’s end that Britain’s historically accrued order, ““with all its drawbacks, possesses the greatest portion of real happiness”” (241). Radicalism, conversely, is depicted as hostile to the historical forces that enable successful nation-building. Walker’s strategy of aligning British order with the forces of history while insisting on radicalism’s opposition to them is, I argue, broadly characteristic of the anti-Jacobin genre.

Walker pursues a number of tactics in *The Vagabond* to define radical figures who seek to undermine British order in terms that mark them out as the enemies of history. First, he describes them as ignorant speculators inattentive to circumstance and unmindful of

experience. The Godwinian tutor Stupeo dismisses experience as irrelevant (“Examples,” he claims, “have nothing to do with rational principles and metaphysical arguments” [222]), while Fenton comes to understand radicalism as an adherence to one “fundamental and happy maxim”: that of “disbelieving every thing past, present, and to come” (87). Instead of allowing one to anticipate similar consequences from similar actions, history to the radical mind is suspect because it eludes the test of individual reason: “if we proceed upon hear-say evidence, upon tradition, ever-varying; upon chronicles and annals, which are half interpolations,” Fenton tells his dismayed father, “I say, if we believe all those sort of testimonies, we may as well believe the authenticity of our bibles” (86). Having cribbed their opinions from speculative treatises, Walker’s new philosophers struggle throughout the narrative as they encounter realities that contradict their nostrums. Stupeo, the only character in the novel who refuses to acknowledge the discrepancy between theory and practice, ultimately becomes a sacrifice to one of his cherished ideals when he is burnt at the stake by the “noble savages” he mistakenly idealises. Walker revels in the ironies of philosophers who, he argues, claim to destroy harmful prejudices while adhering inflexibly to opinions they learn by rote and promote by dogmatic assertion.¹⁶ Hence patterns of allusion in the text connect them with the fanatical enthusiasm of the rebellious dissenters of the seventeenth century,¹⁷ and hence the narrator’s tongue-in-cheek description of Fenton and Alogos as “turn-coats” (241) when they finally reject the new philosophy. Walker implies that radical

¹⁶ See London, “Novel and History,” 74-75.

¹⁷ See, for instance, Citizen Ego’s invocation of “the good cause” (88) while promoting his radical agenda, and the argument made by one of Alogos’s unnamed neighbours that “Enthusiasm [...] is no proof of either truth or justice; but it is certain to inspire a desperate spirit in those who feel it, let the cause be liberty, religion, rebellion, revenge, plunder, or what not” (185).

inflexibility and disregard of circumstance render anathema the concept of experience informing opinion. The novel's narrative of conversion, of course, works toward the contrary position. The reformed Alogos, now acutely attuned to the radicals' sophisticated strategies for reading history, concludes that

“[i]t requires reflection to perceive that the philosophers of the present day are supremely ignorant, and to cover which, they pretend to deny and discredit every relic of antiquity, by which they would plunge the world again into ignorance. What are the dead languages is a common cry—they teach us nothing—we should be studying man: but, how pray are we to study man;—man, who is a creature of experience, when we destroy the experience of ages?” (238)

For Walker, true philosophy requires an acceptance of the fundamentally historical nature of “man,” that “creature of experience,” as well as a solid familiarity with his prior experience, or what he elsewhere calls a knowledge of “human nature, the history of mankind, and the proofs of religious authenticity” (54). True philosophy, in other words, co-exists with and depends on history.

Radicals in *The Vagabond* are also depicted as the subverters of behavioural codes that have traditionally ensured generational continuity. In the early stages of his conversion, Fenton learns to despise the authority of his indulgent father, who, in response, begs his son “to consider how much attention he had bestowed upon [him] in [his] early years” and “to consider if any of his former advice had been in any ways detrimental to [his] welfare; and to reflect, that no possible advantage could arise to him from [his] proceeding in a virtuous life, except that of beholding one whom he had been a means of bringing into the world, an

honour to his country, to human nature, and to himself" (70-71). Walker here figures the hierarchical family that Fenton rejects as an effective, disinterested means of forming virtuous citizens. Denying this signals, as well, failure to anticipate society's future needs. The various scenes in the novel in which radicals are implicated in attacks on feminine propriety and chastity re-affirm Walker's charge that radicalism promotes inattention to futurity. Fenton's attempts to seduce or rape the obstinately virtuous Laura ultimately fail, but other women who come into contact with Fenton are not so lucky. Amelia (the love of Fenton's childhood friend, Vernon) and the adulterous Mary (the Wollstonecraftian figure of the novel) are, through the arguments of the new philosophy, seduced into abandoning the traditional codes that govern female behaviour. Punishment for their lapses, however, falls not solely on them but also on their family members, and particularly their children: Amelia, her father, and her unborn child are killed in a fire, while Mary's deserted husband goes mad and their "children, who had none to provide for them, were sent to the work-house, to be educated by the public, where they caught the small-pox, and died" (127). A recent convert to radicalism, Alogos's saucy maid-lover, Susan, becomes pregnant with Stupeo's child and (in a cruel allusion to Wollstonecraft's fate) dies in childbirth, the victim of her illicit passion; her new-born son quickly follows her to the grave, dying of consumption as a result of his father's insistence that his child "should enjoy perfect freedom, and be allowed to crawl about the house like any other animal" (203). In the Godwinian utopia they discover, the philosophers are surprised to learn that the consequences of women's liberation from traditional sexual codes are lower reproduction rates and the prospect of a complete societal collapse. As London argues, female propriety and chastity in *The Vagabond* turn out to be

necessary bulwarks against volatile male desire and its proclivity to put present pleasure ahead of future considerations.¹⁸ In all of these examples, Walker registers radicalism's attack on conventional British codes of conduct as a threat to futurity; in seeking to seduce British women (the means of generational continuity) away from those codes, radical supporters seek to supplant the very principles that make nation-building possible.

Walker further cements radicalism's oppositional relationship with history by depicting its supporters as destroyers of the repositories of cultural memory. In an ironic (and rather unfair) re-figuring of the Church-and-King mob attack on Joseph Priestley, Walker has Alogos's neighbours turn against the men whose radical philosophy has taught them to be lazy and discontented, burning down Alogos's house, destroying his "cabinet of natural history," and making a "bon-fire" of his "fine library" (183). Fenton and his fellow Gordon rioters, whom he finds himself leading in one of his more extravagant adventures, use the "musty records of precedents, cases and law" to make "a fire to warm the people they had so long enslaved" (112) and choose the British Museum as "a good deposit for stores" after all the "trumpery" inside "should be burnt" (114). In making the Museum a warehouse for the rioters' "stores"—that is, for their weapons and stolen goods—Walker criticises what he sees as the purely interested uses radicals make of history, a point he reasserts later in the narrative when Parecho describes how the radical philosophers of his country turned the ancient and modern texts of his library into "cases for [...] fire-powder and ball" (225). Just as radical figures' undermining of traditional codes of familial hierarchy and femininity leads to a

¹⁸ London, *Women and Property*, 177. See also Mary Jean Corbett, *Allegories of Union in Irish and English Writing, 1790-1870: Politics, History, and the Family from Edgeworth to Arnold* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 26-29.

short-circuiting of the processes of national development, so their destruction of the physical media that enable the transmission of history (whether they be books, the libraries that hold them, or museums) ends in the creation of the abomination Walker describes at the novel's end—a society that has forsaken memory, continuity, and futurity.

The crumbling dystopia the philosophers find in the American west—which is both a vision of British society should it succumb to radicalism and have its own French-style revolution, and a “correction” of the utopian politics of Gilbert Imlay and the more abstract “Pantisocracy” movement—is committed to an ahistorical outlook that threatens its very existence. The first details of Parecho's description of his once-flourishing society stress the former co-existence of past and present: his were “a people who had arrived at the height of various arts and sciences,” he informs the three vagabonds, “so much so, that scarcely a peasant who laboured in the field, but could read the divine books of our ancestors” (215). Having adopted the new philosophy, however, the utopian experimenters made every effort to eradicate historical consciousness, which is implicitly understood in the text as an awareness of the interconnectedness of past, present, and future. They stripped the ancient churches of all their paintings and symbols, fearing they “would recal to mind the God of their fathers” (228). Their commitment to the radical material scepticism of Hume and George Berkeley results in a sustained effort to banish the past, a policy which renders them impotent to punish the foulest of crimes. Parroting Godwin (or at least Walker's ironic conception of him), a disgusted Parecho explains that “it is contrary to political justice, that any *past* offence should be punished by coercion. [...] The body is perpetually changing—the soul of man becomes every moment a different being: so that were we to put this man in

prison, to-morrow we should be confining a totally different being, wholly innocent of the crime” (229). *The Vagabond* registers these actions and policies as part of a sophistical strategy to imagine away the past in the name of a futurity radical policies do nothing to secure, endorsing a mischievous presentism that allows “crime [to] be done with impunity” (230).

Walker’s defence of British society, conversely, relies on a historicism committed to the logic of accretion and on carefully chosen historical examples. Fenton’s attack on British order, for instance, confirms (in spite of his intentions to the contrary) the kinds of historical processes Burke celebrates. In one of his rabble-rousing barnyard speeches, Fenton proves

beyond a doubt, that religion was not of the smallest benefit to mankind. “’Tis true,” said he [...], “that *architecture* was first carried beyond the unpolished beam, and the unshapen stone, by the enthusiasm of people to honour an unknown Deity; but could any thing be more absurd than to raise great piles of magnificence to nobody knew who? And what was the consequence? Why, the great men then would have great houses, and no longer live, as they used to do, in hovels of mud. ’Tis true that *astronomy* was first studied for the sake of tracing the power of God in the creation; but what has been the result? We have learnt to traverse the ocean, and send people from Europe to tyrannise over the people of Africa. Religion indeed gave birth to all the *arts and sciences*, because it was supposed the Architect of worlds must delight in grandeur, and every costly ornament was deemed too little an offering to his abode. But, in my opinion, this would better have been given to the starving poor—no doubt the priests had their tithes out of it. (Here a loud burst of applause broke forth.) It is

vain to say that monks have been the preservers of *literature*; for, at the time they promoted it, they had no intention to benefit mankind, and it is the intention which makes the merit.” (152)

In citing religion as the initial spur to “all the *arts and sciences*,” all the improvements and refinements of the old European order, Fenton inadvertently affirms one half of the Burkean maxim that “Nothing is more certain, than that our manners, our civilization, and all the good things which are connected with manners, and with civilization, have, in this European world of ours, depended for ages upon two principles; and were indeed the result of both combined; I mean the spirit of a gentleman, and the spirit of religion” (8: 129-30). The palpable advantages of these developments are, in stereotypically radical fashion, downplayed or ignored entirely. The innate “naturalness” of the religious impulse responsible for these advancements, Walker suggests, is itself demonstrable by historical inquiry. The reformed Doctor Alogos comes to this very conclusion in his short history of world religions, which ranges from ancient Greeks and Egyptians to Druids and Icelanders: “It is remarkable that all the primitive mythologies agree in every grand point, as the existence of a great Supreme, the creation, the immortality of the soul, and future rewards and punishments” (236). The religious impulse that fuelled the creation of “all the good things” of modern civilisation, Walker’s novel suggests, is an inherent part of human nature, and history—or at least Alogos’s version of it—is made to confirm this proposition.

While Walker consistently positions anti-Jacobinism alongside history in a partnership against ahistorical radicalism, he also appeals to the conventions of historiography to further shore up that network of associations. The decision, for instance, to

depict Fenton as a participant in the Gordon Riots (1780) is an example of the way in which Walker aligns his work with the project of historiography in a bid to further his ideological stance. Almost twenty years removed from the time of the novel's composition, the Gordon Riots are remote enough from the present to be considered "historical" (because the event is long since completed) and yet recent enough to be remembered by his readers. Walker invokes this traumatic moment in British history and anachronistically assigns its participants the radical political discourse of the French Revolution period.¹⁹ While the rioters chant the historically appropriate slogan "No popery," the leaders of the rebellion in *The Vagabond* confess they only adopt that "watch-word" to manipulate their followers into bringing about "the new system of things" (108)—a society founded on the supposed principles of the British radicals of the 1790s. As Fenton admires London in flames, he praises "the sons of Freedom and Liberty waving the three-coloured banners dropping with the blood of their enemies, and hailing the everlasting Rights of Man!!! Ah! how dear must such a scene be to the *friends of liberty* and *universal man*" (116). The conflation here of the Gordon Riots and the French Revolution here allows Walker to condemn the latter from the detached position of the historian: the two moments in history become synonymous, allowing him to use a completed (and much-execrated) event to define a protean one. This typological understanding of historical events is familiar from the political tracts of reformists and conservatives alike,²⁰ and Walker's activation of this interpretative strategy in his novel is consistent with the form's broad engagement with the political discourse of the period.

¹⁹ On this point, see Gilmartin, *Writing against Revolution*, 170-74.

²⁰ See chapter 1, pp.15-37.

Analysis of *The Vagabond* reveals Walker's awareness of the discourses of history as they were agitated and circulated in the major polemical texts of the early Revolution debate and his willingness to exploit them for partisan purposes. The very form of the novel, which includes representations of historical events and a number of contextualising footnotes of varying length,²¹ seems a calculated effort to import history into a genre that, especially in the hands of unscrupulous radicals, anti-Jacobins argued, encouraged a privileging of romance over reality.²² The two-fold strategy Walker employs to discredit radical thought—aligning British order with the authority of history while insisting on radicalism's sophistical but ineffective attempts to negate or elude that authority—is, however, only one of the ways in which anti-Jacobin novelists respond to the historical discourses of the period.

"HISTORICISING" THE NOVEL: INHERITANCE, MANNERS, AND "FICTITIOUS BIOGRAPHY" IN ROBERT BISSET'S *DOUGLAS* (1800)

Despite being authored by the man who wrote one of the earliest and most admiring of Burke's biographies,²³ who contributed regularly to the *Anti-Jacobin Review and*

²¹ Walker revised his text, too, to increase his references to historical authorities. Among the sixteen notes he added to his "3rd" edition are, for instance, five citations of Playfair's *History of Jacobinism*.

²² See Verhoeven, Introduction to his edition of *The Vagabond*, 38-39, and London, *Women and Property*, 169-72.

²³ Bisset, *The Life of Edmund Burke. Comprehending an Impartial Account of his Literary and Political Efforts, and a Sketch of the Conduct and Character of his Most Eminent Associates, Coadjutors, and Opponents*, 2nd edition, 2 vols. (London: Printed and published by George Cawthorn, 1800).

Magazine,²⁴ and who ostentatiously referred to himself as a “zealous Anti-Jacobin,”²⁵ Bisset’s *Douglas; or, The Highlander* is, in formal terms, somewhat atypical of the anti-Jacobin novel.²⁶ One of *Douglas*’s more obvious departures from the genre conventions of the anti-Jacobin novel is its lack of a “Vaurien” figure—that is, a new philosopher who pushes the plot forward by using radical discourse to further his (or, less often, her) self-interested, appetitive pursuits.²⁷ Among the principal villains of the novel, only Lady Mary Manhunt (who is at best a loose caricature of Wollstonecraft) and perhaps Mr. Rhodomontade (who, as the author of extravagant travel narratives, may be intended as a caricature of Gilbert Imlay) are explicitly connected with radical ideas.²⁸ Instead of creating a Vaurien figure who, in the final years of the eighteenth century, had become a staple of the anti-Jacobin novel—as the examples of Fenton and Stupeo (in *The Vagabond*), Edward Fitzosborne (in *A Tale of the Times*), and Alphonse Vallaton (in Elizabeth Hamilton’s

²⁴ For a detailed list of the articles Bisset wrote for the *Anti-Jacobin Review*, see Emily Lorraine de Montluzin, *The Anti-Jacobins 1798-1800: The Early Contributors to the Anti-Jacobin Review* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988).

²⁵ [Bisset], review of *The Vagabond*, by George Walker, *Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* 2 (February 1799): 140. For the attribution to Bisset, see de Montluzin, 172.

²⁶ Little has been written on Bisset or his works. For accounts of his life and literary achievements, see de Montluzin, 57-59, and Lance Bertelsen, “Robert Bisset,” in *Eighteenth-Century British Literary Biographers*, ed. Steven Serafin, vol. 142 of *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Detroit: Gale, 1994), 24-29. For criticism of his writings, see Butler, *Jane Austen*, chapter 4; London, “Novel and History,” and “Clock Time”; Grenby, *in passim*; and Richard Cronin’s Introduction to his two-volume edition of Bisset’s *Douglas*, vols. 4 and 5 of *Anti-Jacobin Novels*, ed. W. M. Verhoeven (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005), 1: vii-xxi.

²⁷ See Grenby, chapter 4, where he elaborates on this anti-Jacobin character-type whose name is derived from the eponymous arch-villain of Isaac D’Israeli’s loyalist novel, *Vaurien; or, Sketches of the Times* (1797).

²⁸ As his name suggests (“vain boaster,” after the braggart king in Lodovico Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso* [1532]), Rhodomontade may also be designed as a commentary on radical discourse, generated in part as a counter to attacks on Burke’s florid style.

Memoirs of Modern Philosophers [1800]) attest—Bisset turns to the stock novelistic theme of inherited property to organise his narrative. Thus, as in the novel Bisset so esteems, Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749), the crisis of *Douglas* centres on the question of legitimate lines of inheritance.

When the familiar eighteenth-century plot of *Douglas* is set in its revolutionary contexts, however, it becomes possible to see the ways in which the novel, formally and thematically, responds to and is shaped by the competing historical discourses of the 1790s. Bisset's attention to figures who seek to redirect hereditary property reflects his conviction that interestedness lies at the heart of attacks on British order, regardless of whether or not those attacks are of the new (i.e., radical) or old (i.e., simply criminal) kind. His defence of a hierarchical social structure is symptomatic of his commitment to the notion of inheritance in its broadest sense as a principle that ensures the transfer of the cultural and behavioural norms that secure order. Bisset also adopts other strategies in his bid to align his narrative with the kind of historical authority he associates with the Burkean notion of inheritance. His positioning of his narrator as a historian of "manners," his careful incorporation of historical fact, and his categorisation of his novel as a "FICTITIOUS BIOGRAPHY"²⁹ are indicative of his larger goal: to define his efforts as informed by and attuned to history in ways that his fanciful, romance-writing, reformist counterparts—whether they be radical, sentimental, or Gothic—are not.

The plot of *Douglas* is driven primarily by the threat that the Douglas estate, Tay

²⁹ Bisset, *Douglas; or, The Highlander*, ed. Richard Cronin, vols. 4 and 5 of *Anti-Jacobin Novels*, ed. W. M. Verhoeven (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005), 1: 5, 9. References are to this edition.

Bank, will fall into the hands of the ambitious Rhodomontade family and its satellites. Early in the novel, the eldest Douglas, the bachelor James, becomes the proprietor of the estate; the regular course of succession suggests that one of his younger brothers (Alexander, who is also a bachelor, or General Charles, the hero's father and namesake) will inherit after him. Since the General is the only Douglas to have children, his eldest son Charles stands to inherit next. This course of succession is rendered doubtful, however, when James is duped into marrying the promiscuous Molly Rhodomontade. The marriage, and the parasitic friendship that enabled it, are the first of a long train of plots the Rhodomontade circle pursue in attempting to secure Tay Bank.

The Rhodomontades and their allies pursue a number of strategies aimed at re-directing inherited property from its legitimate source. While James is recovering from a bout of illness brought on by his excessive drinking, he overhears Molly and her father discussing a will by which the Rhodomontade family stands to inherit. Since he has no recollection of signing such a document, he fears he has done so "during intoxication" (1: 206); with the help of friends of the family, Mr. Longhead and Mr. Wiseman, he erases his name from the spurious will. After James's death, the second half of the novel similarly turns upon the question of another will, that of the supposedly dead Alexander, the next heir to Tay Bank. With the help of Patrick Swearwell, the Rhodomontade circle forges a will in its favour, but this plot unravels when Alexander, very much alive, returns to set matters right. Molly also gives birth to three sons whose claims to the Douglas estate are, like the two wills, illegitimate: the first is the result of a liaison with "a tall strapping West Indian" (1: 90) a month before her marriage, and the other two are products of her adulterous affair with

Swearwell. In the end, all three false heirs, conveniently, die young (1: 158, 1: 218, and 2: 246)—their inherently sickly constitutions being, apparently, the hallmark of their illegitimacy—thereby ending the threat that Tay Bank might fall to the Rhodomontade family.

These appropriative schemes are thus figured explicitly in the novel as attempts to profit from the notion of inheritance by usurping the place of the rightful heir. That the Rhodomontade circle does so solely for gain without invoking radical discourse to assert the inherent injustice or ineptness of inheritance as a means of transmitting value is indicative of Bisset's belief that assaults on Britain's hierarchical order, whether informed by radicalism or not, are motivated by interestedness. From Dr. Strongbrain, William Subtlewould, John Bawlwell, and Tom Croft (caricatures of Mackintosh, Godwin, John Thelwall, and Thomas Holcroft, respectively) to Mr. Poll (the Unitarian barber who goes bankrupt promoting radical politics instead of his business) and Mr. Sidney (a friend to Charles who, prior to his recovery, uses the new philosophy to seduce women), proponents of the radical cause crowd the pages of *Douglas*. Of the members of the Rhodomontade circle who plot to usurp the Douglas estate, however, none is made to spout radical doctrines to account for his or her conduct, not even the two characters who seem to be modelled after notorious Jacobin figures, Lady Mary and Mr. Rhodomontade. Bisset's failure to differentiate between radicals and common criminals is, of course, entirely purposeful: interestedness, he suggests, informs the actions of both. In Bisset's starkly dichotomous political economy, radicalism, like criminality, is motivated by selfishness.

Bisset's narrative also vindicates elements of Britain's hierarchical order whose

raison d'être depends on the inheritance principle. Patterns of re-distribution and acquisition at the novel's end, for instance, clearly suggest that property belongs, by birth and worth, in the hands of the gentrified and aristocratic classes: the lowly Mr. Dip, who retired from the candle-making business to live as a gentleman only to be swindled out of his money, is forced to sell his property to Alexander, while the General uses the money he has earned serving in India to buy an estate nearby Tay Bank, "partly for himself and partly for his son" (2: 255). The hereditary peerage, meanwhile, is repeatedly defended on pragmatic grounds: "I respect the peerage," young Charles tells his haughty, aristocratic cousin Sir Duncan Dismal,

"as AN ORDER INDISPENSIBLY NECESSARY FOR THE BALANCE OF THE CONSTITUTION, but that is in their corporate, not their individual capacity.

Individuals, whether peers or commons, I respect in proportion to THEIR WISDOM AND VIRTUE, and wish to associate with them, or not, according as I find their manners, habits, situations, and mine admit of a close intercourse." (2: 32)³⁰

Pride in one's ancestors, alternatively, is described at the novel's outset as "a principle which," though sometimes "a great means of extravagance and consequent embarrassment," "surely, no wise man would wish to eradicate, where it leads to good conduct, although it might easily be proved that, abstractly, it is not consistent with reason" (1: 16). The narrative repeatedly affirms this statement, showing that family pride, with its Janus-faced orientation toward past and future, stimulates laudable, self-denying conduct—"economy" and prudence

³⁰ Cronin cites this passage, among others, to argue that "Bisset offers a staunch and uncompromising defence of the status quo, but it is a defence that reveals, as if despite itself, fraught divisions between classes, between the nations that make up the kingdom and between the sexes" (1: xix).

in order to secure the estate for future generations (1:16), and industry and “magnanimity” in order to live up to expectations set by illustrious ancestors (1: 79)—more often than not. Hereditary dignity and distinctions in *Douglas*, like hereditary property, contribute to British order.

Villains in the novel are, as we have seen, characterised by their one-dimensional conception of inheritance as a means for gain, a single-mindedness that registers their inability to appreciate (Bisset argues) its broader significance as a principle that enables the transmission of value. That inheritance is understood in these terms in *Douglas* is evident from the description of Mr. Wiseman, who, at the novel’s end, looks to Charles’s friend Mr. Wilson, his future son-in-law and the heir to his modest estate, “for the transmission of moral and intellectual worth to his posterity” (2: 259). Conversely, when Subtlewould offers financial advice to Mr. Sidney, whose early support for the radical cause has led to fiscal irresponsibility, Bisset suggests that radicalism promotes an under-valuing of one’s cultural inheritance as well as a disregard for futurity. After informing Sidney that he cannot lend him any money, the philosopher Subtlewould counsels him to go to “Mr. Defraud,” who

“has often advanced money on reversions to estates, (the absurdity of institution still obliges me to use the old language,)[;] as you are heir to your uncle, he may probably be prevailed on to purchase the reversion of your inheritance. I think by that means much good might accrue to the whole.”

“You d—d scoundrel,[?]” returned Sidney, “would you take advantage of my necessities to compel me to part with my inheritance, by a bargain with that infamous miscreant[?]” (2: 128-29)

Sidney's response signals more than simple outrage at a financial arrangement that would require him to submit to Mr. Defraud's exorbitant terms. The image of Subtle would (Godwin, the arch-apostle of the new philosophy) trying to convince Sidney (a propertied young Englishman who is initially sympathetic to the radical cause) to "part with [his] inheritance" reverberates with cultural significance when we recall the central place of inheritance in Burke's defence of British order, and Bisset's familiarity with and approval of that defence. This scene is best understood, in other words, as a compact rendering of a familiar Burkean critique: whether from interestedness or shortsightedness, radicals underestimate the value of the cultural inheritance that gave rise to, and which continues to shape, British society.

In addition to his use of inheritance as an organising and thematic principle in *Douglas*, Bisset takes other steps to emphasise his solidarity with the project of history in general.³¹ He proclaims (in the Dedication) that his novel is an "attempt to pourtray the sentiments, manners, and character of a Highland gentleman," and that his "purpose" is "to describe existing manners, both in the Northern and Southern parts of the kingdom" (1: 5).³² The narrative, moreover, delivers on this promise to proceed after the manner of an Enlightenment historian, providing detailed accounts of, for instance, the Scottish education system (volume 1, chapters 5 and 7), the Highland games (volume 1, chapter 6), a Scottish "rural fete" (1: 215; volume 1, chapter 6), and the music of Neil Gow (volume 2, chapter 3).

³¹ London also suggests this point, noting that "Bisset's *Douglas* [...] offers a culturally specific representation of Scotland that draws extensively on the models of Enlightenment historiography" ("Clock Time," 549).

³² Phillips notes that the concept of "manners," though not belonging exclusively to the realm of history, was of "special interest [...] for the historical genres in particular" (147): see Phillips, chapters 6 and 7.

Bisset's prominent and repeated claim to attend to "manners" is, I suggest, a strategic move designed (as Karen O'Brien argues of the late eighteenth-century novel more generally) to "liken" his work "to the serious, exemplary business of history":

The historical vogue for manners provided novelists with a means of articulating the historicity of their own endeavors, allowing them to present their detailed depictions of social context as portraits of the times [...]. If claims to moral exemplarity by way of the individual cautionary tale—the romantic adventuress who ends up ruined or exiled, the penitent whore, the reformed rake, the disobedient daughter, and so on—often rang hollow, the exemplary value of manners, accurately and sensitively portrayed, was rarely in doubt.³³

In a similar vein, Bisset carefully locates some of the experiences of his main characters in actual historical contexts. Charles's father, for instance, befriends Adam Ferguson during his first tour of duty with the Black Watch regiment, while Charles's teachers at Edinburgh University include prominent Scottish Enlightenment figures such as Ferguson, Hugh Blair, Dugald Stewart, and John Robison.³⁴ In these and other examples, as Richard Cronin's

³³ O'Brien, "History and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century Britain," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 68, no. 1/2 (2005): 408. O'Brien's argument, I would argue, enables a more nuanced reading than Cronin's (by no means inaccurate) description of *Douglas* as "a Scottish novel" that provides "a comprehensive expression of Bisset's fervent Scottish patriotism" (1: xi, xv).

³⁴ The political affiliations of Blair (who, in 1793, preached a sermon against the French Revolution) and Robison (who authored *Proofs of a Conspiracy against All the Religions and Governments of Europe, Carried on in the Secret Meetings of Free Masons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies* [1797]) surely influenced Bisset's decision to include them in his work. Ferguson, conversely, was a supporter of the French Revolution, but Bisset was apparently able to separate Ferguson's philosophical views from his more contentious political opinions; in his *Life of Edmund Burke*, for instance, Bisset cites a passage from Ferguson's *Principles of Moral and Political Science* (1792) to summarise Burke's argument against "the rights of man" (2: 307-08). Bisset may have had another motive for celebrating Ferguson, irrespective of their different political positions: as Cronin suggests, "the two men were in all probability related" (1: vii). Stewart did not publish anything of a political nature during the period.

detailed annotation of the novel demonstrates, the fictional narrative of *Douglas* introduces historical figures and events in ways that are respectful of the historical record.³⁵ This is not, to be clear, to suggest that every detail in the novel is historically accurate, but rather to show that Bisset grounds some of his novel's events and characters in familiar historical contexts, and with some considerable attention to detail.

Bisset's positioning of *Douglas* within a genre he variously calls "fictitious history"³⁶ or "*fictitious biography*" (1: 8, 11) further suggests an alliance between his novel and history.³⁷ "In the present work," he announces in the Preface, "I have presumed to aim at *fictitious biography* [...]. My object is, to describe HUMAN NATURE and EXISTING MANNERS in *probable circumstances and situations*" (1: 11). By aligning *Douglas* with a "mode of biography" established by writers such as Cervantes and Le Sage, Bisset claims that he, like those great masters, is "imitating real life" and adhering to the "probable" (1: 10). Within the narrative, too, "fictitious biography" is accorded a place among the elite genres. The exemplary Charles, the narrator says, "was extremely fond of history, biography, and voyages" (1: 80). The privileged status given to these genres, especially those two that are unambiguously historical, is hardly surprising given the narrator's repeated celebrations of the "Baconian" method of reasoning by "INVESTIGATION AND INDUCTION" over the

³⁵ Cronin, 1: vii-viii, 1: 251, n. 39, and 1: 259, n. 176, 179.

³⁶ In all probability, Bisset derived this term from chapter thirty-seven of Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, ed. Linda Ferreira-Buckley and S. Michael Halloran (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), 414-24.

³⁷ It is useful here to recall that, by the late eighteenth century, "[b]iography and autobiography were no longer considered in the Enlightenment to be lesser categories of history, but instead they begin to be conceptualized as genres that possess literary merit in their own right" (315); see Felicity A. Nussbaum, "Biography and Autobiography," in vol. 4 of *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, ed. H. B. Nisbet and Claude Rawson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 302-15.

radical method of reasoning by “hypothesis” (1: 80, 137). What follows, however, is decidedly less expected: “Fictitious biography,” observes the narrator, also “often occupied his attention” (1: 80). Bisset’s assertion of an alliance between history and a tradition of the novel to which (he claims) *Douglas* belongs is perhaps not made so abundantly clear anywhere else in the text.

The placement of a school of novels (“fictitious biography”) alongside other prestigious genres is remarkable given that Bisset’s treatment of the novel in *Douglas* is otherwise vitriolic. Some of his criticisms are, as recent scholarly work on other anti-Jacobin novelists suggests, entirely characteristic of the anti-Jacobin genre.³⁸ Bisset’s description of the novel as a vehicle for radical doctrines³⁹ and his depiction of sentimental novels as a means of promoting promiscuity⁴⁰ and romantic expectations of social mobility⁴¹ among women are, for instance, fairly standard. The convergence of Jacobinical politics and sentimental fiction—best evidenced in Sidney’s account of his use of radical and sentimental

³⁸ See, among others, Grenby, chapter 1; Wood, chapter 1; London, *Women and Property*, chapters 11 and 12; Nicola Watson, chapters 1 and 2; Gilmartin, *Writing against Revolution*, chapter 4; and Claire Grogan, “The Politics of Seduction in British Fiction of the 1790s: The Female Reader and *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 11, no. 4 (1999): 459-76.

³⁹ Tom Croft, for instance, is introduced as a radical mouthpiece who weaves Godwinian philosophy into his novels to prove (in Mr. Poll’s words) “‘what wicked good for nothing volks your lords and your bishops, your varsity doctors, and the like of those be’” (1: 191).

⁴⁰ As the narrator informs us, “From low boarding schools,” where novels form an essential part of the pupils’ education, “to prostitution the course is easy, expeditious, and daily trodden” (1: 151).

⁴¹ A lowly boarding-school-pupil-cum-prostitute in the novel, for example, responds to the marriage proposal of her socially-equal lover with the following declaration: “‘Don’t talk to me as a green-grocer’s daughter, but as an accomplished young lady; one that has read the best books, and knows from them what she may expect. Did not, Patty Fairfield, Sir, the miller’s daughter, knowing her own accomplishments, refuse farmer Giles? What was the consequence—she was married to Lord Aimworth’” (1: 201).

texts in his seduction of the young novel-reading girl, Eliza⁴²—is also familiar. Bisset's other criticisms of the novel, however, reflect his own particular view that other novelists (whether of a radical, sentimental, or Gothic cast) neglect the empirical and historical forces with which he aligns his novel. Whether he is detailing the improbable fictions of Mrs.

Brainsick—the aspiring novelist whose complete ignorance of history and geography is coupled with a “*too great sensibility of heart*” and a knowledge of “the history of ghosts and apparitions” (2: 153)—or Eliza's dependence on Sophia Lee's *The Recess; or, A Tale of Other Times* (1785) as her only source of English history (1: 235-36), Bisset charges his radical contemporaries with departing from an understanding of reality grounded in an inductive approach and a knowledge of past experience. “[M]odern romance writers,” the narrator observes while giving his account of Mr. Rhodomontade's travel writings, “have very skilfully availed themselves” of “the advantages of extravagant fictions. [...] Modern romances, as they equal Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in wonderfulness, exceed him in consistency [...] as they exclude probability, not sometimes, but always, and as *all* their fictions are such as [...] never happened in any age or country” (1: 62-63). The alliance suggested here between Mr. Rhodomontade's wildly improbable narratives and “modern romances” signals the dubious status of radical fictions, just as radical figures' reliance on “hypothesis” instead

⁴² “‘The *Circulating Library*,’” Sidney confesses to Charles, “‘was [...] of great assistance to me; I purposely chose those books that relax what they call female virtue [...]. I put into her hand the novels that teach that, what is called female frailty, is not, in the least, inconsistent with every good quality; and also those others which inflame the mind with pictures of the exquisite pleasures of hidden love. In short,—what with Mrs. Wollstonecroft's divine work, and the *sweet effusions of female novelists*, softening the alleged evil, describing the real good of the intercourse of nature, not without succour from the doctrines of the glorious Tom Croft, exhibiting the absurdity of all laws between the sexes, but those that love has made, [...]—we obeyed the laws of nature, without the absurd formality of tyrannic institution’” (2: 36-37).

of “induction” or forms of inherited knowledge in the novel signals the dubious status of their arguments for change.

Bisset’s use of inheritance, his attention to manners and careful incorporation of historical detail, and his insistence that his novel belongs to the elite category of “fictitious biography” instead of the fanciful modes employed by his radical, sentimental, and Gothic contemporaries are all symptomatic of his strategic bid to foreground his—and, by extension, the anti-Jacobin—commitment to history and to contrast that outlook with an ethic that (anti-Jacobins contend) “denies the importance of the past and underwrites a speculative commitment to change.”⁴³ When Bisset’s novel is read in the context of the struggle for the authority of history that took place in the revolutionary decade, we begin to fill in some of the assumptions that underwrite, for instance, Nicola Watson’s passing observation that *Douglas* is “one of the chief predecessors of *Waverley* among Scottish regional and historical novels”; Wood’s tantalising suggestion that it is among a handful of novels that effect an integration of the more familiar sentimental plot with “the broader narrative, and alternate discourse, of history”; or London’s more fully developed contention that “the tensions generated by the competition between radical and loyalist representations encouraged the emergence of new narrative types, in particular the historical novel and regional fiction.”⁴⁴ The question of early historical fiction is one that will be dealt with at more length in chapter 4; for now, it is enough to observe that Bisset’s *Douglas* models some of the formal methods anti-Jacobins

⁴³ London, “Novel and History,” 73.

⁴⁴ Nicola Watson, 109n; Wood, 137; London, “Radical Utopias,” 801. See also London’s “Clock Time,” where she suggests that “[t]he shared vocabulary of the 1790s loyalist fiction and the emergent early-nineteenth-century forms of historical novel is not arbitrary” (555).

use in their bid to flag the “historicity of their own endeavors.”⁴⁵

NARRATING NATIONAL CRISIS THROUGH DOMESTIC TRAGEDY: JANE WEST’S *A TALE OF THE TIMES* (1799)

A writer who was well-known and -respected in her own lifetime, West has attracted more critical attention than most anti-Jacobin novelists. Following the inquiries of Butler (1975), Kelly (1989), and Claudia L. Johnson (1988), scholars have begun the process of sketching out West’s biography, determining her corpus, and evaluating the nature of her relationship with other prominent writers in the period.⁴⁶ More recently, West has been a central figure in studies of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries whose interests range from the development of narrative technique in women’s novels, the ways women negotiated questions of gender and femininity, and the creation of didactic fiction by women writers, to the form of the anti-Jacobin novel, the fate of the letter and the sentimental novel, and the politics of reading.⁴⁷ My own interest in West builds on and diverges from these

⁴⁵ O’Brien, 408.

⁴⁶ See Pamela Lloyd, “Jane West: A Critical Biography” (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1997), and “Some New Information on Jane West,” *Notes and Queries* 31, no. 4 (1984): 469-70; David Thame, “Jane West as Political Pamphleteer: A New Attribution,” *Notes and Queries* 50, no. 3 (2003): 280-81; Valerie Grosvenor Myer, “‘Caro Sposo’ at the Ball: Jane West and Jane Austen’s *Emma*,” *Notes and Queries* 29, no. 3 (1982): 208; Patricia Meyer Spacks, “Sisters,” in *Fetter’d or Free?*, ed. Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski, 136-51; and Susan Allen Ford, “Tales of the Time: Family and Nation in Charlotte Smith and Jane West,” in *Family Matters in the British and American Novel*, ed. Andera O’Reilly Herrera, Elizabeth Mahn Nollen, and Sheil Reitzel Foor (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1997), 15-29.

⁴⁷ See Anna Uddén, *Veils of Irony: The Development of Narrative Technique in Women’s Novels of the 1790s* (Uppsala: S. Academiae Upsaliensis, 2000); Eleanor Ty, *Empowering the Feminine: The Narratives of Mary Robinson, Jane West, and Amelia Opie, 1796-1812* (Toronto: University of

studies, recognising that questions of gender unquestionably play a significant role in her work but also insisting on a reading that considers her writing in light of a pervasive concern shared by her male and female anti-Jacobin contemporaries alike: the perceived role of history in the Revolution debate.

In *A Tale of the Times*, West registers the historical discourses of the period in ways that are more subtle and also more sustained than in Walker's *Vagabond* or Bisset's *Douglas*, drawing on them to frame her narrative and her reader's experience of it. The plot details the breaking up of the Monteith marriage, which is realised at the novel's end when Geraldine, after being raped by her seducer and cast off by her husband, dies. Employing a suggestive network of allusions, West aligns Geraldine's evolving attitude toward those who are closest to her with an orientation toward history associated in anti-Jacobin discourse with radicalism. West's heroine falls not because she is converted to radical opinions but because she adopts a way of viewing those she is connected to by ties of marriage and friendship—dwelling on their perceived faults, comparing their characters with specious or absent ideals, and forgetting what obligations she owes them (by prescription or otherwise)—that has many of the distinguishing features of the supposed radical historical view. To escape such impotent dissatisfaction with one's familiar surroundings (domestic or national), West's narrator, Prudentia Homespun,⁴⁸ recommends “a close attention to the costume of manners”⁴⁹ or an

Toronto Press, 1998); Wood; Grenby; Nicola Watson; and London, *Women and Property*, chapter 12.

⁴⁸ On the ambiguities of the relationship between West and her narrator, see Thame, “Cooking Up a Story: Jane West, Prudentia Homespun, and the Consumption of Fiction,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 16, no. 2 (2004): 217–42.

⁴⁹ West, *A Tale of the Times*, ed. Amanda Gilroy, vol. 7 of *Anti-Jacobin Novels*, ed. W. M. Verhoeven (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005), 6. References are to this edition.

adherence to the inherited forms that traditionally govern social interaction. West's careful mapping of the discourses of history onto her narrative demonstrates the malleability of the discursive phenomenon I have been tracing.

A Tale of the Times is usually interpreted as a novel which, while not strictly allegorical, develops thematic concerns which invite a reading along broader, generally nationalist lines.⁵⁰ While critics interested primarily in questions of gender and femininity usually suggest a correspondence between Geraldine and Britain, however, I argue that West's narrative in fact suggests a more complex configuration. West's plot focusses, after all, not solely on Geraldine's catastrophic fall but also on the collapse of the Monteith marriage. If, as most critics agree, the narrative is designed to evoke the image of Britain under siege by radical forces, I propose that West uses the Monteiths, and not just Geraldine, as the vehicle for her nationalist message. The decision to employ a domestic relationship to trace the threat to Britain's socio-political order is not surprising.⁵¹ As Wood suggests, conservative women writing in the 1790s, unlike their male counterparts, had to develop strategies to engage political issues in less explicit ways if they were to avoid the stigma of the "intellectual woman" which anti-Jacobins assigned to radicals such as Wollstonecraft.⁵²

⁵⁰ Butler, 96; Ty, 103; London, *Women and Property*, 199; and Amanda Gilroy, Introduction to her edition of West's *A Tale of the Times*, xii.

⁵¹ Nancy E. Johnson, for instance, notes the pervasive nature of this strategy in the anti-Jacobin novel; see Johnson, "The 'French Threat' in Anti-Jacobin Novels of the 1790s," in *Illicit Sex: Identity Politics in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Thomas DiPiero and Pat Gill (Athens, GA, and London: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 182-202.

⁵² "[W]hile men's novels were openly political," Wood argues, "women's novels were more subtly so, and approached political issues through a number of ideologically related categories, such as gender, class, and domesticity" (56). At the same time, however, it should be noted that both male and female anti-Jacobin novelists shared an instrumentalist view of the novel as a form they could use for political ends.

That West devotes her attention to a marriage threatened and eventually destroyed by radical ideas, moreover, seems highly apposite given Burke's tendency to describe the concepts of society and nation in legalistic terms ("contract," "partnership," "corporation," and so on) that imply union.⁵³

West encourages a political reading of James and Geraldine's marriage when she depicts that relationship as a yoking of widely disparate values and outlooks. James is a child of privilege, having received a University education, gone on the grand tour of Europe, inherited an estate clear of encumbrances, and taken his ancestral seat in the House of Lords (11-12). His birth connects him vaguely with aristocratic ideals and virtues, but his own conduct and character align him primarily with some of the worst faults associated with his privileged class: "Nature intended him to be humane and beneficent; but a neglect of discipline and constant indulgence had introduced an indolent selfishness" (70). The narrative repeatedly confirms that he pursues a given course of action for reasons that are primarily petty and self-interested: he returns to live on his estate shortly after his marriage, for instance, not because (as his father-in-law recommends) it is the proper thing for a landed gentleman to do but because he is insulted by his sister's and aunt's haughtiness (96), and he is reconciled to his ancestral home not because of a sense of obligation to his tenants but because he enjoys its prospects for hunting, sporting, and drinking parties (113). In *A Tale of*

⁵³ In the *Reflections*, Burke argues that "[s]ociety is indeed a contract. [...] It is a partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; a partnership in every virtue, and in all perfection" (8: 146-47); in *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, he contends that "[t]he idea of a people is the idea of a corporation. It is wholly artificial; and made, like all other legal fictions, by common agreement" (3: 82). For a discussion of Burke's understanding of the nation as a "corporation," see Conniff, *The Useful Cobbler*, chapters 1 and 3. That West was a supporter of Burke is uncontroversial: see her *Elegy on the Death of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (London: T. N. Longman, 1797).

the Times, the figure of James suggests the spectacle of privilege without any corresponding sense of obligation or responsibility, of power without the forms and manners of civil life that countermand selfish inclinations—"All the pleasing illusions," as Burke argues in the *Reflections*, "which made power gentle, and obedience liberal, which harmonized the different shades of life, and which, by a bland assimilation, incorporated into politics the sentiments which beautify and soften private society" (8: 128).

In the early years of their marriage, however, Geraldine is able to harness James's lowly motivations and conduct in order to effect her project to improve the living conditions of her husband's tenants. When she proposes to build a school and new homes and to encourage manufactures among her "colony," James-town (116, 118), he is initially hesitant. A number of factors soon secure his assent—including "[h]er judicious allusion to his favourite pursuits [i.e., hunting and fishing]," "the prospect of the honour being wholly his, while he determined that the difficulties should be exclusively hers," and the fact that the plan to introduce manufactures and otherwise improve the lives of his tenants "would be another triumph over the prejudices of his obstinate aunt" (115)—none of which agrees with her more benevolent sentiments. Geraldine, in other words, manipulates her husband's petty, selfish motivations to achieve broader public ends. As in the poem this scene seems designed to evoke, Alexander Pope's *Epistle to Burlington* (1731), West reconciles private interest and public good by invoking the notion of *concordia discors*.⁵⁴ The depiction of the Monteith

⁵⁴ After detailing the extravagant, tasteless "improvements" that the rich Timon has done to his estate, Pope concludes, "Yet hence the poor are cloath'd, the Hungry fed; / Health to himself, and to his Infants bread / The Lab'rer bears: What his hard Heart denies, / His charitable Vanity supplies" (594); see *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt (London: Methuen, 1963), 588-95.

marriage in its flourishing state suggests an unlikely but functional alliance between privilege and power, on the one hand, and an ethic of obligation and civility on the other—a description of British order, not coincidentally, with which very few anti-Jacobins would disagree.

West's politically suggestive description of the Monteith marriage has significant consequences for the narrative of *A Tale of the Times*. The death-bed advice that Geraldine's surrogate mother, Mrs. Evans, gives to the bride soon after her marriage, for instance, takes on other connotations, recalling some of the central ideas of the debate over history. The steps that Mrs. Evans recommends to Geraldine if she would be a "proper" wife and so maintain a long and loving marriage are made to strongly echo conservative prescriptions for cultivating a "proper" orientation toward the past and the current constitution:

"Keep in mind my oft-repeated maxims, that no human character can be perfect, and that it is dangerous to our peace to contemplate with too steady an eye the failings of those with whom we are intimately connected. [...] Make your husband your friend; endeavour to gain his confidence, and beware of forming dangerous intimacies, unsanctioned by experience, which may tend to lessen your attachment to him. Strive to exalt the preference your charms have excited into firm esteem; and if you should not at first succeed, or not so completely as you wish, do not sink into dejection. Remember, time will overcome every difficulty, and patience will soften every sorrow." (83-84)

Mrs. Evans's advice to Geraldine with respect to her domestic affairs reads like a shorthand list of Burkean criticisms of the supposed radical view of history: beware of the Godwinian

assumption that humans are perfectible, of attending to ideals at the expense of the real, of novelty in social arrangements, and of focussing on perceived faults to the exclusion of consolidated achievements. West's strategy of using domestic scenarios to articulate the appropriate political principles is, moreover, as critics of the apostrophe to Marie-Antoinette have observed, familiar from Burke's *Reflections*.⁵⁵

Geraldine's fall, in fact, can be attributed to her departures from Mrs. Evans's prescriptions for domestic happiness and stability, with each of these deviations having, for anti-Jacobins, a clear parallel in radical historical discourse. Right before Mrs. Evans delivers her counsel, Geraldine claims an uncanny "propensity for determining characters from a mere outline, and condemning or admiring in the gross" (82), or, in other words, an ability to intuit a person's character independent of observation or experience. Set against the empirical traditions of Bacon and Locke so esteemed by conservative figures such as Burke, Walker, and Bisset, this insistence on the superiority of inner emotions (what we would now call "inwardness" or "interiority") is anathema and is treated as such in the narrative. Because of her supposed ability, Geraldine falls in love with and marries a man she barely knows, having imagined rather than discerned his real character:

Miss Powerscourt exercised all her inventive powers to fill up the sketch of lord Monteith's character. She marshalled all the virtues and agreeable qualities, and placed them in the properest stations. Wit was supported by taste and learning, generosity was circumscribed by prudence, and heroism was tempered by the most melting sensibility. In fine, the portrait was enchanting, but the likeness was ideal; the

⁵⁵ See, for instance, Boulton, *The Language of Politics*, chapter 7, and Kelly, "Jane Austen," 289.

fair designer however, like Pygmalion, became deeply enamoured with the creature of her own imagination. (43)

She falls “into the same error of precipitate judgment which she had been formerly guilty of in the case of lord Monteith,” the narrator later informs the reader, when “forming her opinion of [Fitzosborne’s] dangerous character” (171). Although the consequences of her gross misreading of Fitzosborne (seduction and rape) are far more disastrous than those of her ill-advised marriage to James (a dissimilarity of sentiments and interests which is not, the narrative insists, an insurmountable obstacle to a happy marriage), the source of her errors is the same. West uses Geraldine’s tragic fate to illustrate the dangers of trusting in the conclusions of the imagination (associated with the “inner” self and the purportedly delusional idealising of radical politics) instead of those of the judgment (associated, conversely, with the historical forces which anti-Jacobin claim as their own: observation and experience). In *A Tale of the Times*, the heroine falls because, like radical proponents for change, she overvalues interiority and imagination at the expense of empirical observation and lived experience, and not, as Claudia L. Johnson suggests, because she disobeys her father, the “prudent monarch,” and marries the man of her choice.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen*, 7. Johnson’s reading of *A Tale of the Times* is particularly unsatisfying. She calls Sir William (whom she erroneously names “Sir Anthony”) the “moral center” of the novel (7) when, in fact, as Mrs. Evans’s respectful criticism of his plan to have his daughter marry Henry suggests, he is clearly figured as a benevolent but flawed patriarch: “‘You know, Lucy, he is not apt to make observations on people or incidents which do not immediately affect himself. The world slides by unnoticed, if it do not elbow him; and though this may conduce to the tranquillity of his mind, it prevents him from enlarging his stock of information. Can you, however, wonder, from what he has felt and from what he has observed, that he should suppose mutual attachment unnecessary in a union between two worthy people?’” (53-54). Johnson misquotes the latter half of this final sentence out of context to argue that “West frowns on marriages of affection” (16), and she reads the heroine’s fall as a consequence of her earlier rejection of her father’s authority. For further analysis of the problems with Johnson’s approach to West, see Lloyd, “Jane West: A Critical Biography,” 4-8.

Among the keys to Fitzosborne's scheme are his subtle invitations to Geraldine to compare James's character with the virtuous character he stages, and so to render her dissatisfied with her marriage. When Geraldine's friends Lucy Evans and Henry Powerscourt overhear Fitzosborne quietly proposing to placate what he calls James's "savage frenzy" (262), both perceive how he uses his offers of assistance to become a mediator between a man and his wife—a role which certainly encourages a "dangerous intimac[y], unsanctioned by experience, which may tend to lessen [her] attachment" to her husband (83)—and how this strategy allows him to demonise James while establishing a contrast with his own calmer, more appreciative self. Her seducer employs this stratagem to dramatic effect in a scene just prior to her abduction. At the moment Geraldine learns that James has neglected to pay his labourers their wages, she walks across the gallery and, simultaneously, overhears her husband in the midst of a drinking party while she sees Fitzosborne sitting "with a book in his hand in a posture of fixed attention. She never felt the power of contrast so strong before; and a momentary impulse almost tempted her to tear from her finger the witness of that bond which had sealed her misery" (269). Geraldine's unhappy reflections about her marriage lead her to momentarily espouse political⁵⁷ and religious⁵⁸ tenets which West's audience would have easily recognised as radical, thereby inviting the reader to draw the appropriate political

⁵⁷ "Oh splendid wretchedness!" she cries out, "the lonely villager, whom we abridge in his scanty enjoyments, curses this parade of luxury; and the curses of the injured will one day come into judgment against their proud oppressors" (269-70). See also 277.

⁵⁸ Looking at the self-declared Deist, Fitzosborne, as he reads, she says, "All must be right [...] in his bosom. He is neither tortured by remorse nor fear; and can what I have heard of the sceptic's wretched state be just? Perhaps at this moment I should feel some consolation in thinking, that the great Author of the universe is too much engrossed by his own perfections to take cognizance of things below; for then I need not fear his avenging the wrongs of indigence." Only the fortuitous cry of her newborn son averts these blasphemous thoughts, reminding her that "a mother must, for your sak[e], hope that there is a *special* Providence to protect your helpless infancy" (270).

parallels from the heroine's domestic plight. That Fitzosborne orchestrated this entire spectacle to incite these thoughts is later made clear from the text. In this way, the strategies West's villain employs in pursuit of his nefarious plan recall anti-Jacobin characterisations of the ways the radical historical outlook breeds discontent, a point which West clinches by repeatedly and overtly connecting Fitzosborne with radicalism through his affiliations with revolutionary France⁵⁹ and his subversive discourse.⁶⁰

While Fitzosborne's methods work to undermine the duty Geraldine owes her husband, they also lead her to forget the obligations she owes to her closest friends. Lucy has been her best friend since childhood, while the self-denying Henry has proven his sincere friendship by, at her request, refusing her father's proposal that he marry her, a marriage that suited his heart and would have secured him financially. Both intercede when they perceive the tendency of Fitzosborne's conduct but are rejected because Geraldine feels a new sense of obligation toward her seducer. This forgetting of old obligations has familiar ideological resonances, recalling anti-Jacobin charges against radical doctrines which assert (for example) "that the present age had more wisdom than all the preceding ones taken collectively" (251) and "that the present order of things requires the bold hand of some intelligent reformer!" (277). West's narrative condemns Geraldine for her lack of gratitude—an issue Godwin made the subject of debate when, in *Political Justice*, he infamously argued that a "benefactor ought to be esteemed, not because he bestowed a

⁵⁹ Fitzosborne begins the novel in Paris "where he was [...] contemplating the sublime spectacle of a great nation emancipating itself from the fetters of tyranny and superstition" (141); at the novel's end, he dies by his own hand in a French jail while awaiting execution, having escaped James's wrath and made his way back to the "country where he had imbibed all his pestilent notions" (328).

⁶⁰ For examples of some of Fitzosborne's radical arguments, see chapters 27, 33, 34, and 37.

benefit upon me, but because he bestowed it upon a human being" (3: 51)—and, more importantly, for succumbing to the ahistorical ethic such a view was thought to imply.⁶¹ West aligns this prioritising of the present over the past with the suspect arguments of the Deist who, for West, is merely the atheist in disguise. Geraldine, in the final analysis, distrusts Lucy's and Henry's judgments because both insist that Fitzosborne's religious infidelity clearly indicates his villainy. Having listened to her seducer's contentions and observed his staged example, however, she has adopted a more latitudinarian view and instead secretly accuses her friends of "bigotry and censoriousness" (245). West connects her heroine's forgetting of old obligations with a presentism associated with the Godwinian critique of gratitude and, simultaneously, with the discourse which Enlightenment *philosophes* employed against religion, thereby infusing her domestic decisions with tenets widely associated with radicalism.

Geraldine's summary of her own fall reveals, in turn, that her seducer's most effective tactic was his tantilising evocation of the perfect union. She long ago realised that James was not her ideal match, she confesses toward the novel's end, but she had previously consoled herself after the fashion Mrs. Evans prescribed. Only after she had met Fitzosborne and he had seduced her husband, encouraging his gambling and extra-marital affair, did she "feel the power of contrast which [she] had hitherto indignantly avoided" (310-11). The

⁶¹ Anti-Jacobin novelists frequently parodied Godwin's interpretation of gratitude. When, for instance, Vernon learns that Fenton has seduced his love, Amelia, in *The Vagabond*, he exclaims, "this moment I would tear your soul from your body, did not *gratitude* for your father prevent me." "Do you not know," Fenton replies, "that *gratitude* is a crime? because—." "The man without gratitude" Vernon interrupts, "is a companion alone for the blackest fiends of hell. The affections of angelic mind are lost on his callous soul. He may talk as he will of benevolence, but *self* is the centre of all his actions; and because he will not *return* a favour, he would meanly seek to destroy the obligation" (79-80).

“‘contrast’” that he manipulatively produced, she argues, introduced the prospect of the ideal marriage:

“The elegant commendations of Fitzosborne taught me, that I was not a being of a vulgar mould. [...] His glowing descriptions, though delicate as the ear of purity itself could desire, pointed out a fairy region of felicity, the abode of congenial minds, where human foibles and human sorrows never intrude. Infatuated by this unreal vision, the blameless occupations by which I had previously diverted painful reflections became insipid. Wrongs were converted into unpardonable injuries, and inattentions grew into wrongs. I no longer recollected those who were less happy than myself. The pang of wounded love lost its tenderness, while it assumed the indignant spirit of offended pride; and my rebel heart, imperceptibly alienated from its lawful possessor, admitted an usurped claim.” (311)

The implications of Geraldine’s account of her seduction, once translated into the political terms which the narrative invites, are unambiguous. Proponents of radical politics, anti-Jacobins argue, flatter human nature and employ a deceptively “moral” discourse to help conjure up visions of the ideal future socio-political arrangement in which all conflict will be neutralised. In doing so, they breed dissatisfaction with British order, past and present. Not surprisingly, then, West’s novel comes to conclusions that are appropriately Burkean: radical discourse is specious (since the basis of the contrast is invariably exaggerated or manipulated), self-interested (Fitzosborne, after all, seduces Geraldine with the hope of later marrying her and so gaining control of her money), and abstractly idealistic (the perfect union, domestic or political, is unattainable).

A Tale of the Times thus traces the collapse of the Monteith marriage while insisting on the political reverberations of Geraldine's increasing dissatisfaction with her domestic surroundings, and ultimately argues, as Burke had, that radicalism threatens to destroy the inherited system of manners and principles that supports the present order. "When posterity shall know," Prudentia declares, the impious, immoral principles which

characterize the close of the eighteenth century, it will cease to wonder at the calamities which history will then have recorded. Such engines are sufficiently powerful to overturn governments, and to shake the deep-founded base of the firmest empires. Should it therefore be told to future ages, that the capricious dissolubility (if not the absolute nullity) of the nuptial tie and the annihilation of parental authority are among the blasphemies uttered by the *moral* instructors of these times; should they hear, that law was branded as a vain and even unjust attempt to bring individual actions under the restrictions of general rule; that chastity was defined to mean only individuality of affection; that religion was degraded into sentimental effusion; [...] should, I say, generations yet unborn hear this, they will not ascribe the annihilation of thrones and altars to the successful arms of France, but to those principles which, by dissolving domestic confidence and undermining private worth, paved the way for universal confusion. (198-99)

Like Burke, West's narrator imagines Britain's historically accrued order standing on the brink of destruction, and she heralds its long-established manners and principles as foundational to its survival. The novel registers the threat to British society by insisting on the political resonances of Geraldine's growing discontent with her domestic situation. In

allowing Fitzosborne to act as a mediator between herself and her husband, in agreeing to hold a clandestine correspondence with another man,⁶² and in indulging in the contrasts which her seducer artfully produced, Geraldine violates traditional codes of feminine propriety. If Britons abandon their cultural heritage for the siren call of Jacobin politics, *A Tale of the Times* suggests, a similarly tragic fate awaits them. The only antidote to the seductive but ultimately destructive tenets of radical thought, West's novel concludes, is "a close attention to the costume of manners" (6).

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In the opening pages of Elizabeth Hamilton's *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, Bridgetina Botherim's ignorant but affectionate mother announces that her daughter "has read every book in the circulating library, and Mr. Glib [a fellow misguided new philosopher] declares she knows them better than he does himself."⁶³ "Indeed, mamma," Bridgetina replies, "I do no such thing. [...] do you think I would take the trouble of going through all the dry stuff in Mr. Glib's collection—history and travels, sermons and matters of fact? I hope I have a better taste! You know very well I never read any thing but novels and metaphysics" (38). As if to assure her readers that the other members of the radical troupe ridiculed in the novel regard all "matters of fact" in a similar light, a letter by Mr. Myope

⁶² On the ideological significance of West's strategic use of letters, see Nicola Watson, 76-78.

⁶³ Hamilton, *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, ed. Claire Grogan (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2000), 38. References are to this edition.

(yet another Godwin caricature) later informs us that “[t]he superfluous books” of Glib’s library—“such as history, travels, natural philosophy, and divinity”—will be sold to help pay for the planned emigration to Africa while “[t]he novels and metaphysical essays [will be] reserved for the instruction of the philosophers” (162). In our first introduction to the virtuous Harriet Orwell, conversely, we are told that, after having “performed every domestic task, and having compleatly regulated the family economy for the day,” Harriet “was quietly seated at her work with her aunt and sister, listening to Hume’s *History of England*, as it was read to them by a little orphan girl she had herself instructed” (73).⁶⁴ Whereas Hamilton depicts radical figures such as Glib and Myope selling off all their volumes of history in a bid to found a new utopian community, thus signalling their complete disregard for the past, she affirms the Orwell family’s association with exemplary “British” values (economy, industry, domesticity, literacy, and charity) through a communal act of reading history. That everyone present in this latter scene is female suggests, furthermore, the integral (albeit, unquestionably subordinate) role Hamilton assigns women as the “reproducers and custodians of cultural continuity.”⁶⁵

Hamilton’s juxtaposition here of two very different versions of community (one unified by its history, the other unified in devaluing it), as should now be evident, is symptomatic of the ways in which the historical discourses of the revolutionary period shape

⁶⁴ Hamilton’s approval of Hume’s *History of England* (1754–62) indicates the authoritative place of history (as historiography) in anti-Jacobin discourse: while an author such as Walker traces many of the radical positions he despises back to Humean philosophy, anti-Jacobins rarely call into question the value of his *History*.

⁶⁵ Kelly, “Gender and Memory in Post-Revolutionary Women’s Writing,” in *Memory and Memorials, 1789–1914*, ed. Matthew Campbell, Jacqueline M. Labbe, and Sally Shuttleworth (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 119.

the anti-Jacobin novel. The struggle for the authority of history that took place in the overtly political treatises, pamphlets, and speeches of reformists and conservatives in the early 1790s was not an isolated affair but rather part of a broader cultural phenomenon, one that played a crucial role in the development of the period's most unembarrassedly political and didactically over-determined form. The novels examined in this chapter all pursue strategies that, whatever their differences, suggest an alliance between the anti-Jacobin cause and the forces of "history"—registered variously as empirical observation and experience, continuity and futurity, and the Burkean principle of inheritance—while insisting on radicalism's suspect relationship with each. Whether they are illustrating the threat that radicals pose to the physical media that ensure the transference of history (books, libraries and museums, mothers and daughters), "historicising" the novel in ways that seem to anticipate the form's early nineteenth-century transformations, or using domestic tragedy to demonstrate the potential political consequences of an unsympathetic orientation toward one's established contexts (domestic or national/political/historical), anti-Jacobin novelists at the turn of the century are rigorously consistent in their message.

CHAPTER THREE

*The Crumbling (E)state: The Problem of History in the Novel of Reform,
1793-1800*

In the closing chapters of Charlotte Smith's *The Young Philosopher* (1798), Medora Glenmorris narrates the tale of her capture and imprisonment at the hands of the self-important Mr. Darnell. When she first enters the room in which she is to be held captive, she carefully inspects her prison:

“There were two doors in the room where I was left to my contemplations; one from a passage by which I entered, the other I unbolted, and found it led into a closet which was lined with arras, while the room adjoining, where the bed stood, was of dark wainscot in little pannels, and ornamented only with two full length pictures of some former squire and his spouse, possessors of the mansion [...]; they were superb, and probably it was expected they would impress me with veneration; but the only sentiment they inspired was fearful curiosity to know if they did not conceal behind them any door or entrance to the room.”¹

Darnell has placed her in a chamber with these portraits, she believes, in hopes that they will inspire her with the proper “veneration” for his supposed family (he is by all appearances low-born, and the idea that he is related to the people in the portraits is dubious) and so induce her to marry him. Because Medora was raised by reform-minded parents who sought

¹ Charlotte Smith, *The Young Philosopher*, ed. Elizabeth Kraft (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 314. References are to this edition.

exile in America to avoid living in the hopelessly corrupt England, however, she is entirely immune to such feelings. Rather than inspiring her with respect for her abductor and so his marriage offer, the paintings only raise the suspicion that they are hiding a secret passage that, she fears, might be used for a more nefarious purpose. Instead of exerting any influence upon her, in other words, the portraits of Darnell's venerable "relations"—those "“monuments of impotent vanity”" (314)—appear to her to be nothing more than facades to facilitate a tyrannical plot.

The ease with which Medora resists the controlling influence of the past in this scene is remarkable only in that it is a rare event in Smith's novel. A review of *The Young Philosopher* reveals that such small triumphs are overshadowed by larger and much more devastating defeats. The ability Medora demonstrates in the passage quoted above, after all, does not prevent the permanent scarring of her admirable mother's mind or the wrongful imprisonment of her father—two gross injustices, Smith insists, enabled by the "“inhuman prejudices”" (352) that the English inherit and bequeath from generation to generation. At the novel's end, the Glenmorrises prepare to hobble back to America, having secured for Medora a share of her rightful inheritance and a worthy husband to boot, but the past weighs so heavily on them as long as they are in England that it threatens their liberty, their intellects, and even their lives.

This chapter will suggest that reformist novels of the 1790s such as Smith's *The Old Manor House* (1793), William Godwin's *St. Leon* (1799), and Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* (1800) represent the determining power of the past as a deleterious, disabling force.

To achieve this end, “Jacobin”² novelists engage the discourses of history that emerged during the French Revolution debate. Above all, they contest Burke’s powerful discourse, and they do so, as the authors of the most prominent non-fictional replies to the *Reflections* did, by turning his ideas and imagery against him. In the *Reflections*, Burke argues that any attempt to amend British society must be informed by an appreciation of its historically determined nature and an awareness that it is a product of its past. By treating that construct as a corporate inheritance, he contends, the British ensure that each generation enjoys the socio-political benefits that have accrued over time while leaving open the possibility of improvement by way of alteration or addition. In the novels examined in this chapter, there is a marked attention to, and travesty of, the tropes and ideas Burke routinely employs: the estate and inheritances in general; the influence of customs, prejudices, and traditions; and the relationship between past, present, and future. In works such as *The Old Manor House*, *St. Leon*, and *Castle Rackrent*, castles and estates, which act as metaphors for the nation, are crumbling and mismanaged; prejudices and traditions only perpetuate old inequities and follies indefinitely; and characters consumed by the past isolate themselves, and often those around them, from present-day experience. These novels subvert the logic of inheritance and, in turn, argue that a commitment to the past such as Burke’s threatens both present and future.

While reform-minded authors such as Smith, Godwin, and Edgeworth create a variety

² Although the term “Jacobin” was originally a term of opprobrium that anti-Jacobins forced upon their opponents, I use it here, as Kelly does, as a label for a heterogeneous group of reform-minded writers. “English Jacobinism,” Kelly argues, “was neither a monolithic party nor a creation of the Anti-Jacobin papers and pamphleteers,” and it “manifested itself, therefore, in different ways” (2); see Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel 1780-1805* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).

of scenarios to explore the baneful effects of a societal model that too-readily embraces the governing influence of the past, they also seek to demonstrate that neither the fictions they write nor the ideologies they develop, as their anti-Jacobin counterparts often allege, argue for a wholesale rejection of history. Instead, like their opponents, they attempt to enlist the authority of history for their cause. In *The Old Manor House*, for example, Smith sets her novel in the 1775-79 period and takes her hero to America, and thereby implicitly undermines the idea of war with France by suggesting that British opposition to the American Revolution offers the closest historical parallel to British opposition to the French Revolution. In *St. Leon*, alternatively, the hero's efforts to implement his projects for reform fail because he attempts to stand "outside" of history, suggesting that Godwin (like Burke) rejects approaches to change that neglect the empirically verifiable aspects of human existence. In *Castle Rackrent*, on the other hand, Edgeworth challenges the category of "official" history even as she affirms the project of history in its most basic sense, praising biographical forms as more "true" than the constructed narratives of "general" history; in doing so, she provides a sceptical approach to reading history familiar from other reformist texts of the period. These authors attack the determining power of the past whenever it threatens their progressive ideals, in other words, but they also use various appeals to history to advance their agendas and to defend themselves against the charge that they are committed to an abstract, ahistorical outlook. The idea of history, they collectively insist, is not threatened by a philosophy predicated on a rejection of the determining power of the past whenever that influence enables corruption, perpetuates abuse, or stultifies life in the present.

As British enthusiasm for French-style reforms waned in the face of the Terror,

loyalist reaction, and the French wars of expansion, reformist novelists increasingly came to accord the past ever-more expansive powers of control. In *The Old Manor House*, which was published in 1793, the influence Mrs. Rayland holds over Orlando and the rest of the Somerive family is debilitating, but it is largely limited to her lifetime. When she dies and Orlando inherits Rayland Hall, the protagonists escape her governing grasp. In the reformist novels published in the later 1790s, however, the determining power of the past is represented as more formidable and insidious. In *St. Leon*, Bethlem Gabor is ultimately consumed by the misanthropy he feels as a result of his family's murder, and St. Leon's son, Charles, ends up embracing the chivalric code that was the original source of his father's demise. In *Castle Rackrent*, the editor's insistence that his text is a "'tal[e] of other times'"³ would seem to suggest that the past depicted in the narrative has since been eclipsed, but the novel's notorious ambiguity and its thorough engagement with Burkean historical discourse suggest that Edgeworth is unable in any straightforward way to reduce the past to a disempowered historical relic. In some ways, this increasingly despairing assessment of the past's ability to determine the present and future reflects the general "sense of loss and confusion" experienced by supporters of the reformist movement in 1790s' Britain.⁴ But these novelists' interest in representing history is also significant in terms of the narratives and formal adaptations it encouraged. The impetus to represent the past in the fiction of the 1790s and early 1800s, as this study argues throughout, is inherently political, an outgrowth

³ Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent* (1800), in *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, ed. Marilyn Butler and Mitzi Myers (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999, 2003), 1: 6. References are to this edition.

⁴ Nancy E. Johnson, *The English Jacobin Novel on Rights, Property and the Law: Critiquing the Contract* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 155.

of the Revolution debate and the historical discourses it generated. One consequence of the “Jacobin” enterprise to represent the oppressive effects of the past’s influence, and so undermine the conservative position, is Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent*, a novel long heralded as “the first regional novel”—and arguably “the gateway to the ampler world of the historical novel.”⁵

**“I NEVER SAW THE LIKE OF THIS OLD HOUSE”: ESTATE AND NATION IN
CHARLOTTE SMITH’S *THE OLD MANOR HOUSE* (1793)**

In the summer of 1792, Smith was a well-known, popular author. She had just completed *Desmond*, a novel she describes in the preface as “so unlike” her previous works that she fears its “political remarks” may alienate her audience: “For that asperity of remark, which will arise on the part of those whose political tenets I may offend, I am prepared. Those who object to the matter, will probably arraign the manner, and exclaim against the impropriety of making a book of entertainment the vehicle of political discussion. I am however conscious that [...] I have not sacrificed truth to any party.”⁶ While the reviewers’ responses were “generally favourable,”⁷ its admiring treatment of the French Revolution and

⁵ George Watson, Introduction to his edition of *Castle Rackrent* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), vii.

⁶ Smith, *Desmond*, ed. Antje Blank and Janet M. Todd (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2001), 45, 47.

⁷ Loraine Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith: A Critical Biography* (Basingstoke: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 152.

its inspiring ideals did indeed draw “some strong criticism.”⁸ Larger forces were at work, however, which would soon make it increasingly difficult to profess favourable opinions in print. Shortly after Smith published *Desmond* and started writing her next novel, British supporters of the French Revolution received two shocks in quick succession: in August, supporters of the new French government attacked the Tuileries palace and imprisoned the royal family, and, less than a month later, orchestrated the infamous September Massacres in Paris. If Smith in early 1792 was already aware that discussing politics and supporting the Revolution in her novels might have an adverse impact on her sales, as the preface to *Desmond* suggests, then she now had to consider how this violent turn of events in France might render her opinions even more unwelcome. Still politically committed to the French Revolution and still in agreement with those who suggested that the British constitution stood in need of similar reforms, Smith decided that if she wanted to continue to provide for her family with the profits of her writing and yet remain true to her political beliefs, she had to adopt a less explicit approach in her next novel.⁹

Written rapidly in this atmosphere and published in early 1793, *The Old Manor House* was reprinted throughout the nineteenth century more often than any of her other

⁸ Jacqueline M. Labbe, Introduction to her edition of *The Old Manor House* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2002), 13.

⁹ See Labbe, Introduction to her edition of *The Old Manor House*, 26-27, and Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith*, 174.

works,¹⁰ and, although Smith has received scholarly attention only relatively recently,¹¹ it remains her most accessible¹² and discussed text today.¹³ What its critics have not always appreciated, however, is that the work is (as Loraine Fletcher, Smith's most recent and thorough biographer writes) the "most subtle of [Smith's] novels."¹⁴ A little more than twenty years ago, one scholar, reflecting what she apparently regarded as current critical consensus, wrote that in *The Old Manor House* Smith "sets aside French questions in a story resembling the sentimental narratives of her early period."¹⁵ In fact, Smith adapts sentimental narrative to the exploration of some of the fundamental issues raised by the French Revolution. As this section of the chapter demonstrates, *The Old Manor House* firmly

¹⁰ Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith*, 189. The British Library Integrated Catalogue has editions of the novel for the years 1810, 1837, 1840, 1844, and 1878.

¹¹ Among the works that helped reverse Smith's critical neglect are Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski, eds., *Fetter'd or Free?*; Ty, *Unsex'd Revolutionaries: Five Women Novelists of the 1790s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); and Carol Shiner Wilson and Joel Haefner, eds., *Re-Visioning Romanticism: British Women Writers, 1776-1837* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994).

¹² At least four modern editions of the novel exist: Anne Henry Ehrenpreis's (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), Janet M. Todd's (London: Pandora Press, 1987), Ferris's (vol. 6 of *The Works of Charlotte Smith*, ed. Stuart Curran [London: Pickering and Chatto, 2006]), and Labbe's (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2002). References are to this latter edition.

¹³ In addition to the introductions for the above editions, the more recent considerations of the novel include Joseph F. Bartolomeo, "Subversion of Romance in *The Old Manor House*," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 33, no. 3 (1993): 645-57; Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith*, 163-91, and "Charlotte Smith's Emblematic Castles," *Critical Survey* 4 (1992): 3-8; Angela Keane, *Women Writers and the English Nation in the 1790s: Romantic Belongings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 96-102; Labbe, "Metaphoricity and the Romance of Property in *The Old Manor House*," *Novel* 34 (2001): 216-31; Cheryl Nixon, "Legal and Familial Recordkeeping: Chancery Court Records and Charlotte Smith's *The Old Manor House*," *Literature Compass* 2, no. 1 (2005): 1-24; Janina Nordius, "'A Kind of Living Death': Gothicizing the Colonial Encounter in Charlotte Smith's *The Old Manor House*," *English Studies* 86, no. 1 (2005): 40-50; and Uddén, chapters 4 and 5.

¹⁴ Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith*, 170.

¹⁵ Elizabeth R. Napier, "Charlotte Smith," in *British Novelists, 1660-1800*, ed. Martin C. Battestin, vol. 39 of *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Detroit: Gale, 1985), 2: 437.

grounds itself in the politics of the 1790s through its engagement with the period's historical paradigms.

Smith's *The Old Manor House* subverts the Burkean discourse of history by exploiting one of Burke's favourite tropes, the estate, using it to characterise his appeal to history as a deadly entrapment by the past. Through a network of associations, Smith suggests a symbolic relationship between, on the one hand, Rayland Hall and its inner workings, and, on the other, the British nation and its politics. Rayland Hall is owned and presided over by Mrs. Rayland, an eccentric spinster whose dedication to the past is figured in terms designed to recall Burke. Because she has the power to determine who will inherit the estate, she exerts control over the generations who follow her. This inter-generational influence is depicted in the novel as paralytic, encouraging among the younger generations stasis instead of action, sycophancy instead of self-determination, and anxiety instead of security. The novel also reveals that a commitment to the past such as Mrs. Rayland's, rather than producing the ordered society Burke imagines, enables various kinds of manipulative, exploitative, and criminal behaviours. As tyrannical and long lasting as it is, however, Mrs. Rayland's control is limited to her lifetime, suggesting that the determining power of the past is similarly constrained. For Smith, then, Mrs. Rayland represents a static relationship between past and present that she associates with Burke. She rejects this model in favour of the vital, process-defined one that underwrites, for instance, her condemnation of British policy in the 1790s—and she does so in such a way so as to affirm her commitment to history. Setting her novel in a distinct historical period, Smith implicitly contrasts British policy then (1775-79) and now (1790-93) to argue that British opposition to the French

Revolution is misguided. She invokes history to suggest that, in their resistance to new forms of government founded on notions of consent, Britons have repeatedly set themselves in opposition to the progressive course of history heralded by her reformist contemporaries.¹⁶ In *The Old Manor House*, Smith uses the historical discourses of the period to interrogate the British social contract, the national myths that support it, and the national policies it produces.

Smith identifies Rayland Hall and its proprietor as relics of the English past, connecting them to the seventeenth century in particular. “[T]he Old Hall,” she writes in the first chapter, “had not received the slightest alteration, either in its environs or its furniture, since it was embellished for the marriage of [Mrs. Rayland’s] father Sir Hildebrand, in 1698” (40). Later in the novel, we learn that a “[g]reat part of the house retained the same appearance of defensive strength” it had during the civil war (1642-49) when “Rayland Hall had held out against a party of Fairfax’s army that had closely besieged it” (61). Similarly, Mrs. Rayland is introduced as “a specimen of the magnificence of the last century” (43), and this point is confirmed repeatedly throughout the narrative. In her conduct, for example, she “pique[s] herself upon following the notable maxims of her mother” (47); in her letter-writing, she comically “pique[s] herself on spelling as her father spelt, and disdain[s] those idle novelties by which a few superfluous letters are saved” (102). Mrs. Rayland is, moreover, incapable of reading the present in its own terms and must instead revert to the

¹⁶ Smith’s strategy of displacing the concerns of the present onto the past is a common one familiar from other novels in the period. In *The Vagabond*, for example, as we have seen, Walker uses the Gordon Riots as an implicit cipher of the French Revolution. Both authors invoke an earlier time frame in the place of the present to create a sense of “distance,” enabling them to analyse present events from the supposedly detached vantage point of the historian.

contexts and discourses of the previous century. When she approves of Orlando's choice to join the military, for instance, she does so because she associates a career in the army with her grandfather, Orlando's namesake, who "appeared with distinguished honour in the service of his master, against the rebel Monmouth in 1685, though not of the religion of King James" (238); when she speaks of the American Revolution, Mr. Somerive reports, she views it as "a quarrel with people whom she considers as the descendants of the Regicides, against whom her ancestors drew their swords" (160). Surrounded by portraits of her ancestors and taking a "peculiar satisfaction in relating the history of the heroes and dames of her family" (49), Mrs. Rayland and the house she occupies are a microcosm of the late seventeenth century preserved and unnaturally extended into the present moment.

In organising her plot around a manor that has not been altered in almost 100 years and which is presided over by a past-oriented proprietor, Smith invites readers to recall the post-1688 constitutional settlement and the ways in which it was invoked in the early stages of the French Revolution debate. Burke's opponents roundly objected to the reading of the Glorious Revolution he articulated in the *Reflections*, particularly his claim that "the English nation did at that time most solemnly renounce and abdicate [the right to elect kings], for themselves and for all their posterity for ever" (8: 70). For those Britons who, like Smith, supported a reformist agenda, the notion that one generation could determine any question for all others was, as Paine writes in the first part of *Rights of Man*, particularly abhorrent:

There never did, there never will, and there never can exist a parliament, or any description of men, or any generation of men, in any country, possessed of the right or the power of binding and controuling posterity to the "*end of time*," or of

commanding for ever how the world shall be governed, or who shall govern it [...].

Every age and generation must be as free to act for itself, *in all cases*, as the ages and generations which preceded it. The vanity and presumption of governing beyond the grave, is the most ridiculous and insolent of all tyrannies. (91-92)

The Old Manor House novelises this explicitly political theme of the previous generation “governing beyond the grave”; Mrs. Rayland’s control over the Rayland estate, after all, allows her to determine and adversely influence the lives of the rising generation. The very terms of Paine’s rejection of Burke’s position are also reflected in Mrs. Rayland’s character, which is described over the course of the narrative as a combination of “vanity,” “presumption,” and “insolence.” Smith defines Mrs. Rayland in this way in order to stress her compromised position: if her Burkean worldview really indicated a commitment to the values that ideology supposedly enshrines, then she would submit her property to the usual course of inheritance (primogeniture). Instead, her vanity prevails over her professed beliefs and she refuses to name a heir for fear of losing her control of those around her, suggesting that her position (like Burke’s) disguises other, more self-interested motives.

The network of associations Smith creates for Rayland Hall and its owner—particularly their affiliations with the period that produced the highly debated constitutional settlement, with stasis and resistance to change, and with obsolescence and anachronism—has other political resonances. Mrs. Lennard’s comments on the condition of the manor, for instance, are a devastating assessment of the condition of the British nation in the 1790s: “I never saw the like of this old house—it will tumble about our ears, I reckon, one day or ’nother, and yet my lady is always repairing it [...]; but the wainscoting of this

here end of the wing [...] has been up above an hundred years; and we may patch it, and patch it, and yet be never the nearer: but, for my part, I suppose it will last my time” (263).

Similarly, when Smith declares that “with [Mrs. Rayland] the age of chivalry did not seem to be passed” (265), she is explicitly connecting the house’s owner with Burke, his famous lament for chivalry, and the arguments he employed to support his reading of the French Revolution. Smith’s depiction of Rayland Hall and its proprietor is thus designed to provoke a consideration—and, in doing so, articulate a withering critique—of the British social contract in the 1790s and the Burkean logic that supports it.¹⁷

Smith develops her critique of “things as they are,” first, by demonstrating how the overbearing influence of the past renders her hero, Orlando Somerive, static and subservient. According to the law of primogeniture, Orlando’s older brother Philip should inherit the Rayland estate, but because their capricious relation Mrs. Rayland controls the inheritance, the course of transmission is uncertain. After the improvident Philip falls out of favour with her, Orlando is generally recognised as her heir-expectant but not her heir-at-law, a status that brings him no security because it is presumptive rather than legally binding. As a result, Orlando is largely immobilised in the first three volumes of the novel, torn between his desire to secure the financial well-being of his family and his desire to pursue his own happiness in the form of his love, Monimia. For the former reason, his father insists that he refer all questions regarding his future to Mrs. Rayland. Thus, when his obnoxious uncle, Mr. Woodford, offers to apprentice him in his business (volume one, chapters 6-8); when the

¹⁷ For other readings that suggest that Smith uses the manor as a metaphor for Britain, see Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith*, and “Emblematic Castles”; Ferris’s Introduction to her edition of *The Old Manor House*; and Labbe’s Introduction to her edition of *The Old Manor House*.

rakish General Tracy proposes to procure him a commission in the military (volume two, chapters 1-12); or when the cringing arch-deacon, Dr. Hollybourn, presents an advantageous marriage offer in the form of his daughter (volume three, chapter 8), Orlando must first consult with Mrs. Rayland. In each case, her judgment is governed by her antiquated prejudices—a reverence for nobility in general and her ancestors in particular, a contempt for commerce and the new monied classes, and a feudal understanding of social relationships—and her desire, “like another Elizabeth” who “could not bear openly to acknowledge her successor,” to keep Orlando “dependent” (242). Although Joseph Bartolomeo is right that Orlando’s “passivity and dependence”¹⁸ mark him out as a parody of the romance hero, it is important to acknowledge that his paralysis is also a consequence of the determining power of the past.

The debilitating influence that Mrs. Rayland and the Hall exert extends beyond Orlando to include the entire Somerive family, and Smith thereby suggests that the current order creates antagonistic tensions between generations. Smith establishes this point especially through Mr. Somerive, who is, as Ferris argues, “the novel’s most evocative exploration of the [...] deleterious effects” of the Burkean understanding of the nation as an inheritance.¹⁹ Mr. Somerive is particularly anxious to secure his family financially before he dies because his estate is entailed to his profligate son Philip (who hovers over the house at West Wolverton like a vulture, waiting to convert it into cash to support his profligate lifestyle), whereas the Rayland estate (which, if the inheritance were sure, would fall to him

¹⁸ Bartolomeo, “The Subversion of Romance,” 652.

¹⁹ Ferris, Introduction to her edition of *The Old Manor House*, xv.

and his heirs) is instead subject to the caprice of a proud old woman. Thus situated, he sometimes counsels his children, against his own conscience, to pursue the more prudent course of action first and foremost. For this reason, Mr. Somerive, as loving and intelligent as he is, advises Isabella to carefully consider General Tracy's proposal to marry her, despite "the disparity of age," since Tracy promises to make "very great settlements if she accepted of him" (285). His insistence that Orlando refer any subject regarding his future to Mrs. Rayland's consideration is also a consequence of his concern for his family, and he does so even though he is all too aware that, in recommending Orlando's deference and inactivity, he is doing nothing to secure his son's future if (as Mr. Woodford warns him) the "peevish old woman [...] dies and bilks him at last" (94). Anxiety concerning the future welfare of his family and the moral compromises he has made to further it overtake Mr. Somerive before the novel's end and he dies "of a broken heart" (429), the casualty of a larger inter-generational struggle. In *The Old Manor House*, Smith uses the plight of the Somerive family to demonstrate the kinds of anxieties and pressures plaguing the rising generation in a system that empowers previous generations with a controlling influence akin to Mrs. Rayland's.

Smith continues her attack on a society organised around a Burkean dedication to the past with her depiction of the politics of Rayland Hall, which emphasises the kinds of disorder and abuse Mrs. Rayland's rule enables. Although Mrs. Rayland owns the manor, Monimia's purported great aunt²⁰ and the house's "femme de charge," Mrs. Lennard, is "so much superior to her mistress in understanding" that she "govern[s] her entirely" (43, 44).

²⁰ As Labbe notes, the novel is purposefully ambiguous on the issue of Monimia's parentage; see the Introduction to her edition of *The Old Manor House*, 15.

While she “smile[s] internally” (49) at Mrs. Rayland’s reverence for her ancestors and their antiquated ideas, Mrs. Lennard outwardly appears to agree with her sentiments to gain her trust and exploit those prejudices when it serves her own interests. When her charge, Monimia, is suspected of doing something that might endanger her place in Mrs. Rayland’s will, for instance, Mrs. Lennard is careful to draw attention away from her niece by artfully praising Mrs. Rayland’s ancestors and family history, and thus effectively “blunt[ing] the spirit of enquiry” (50). The problem with Mrs. Rayland’s rule, then, is that her esteem for things old makes her vulnerable to manipulation at the hands of self-serving servants.

Because she has lost control of her own house, Rayland Hall has become part of an illegal smuggling operation run by her coachman, Mr. Snelcraft, and her butler, Mr. Pattenson, who mysteriously holds Mrs. Lennard “in his power” (84) for reasons Smith never clarifies. Like Mrs. Lennard, Mr. Pattenson and Mr. Snelcraft abuse their positions to enrich themselves—and, in the case of Pattenson, to seduce the women he oversees. Smith’s description of the domestic politics of the manor, as is made clear early in the first volume of the novel, is explicitly aligned with the politics of the nation: “In a great house there are among the servants as many cabals, and as many schemes, as among the leaders of a great nation” (83). The suggestion that Rayland Hall is governed by self-interested cronies—to whom, Smith insists repeatedly, Mrs. Rayland submits “rather from habit than from choice, and had not resolution to throw off a yoke she had been accustomed to so many years” (430)²¹—represents an unambiguous assessment of the corrupt state of the British political system in the 1790s.

²¹ See also pp. 413, 468, and 469.

Smith also uses the architecture of the old manor to turn Burke's estate analogy against him. As the notorious outlaw Jonas Wilkins explains, Pattenson's smuggling ring uses "Madam's cellars" and a door that "nobody knows nothing about" in order to stow away their "goods" (153). That the architecture of Smith's emblematic house, particularly the substructure upon which it is built, facilitates this criminal activity is a purposeful travesty of the estate imagery that Burke employs in the *Reflections* when, for instance, he chastises the French for disowning their ancient constitution, which he claims "possessed in some parts the walls, and in all the foundations of a noble and venerable castle. You might have repaired those walls; you might have built on those old foundations" (8: 85). By implicating the "cellars" and ancient construction of Rayland Hall in the corruption overseen by Mrs. Rayland's servants, Smith suggests that the "old foundations" of the house, and the nation, are rotten. At the same time, however, Smith uses the manor's design to suggest another, more hopeful point: the possibility of a distinctly different future emerging from the oppressive past. It is, after all, the secret passageway between the base of one of the manor's turrets and Monimia's room that enables the young lovers' relationship to blossom and, consequently, allows them to succeed Mrs. Rayland as the owners of Rayland Hall. In Smith's novel, the architecture of the manor itself, unbeknownst to its manipulated owner and the corrupt servants who govern the house, provides the means through which the determining power of the past may be evaded and, eventually, overcome.

If the secret and forgotten passageways in *The Old Manor House* imply that such a past-oriented governing order is vulnerable to the kind of subversion that Orlando and Monimia's relationship represents, then Mrs. Rayland's death makes a similar point,

suggesting that the duration of its reign is limited. When Orlando returns from America to discover that his patron has died, he is at long last free to actively pursue his heart's desire, Monimia, whom he instantly marries once he has located her. Orlando, it is true, does not shed entirely the passivity and deference that defined him while Mrs. Rayland held sway over his future: he hides his wife and his marriage from his mother for an extended period of time, for instance, fearing she would be "secretly adverse" (483) to an alliance that does nothing to secure him financially. As inept a romance hero as Orlando is, however, his decision to marry Monimia is a remarkable instance of self-determination, of looking forward to a future he can define rather than backward to a past that shapes it for him: "Poor as he was, he had long since determined, that if she was restored to him, he would marry her, and trust to Providence, and his own exertions, for her support" (482). Mrs. Rayland's ability to influence Orlando's future in ways that contradict his deepest desires, however powerful, is circumscribed by her death: "The little withered figure, bent down with age and infirmity," the narrator claims, is "the last of a race [...] which in a few years, perhaps a few months, might no more be remembered" (49). The novel ends in a gesture loaded with reformist implications, with Orlando and Monimia taking possession of Rayland Hall and re-decorating the manor to bring it into the eighteenth century: "without spoiling that look of venerable antiquity for which it was so remarkable, [Orlando] collected within it every comfort and every elegance of modern life" (521). Whereas in *The Young Philosopher* the Glenmorrises must ultimately abandon England to return to the only place genuine political

justice is possible, America,²² Mrs. Rayland's death and Orlando and Monimia's succession in *The Old Manor House* suggest that England is still salvageable.

While Smith thus treats the influence of the past to a thoroughgoing critique, she also seeks to ground her fiction historically. As Ferris notes, *The Old Manor House* is remarkable for "its historical character," a phrase she uses to emphasise that, although it is "an historical novel in the sense of featuring events prominent in the nation's history, it is not historicist, for it does not understand the past as a distinct reality whose difference the historian-novelist seeks to probe and convey 'on its own terms'. Rather, [...] it uses the past as a 'screen' onto which to project concerns of the present."²³ The novel is set in the 1770s (specifically, from 1775 to 1779) and the major political event of that period, the American Revolution, figures prominently in the narrative. For well over half of the novel, Orlando is either facing the vague prospect of fighting the American "rebels" or, after he is deployed to America in volume three, actually doing so. While Smith's notorious description of "savannahs" (361) in the regions around the current Ontario / New York border reflects her ignorance of North American climate, her portrayals of some of the military campaigns that took place during the War of Independence, as Labbe and Ferris stress in their textual annotations to their respective editions, carefully attend to the historical record. Perhaps even more significant than this attention to the past, however, is the ideological end that this historical turn is designed to serve.

²² As William D. Brewer argues, "The American Utopia remains a blurry, pantisocratic ideal in *The Young Philosopher*. [...] Smith's optimism about the prospects for the New World contrasts sharply with her pessimism regarding the future of Europe" (59). See Brewer, "Charlotte Smith and the American Agrarian Ideal," *English Language Notes* 40, no. 4 (2003): 51-61.

²³ Ferris, Introduction to her edition of *The Old Manor House*, x-xi.

Smith's reasons for representing this moment in British history reflect her political commitments and her own historical moment.²⁴ In radical discourse, as was noted in chapter 1, the revolutions in America and France are fundamentally connected; the former, many supporters of the French Revolution argued, prefigured the latter, and both are part of a broader historical phenomenon usually referred to as "Enlightenment."²⁵ In *The Old Manor House*, Smith expresses sympathy with this progressive narrative when she aligns British attitudes toward the Americans in the 1770s with those held toward the French in the 1790s.²⁶ As Orlando crosses to America, he becomes increasingly anxious about the justice of the war and asks himself "*what all this was for?*" (353). At first, he is able to "quie[t] these doubts by recurring to history"; he can subdue his objections to the war because he, in mock-Burkean fashion, venerates the actions of the heroes "whom his school-studies had taught him to admire, and whom his maturer reflection had not yet enabled him to see divested of the meteor glare which surrounded them" (353). His encounter with Mr. Jamieson, an American soldier who has been taken prisoner, however, complicates his position. Having heard the American point of view from Mr. Jamieson, Orlando comes to feel "a pity not unmixed with respect" for the rebels, especially after he learns that the British are using "savage" "Indians" against them (364). In a footnote appended to this passage, in which David Ramsay's *History*

²⁴ Other critics have made similar assertions: see Labbe, Introduction to her edition of *The Old Manor*, 26-27; Ferris, Introduction to her edition of *The Old Manor House*, x; Todd, Introduction to her edition of *Old Manor House*, x; Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith*, 174; and Keane, *Women Writers and the English Nation*, 96-102.

²⁵ See chapter 1, pp.25-27 and 47-54.

²⁶ In this respect, I am contesting Maxwell Wheeler's argument that Smith "builds a model of history that resists her radical politics" (15); see Wheeler, "Charlotte Smith's Historical Narratives and the English Subject," *Prism(s)* 10 (2002): 7-18.

of the *American Revolution* (1789) and the *Annual Register* of 1779 are cited to elaborate on the inhumanity of this tactic, Smith explicitly connects British opposition to the American revolution with British opposition to the French Revolution. “Those who have so loudly exclaimed against a whole nation struggling for its freedom, on account of the events of the past summer,” she writes, “are entreated to recollect how much the exploits of this expedition [...] exceed any thing that happened on the 10th of August, the 2d of September, or at any one period of the execrated Revolution in France” (365n). In adopting such a “barbarous policy” (364n) against the Americans, Smith implies, Britain resisted what Mackintosh calls the “progress of light,” which “the Revolution of 1688 may have had no small share in accelerating” and “which has dissolved the prejudices that supported despotism” (155). Given that war with France loomed as Smith wrote the novel and actually broke out before it was published, the idea that Britain was poised to continue its policy of using brutal force against yet another “nation struggling for its freedom” was very real to her. The depiction of the American Revolution thus invites a comparison between British actions then and now, and suggests that the British have repeatedly and violently opposed the progressive course of history.

Smith’s novel is a notable intervention in the historical discourses of the period. In its subversive use of one of Burke’s favourite metaphors for the nation, its pointed depiction of the detrimental effects of a past-oriented regime, and its politically motivated representations of the past, *The Old Manor House* engages some of the more contentious claims about history and the nature of historical change articulated in the political tracts of her contemporaries. One of Smith’s more remarkable achievements in the novel is her ability to

accommodate, on the one hand, a critique of a Burkean adherence to the past and, on the other, a commitment to history. She achieves this latter effect by displacing the concerns of the present onto the past (a strategy familiar from, for example, Walker's *Vagabond*), invoking the events of the 1770s to suggest the regressive nature of British politics in the 1790s. That the determining power of the past in Smith's novel is inherently vulnerable to subversion (as the internal politics and architecture of Rayland Hall imply) and subject to limitation (as the death of Mrs. Rayland and the end of her influence imply) is an indication of the optimistic state of the reform movement in Britain in the early 1790s. After the violence of the Terror and the French Revolutionary government's wars of expansion, however, this optimism became increasingly untenable. As many British supporters despaired at the bloody path that the French Revolution had embarked on, reformist novelists of the later 1790s began to represent the influence of the past as more entrenched and devastating than it had previously been imagined in a novel such as *The Old Manor House*.

"THE PROBLEM OF HISTORY": THE PERSISTENCE OF THE PAST IN WILLIAM GODWIN'S *ST. LEON* (1799)

When *St. Leon* was published in 1799, Godwin had become one of the most reviled men in Britain. His opponents identified the anarchistic philosophy he propounded in *Political Justice* with the turmoil in revolutionary France. His most recent publication, *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798), was a complete fiasco. However much he intended to honour Mary Wollstonecraft's memory, his forthright

account of his wife's life in the years before their marriage—particularly her attempted suicides and her amours with other men (Henry Fuseli, who was already married at the time of their affair, and Gilbert Imlay, by whom she had a child out of wedlock)—brought further derision upon himself and his wife, and supplied his enemies with yet more ammunition for their satirical attacks. Although Godwin could not have known it at the time, he had entered a period of prolonged public ridicule. As Grenby reports, the short-lived anti-Jacobin novel, in which Godwin and his ideas are regularly caricatured, experienced a boom in production at the turn of the nineteenth century, with “some thirty highly conservative novels” being published between 1798 and 1805.²⁷ “The cry spread like a general infection,” Godwin reportedly lamented, “and I have been told that not even a petty novel for boarding-school misses now ventures to aspire to favour unless it contains some expression of dislike or abhorrence to the new philosophy”²⁸ with which he was primarily identified. In novel after novel, Godwin's philosophy was contorted beyond recognition and his deceased wife depicted as a prostitute. One of these novels, published in 1800, was a humiliating parody of *St. Leon*, which mocked everything from his political notions down to his idiosyncratic diction.²⁹ That he could announce in the preface to *St. Leon* that he is “anxious [...] to modify” some of the ideas expressed in the early chapters of *Political Justice* even though he

²⁷ Grenby, 10.

²⁸ Godwin, quoted in H. N. Brailsford, *Shelley, Godwin, and their Circle* (1913; repr., n.p.: Archon, 1969), 156.

²⁹ Edward Dubois, *St. Godwin: A Tale of the Sixteenth, Seventeenth, and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Robert Miles, in vol. 9 of *Anti-Jacobin Novels*, ed. W. M. Verhoeven (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005).

still affirms the overall “system” of “justice” he outlined there³⁰ is a testament to his dedication to critical inquiry and to his dogged perseverance in the face of an increasingly hostile opposition.

In recent years, *St. Leon* has been made the subject of a variety of critical readings, including considerations of the novel’s generic diversity,³¹ its relation to texts written by his wife and daughter,³² and its place in the broader contexts of the 1790s.³³ Only a handful of critics, however, have considered *St. Leon* as engaging questions related to history and the relationship between past, present, and future.³⁴ Building on the work of Gary Handwerk, Kelly, and David Collings in particular, my reading focusses on the historical dimension of

³⁰ Godwin, *St. Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century*, ed. William D. Brewer (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2006), 52. References are to this edition.

³¹ See Ellen Lévy, “The Philosophical Gothic of *St. Leon*,” *Caliban* 31 (1996): 51-62; Gregory Maertz, “Generic Fusion and Appropriation in Godwin’s *St. Leon*,” *European Romantic Review* 5 (1995): 214-29; Marie Roberts, “Science and Irrationality in William Godwin’s *St. Leon*,” in *Transactions of the Seventh International Congress on the Enlightenment II*, vol. 264 of *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1989), 1196-99; and William Austin Flanders, “Godwin and Gothicism: *St. Leon*,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 8 (1967): 533-45.

³² See Maertz, “Family Resemblances: Intertextual Dialogue between Father and Daughter Novelists in Godwin’s *St. Leon* and Shelley’s *Frankenstein*,” *University of Mississippi Studies in English* n.s., 11/12 (1993-95): 303-20, and Andrew McCann, *Cultural Politics in the 1790s: Literature, Radicalism and the Public Sphere* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), chapter 5.

³³ See A. A. Markley, “Aristocrats Behaving Badly: Gambling and Dueling in the 1790s Novel of Reform,” *European Romantic Review* 17 (2006): 161-68; Anne Chandler, “Romanticizing Adolescence: Godwin’s *St. Leon* and the Matter of Rousseau,” *Studies in Romanticism* 41 (2002): 399-414; and Ian Ward, “A Man of Feelings: William Godwin’s Romantic Embrace,” *Law and Literature* 17 (2005): 21-46.

³⁴ See David Collings, “The Romance of the Impossible: William Godwin in the Empty Place of Reason,” *ELH* 70 (2003): 847-74; Gary Handwerk, “Historical Trauma: Political Theory and Novelistic Practice in William Godwin’s Fiction,” *Comparative Criticism* 16 (1994): 71-92, and “History, Trauma, and the Limits of the Liberal Imagination: William Godwin’s Historical Fiction,” in *Romanticism, History, and the Possibilities of Genre: Re-Forming Literature 1789-1837*, ed. Tilottama Rajan and Julia M. Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 64-85; Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel*, 209-36, and “History and Fiction: Bethlem Gabor in Godwin’s *St. Leon*,” *English Language Notes* 14 (1976): 117-20; and Justine Crump, “Gambling, History, and Godwin’s *St. Leon*,” *European Romantic Review* 11 (2000): 393-407.

Godwin's novel and the ideological implications it develops as a consequence.

While *St. Leon* is not in any straightforward way (as one reviewer described the work) "a recantation" of Godwin's early radicalism,³⁵ it is a critical retrospective on the 1790s—a stock-taking of the state of his philosophy and the possibilities for reform in Britain³⁶—and the discourses of history prove central to this revaluation. The novel registers, for instance, the familiar radical critique that, in British society, the past adversely determines the present and future. St. Leon's inability to shed the vestiges of his feudal upbringing is, in this sense, a continuation of Smith's analysis. *St. Leon* expands the terms of this critique considerably, however, using the examples of St. Leon, his son Charles, and Bethlem Gabor to suggest that the influence of the past is more subtle and complicated than Smith implies. In Godwin's novel, it destroys these men or, in a cyclical fashion, dooms them to relive the mistakes of their fathers. Godwin's novel also responds to criticisms familiar from Burkean historical discourse. The narrative, for instance, obsessively documents the ways in which St. Leon's various plans for improvement (whether domestic or international) are subjected to empirical scrutiny. St. Leon usually worsens the circumstances of those he seeks to help because, as Burke argued of Godwin's radical contemporaries, he attempts to evade history: his engine for change (the philosopher's stone) operates in a historical vacuum, allowing him to create infinite wealth and so effect change irrespective of prior circumstance. As St. Leon's various

³⁵ [Christopher Lake Moody], review of *St. Leon*, by William Godwin, *The Monthly Review* n.s., 33 (1800): 24. For the attribution to Moody, see Pamela Clemit, Introductory Note to *St. Leon*, vol. 4 of *The Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin*, ed. Mark Philp (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1992), vi. Contemporary reviews of *St. Leon* are collected in Kenneth W. Graham's *William Godwin Reviewed: A Reception History 1783-1834* (New York: AMS Press, 2001), 156-73.

³⁶ For similar readings, see Collings, and Clemit's Introduction to her edition of *St. Leon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), vii-xxiii.

failures suggest, the novel rejects as deluded and dangerous any approach to change that disregards the fundamentally historical nature of human life. Godwin's hero, in fact, comes to the conclusion that "[e]very thing in the world is conducted by gradual process" (193). In these ways, Godwin mounts a critique of a past-oriented socio-political model even as he characteristically rejects reformist efforts to effect immediate change.

St. Leon is set in sixteenth-century Europe, but Godwin is interested in "history" primarily as a discursive counter within the larger political debate of the 1790s. As Ferris argues of Smith's *The Old Manor House*, *St. Leon* lacks the historicist perspective that is most often seen as the signature of the "historical novel."³⁷ In spite of the network of references to the Reformation³⁸ and his use of historical figures, Godwin is not particularly concerned with the historical accuracy of his representation of the past. As Kelly notes in the instance of Bethlem Gabor, for example, Godwin is more than willing to put aside consensus on the historical record for the sake of his narrative.³⁹ And while Justine Crump is certainly right to argue that "the novel can be read as the history of an entire civilization, from the fall of chivalry to the emergence of those rational and capitalist modes associated with the

³⁷ Ferris, Introduction to her edition of *The Old Manor House*, x-xi. Godwin, in fact, explicitly rejects some of the methods (such as dialect and idiolect) that historical novelists usually adopt to convey historical particularity. When the black slave Hector is first introduced, for instance, *St. Leon* refuses to recreate his discourse, claiming that he "disdain[s] the mimic toil of inventing a jargon for him suitable to the lowness of his condition: the sense of what [Hector] said [he] faithfully report[s]" (247).

³⁸ Godwin carries *St. Leon* into cities which were, in the sixteenth century, significant for their connections with the Protestant "struggle for religious and political freedoms" and introduces him to a number of historical figures "connected to those struggles" (219-20); see Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel*, 218-21.

³⁹ Bethlem Gabor "is merely a Gothic villain with the name of a real historical personage" (*The English Jacobin Novel*, 235, and "History and Fiction," 120). A survey of the responses to *St. Leon* in the reviews and Dubois's *St. Godwin* shows that Godwin's contemporaries were also keen to point out the novel's various "violation[s] of history and chronology" (in Kenneth W. Graham, 161).

Enlightenment,”⁴⁰ Godwin’s interest lies primarily in the present his tale is designed to convey. As many critics have noted, various episodes in the novel allude to contemporary events, including scenes in which St. Leon is imprisoned and then interrogated by the Inquisition (an allusion to the various anti-radical acts passed by the Pitt government in the last half of the decade) and his house is burnt down by a superstitious Italian mob (a reference to the attack on Joseph Priestley’s house in 1791). The historical character of *St. Leon* is symptomatic of the novel’s larger project to probe the historical paradigms invoked during the political discussions of the 1790s, and any efforts to represent the past “on its own terms” is subordinate to that goal.

Godwin depicts St. Leon as a man whose future tragedy is predetermined by the influence of the past, especially his education in the values of his chivalrous forefathers. St. Leon is born into a noble family and raised by his widowed mother, who “was a woman of rather masculine understanding, and full of the prejudices of nobility and magnificence”; her “mind was inflamed with the greatness of [her son’s] ancestors, and she indefatigably sought to kindle in [his] bosom a similar flame” (55). “[T]he whole purpose of [his] education” (71) is to prepare him for a life of military pursuits, and to accustom him to distinction and privilege. At different moments in the narrative, St. Leon is disillusioned of these prejudices. When he witnesses the carnage of war during the siege of Pavia, for instance, he believes that such a scene must “induce [one] to abjure the trade of violence for ever” (73); when his family’s house and possessions are decimated in a freak storm, he experiences a “sudden revolution of opinion” (131) and learns to value “domestic blessings” (130) rather than pine

⁴⁰ Crump, 394.

endlessly for lost glory and riches. The novel stresses, however, that these moments of clarity are “of fleeting duration” and that “[t]he force of education, and the first bent of [his] mind, were too strong” (73). Again and again, St. Leon confesses that he cannot escape the effects of his upbringing: “I retained the original vice of my mind. The gestures of worship and the voice of applause were necessary to me” (88); “vanity and ostentation were habits wrought into my soul, and might be said to form part of its essence” (135); “[t]he youthful passions of my soul, which my early years had written there in characters so deep, were by no means effaced. I could not contemplate the splendour of rank with an impartial eye” (160). When the mysterious stranger wishes to impart the secrets of the philosopher’s stone and *elixir vitae* to St. Leon, who is at first reluctant to trade his domestic happiness for any benefit, he exploits this weakness. The stranger manipulates St. Leon, “touch[ing] upon the first and foremost passions of [his] soul” (157), pointing to his “degraded [...] rank,” his family’s plebeian existence, and his apparent indifference to “magnificence and distinction” (158). St. Leon’s chivalrous education conditions him to accept the stranger’s secrets, which in turn condemn him to a life of misery and isolation. The tragedy of St. Leon’s narrative is, then, his inability to throw off the determining power of the past in spite of his better reason.

If such a conclusion is familiar from Smith’s *The Old Manor House*, Godwin’s consideration of the effects of what Handwerk calls “historical trauma” contributes considerably more subtlety to Godwin’s analysis of the influence of the past.⁴¹ Both St. Leon and Bethlem Gabor experience traumatic events that predetermine their future courses of

⁴¹ On this point, see Handwerk, “Historical Trauma,” and “History, Trauma, and the Limits of the Liberal Imagination.”

action. After St. Leon witnesses the spectacle of his family starving and living in squalor, “[a]varice descended, and took possession of [his] soul. Haunted, as [he] perpetually was, by images of the plague of famine, nothing appeared to [him] so valuable as wealth” (151). Like his early education, this experience prepares him to accept the stranger’s secrets and so to live as a perpetual exile. Gabor’s case is even more indicative of Godwin’s nuanced assessment of the past’s powerful grasp. When St. Leon’s efforts to reform Hungary begin to draw the attention of the local government, he decides to seek outside help. Toward this end, he determines upon Gabor, a fallen nobleman whose estate he restores in exchange for his friendship and protection. Gabor, however, is a misanthropic figure: because his family was murdered by marauders, he has “vowed vengeance against the whole human race” (386). In enlisting the aid of this man for his schemes for improving the lot of the people of Hungary, St. Leon underestimates or is blind to the effects of historical trauma. Gabor quickly grows to despise St. Leon and eventually imprisons him for his efforts to aid mankind. “I hated you the more,” Gabor confesses to St. Leon, “because, having suffered what I had suffered, your feelings and your conduct on the occasion have been the reverse of mine. [...] Instead of, like me, seeking occasions of glorious mischief and vengeance, you took upon yourself to be the benefactor and parent of mankind” (399). As Handwerk argues, Gabor’s is “a hatred that St. Leon’s rationalism can neither perceive nor accommodate”; his opposition to St. Leon’s plans for improving Hungary is explicable only by his rootedness in the defining event of his past, and Godwin thereby suggests “the ambivalent nature of historical consciousness, at once a necessary supplement to reason and a reminder of its limits.”⁴² In *St. Leon*, Godwin

⁴² Handwerk, “History, Trauma, and the Limits of the Liberal Imagination,” 74, 80.

raises the possibility that history may inflict psychic traumas that radically obstruct the individual's access to agency and reason. Once again, the influence of the past is described as adversely influencing the present and future, and limiting the prospects for change; the phenomenon Godwin depicts here is all the more insidious, however, because it is internalised by the individual rather than (as Mrs. Rayland and Rayland Hall suggest in *The Old Manor House*) a function of external systems of power.

Godwin's depiction of St. Leon's son Charles and the nature of his relationship with his father are also, as we will see in a moment, central to his analysis. When inquisitive minds begin to question the sudden increase in riches that the philosopher's stone brings St. Leon, Charles demands to know the true source of his father's riches. St. Leon confesses that "there is a mystery annexed to the acquisition of this wealth that can never be explained" (210), causing Charles to disown his father and his name, and to set out to live according to the chivalric notions of honour he has been taught to value. In the final volume of the novel, after he has regained his youth with the *elixir vitae* and his benevolent plans to aid the inhabitants of Hungary have failed, St. Leon again encounters Charles. Unknown to anyone, St. Leon assumes another new identity (Henry Aubigny) and "resolve[s] to devote [him]self to his [son's] service" (413). Toward this end, he secretly arranges to have a large sum of money bestowed on Pandora, Charles's love, because her lack of a dowry is the only obstacle to their marriage. His plan ultimately succeeds, but it comes at the cost of continuing to be a part of his son's life. Charles comports himself strictly according to chivalric notions, serving as a soldier against the "infidel" Turks and living by the "prejudices" (415) and "political prepossessions" (447) his code dictates. He despises the steps the sieur de Chatillon (the

pseudonym St. Leon adopts during his time in Hungary) has taken to aid the Hungarians, interpreting his desire to “rescu[e] the infidels from famine” as proof that he is “an enemy to the cause of truth and Christianity” (415). When Charles finally discovers that Aubigny and Chatillon are one and the same man, St. Leon must flee, leaving his son to spread “the blackest invectives” against him (448). St. Leon abruptly ends his narrative here, concluding that “the virtues, the glory, and the happiness of [his] son” are his “one consolation,” and entreating the reader “to enter [...] fully into [his] sentiment of congratulation” (448) in having such a noble offspring.

The ironic and tragic implications of this ending, however, are manifold, and through them Godwin offers a sardonic commentary on the nature of inter-generational relations.⁴³ St. Leon’s secret machinations and his illicit wealth provide Pandora with the money she needs in order for her marriage with Charles to go forward. Charles’s future is thus secured by the very riches that caused him to disown his father in the first place. Charles effectively “villainize[s]” his father,⁴⁴ but he does so with an ironic twist: he defines himself through his rejection of his father’s “dishonour” (212) and “disgrace” (213)—and he does so a second time, in fact, in his repudiation of the benevolent plans St. Leon pursues under the guise of Chatillon. But however much the son may try to separate himself, he (unknown even to himself) remains implicated in them and indebted to his father. In his final celebration of Charles, meanwhile, St. Leon remains oblivious to the fact that what he sees before him is

⁴³ Unlike Brewer, who suggests that the novel has “a somewhat arbitrary ending” (11), I read Godwin’s conclusion as a function of his ideological position. See Brewer, Introduction to his edition of *St. Leon*, 11-39.

⁴⁴ Handwerk, “History, Trauma, and the Limits of the Liberal Imagination,” 74.

another “version of his own younger self.”⁴⁵ In his final actions, Charles confirms his commitment to the chivalric code that conditioned his father’s mind to accept the secrets of the philosopher’s stone and the *elixir vitae* at the cost of his domestic happiness, and which even St. Leon (in his few moments of clarity) has grown to regard as “infatuation and delusion” (424). That St. Leon celebrates what Charles has become—that is, subject to the same opinions that cost him his family, and which inculcate the kind of “prejudices” (415) and “rooted political prepossessions” (447) that leave Charles cursing him for feeding Hungary’s starving “infidels” (415)—signals his inability to see that his son is a kind of repetition of himself. St. Leon’s failure to comprehend his perpetuation of the ideology that brought about his downfall is particularly ironic given the discovery he made previously in the dungeons of the Inquisition: “I found that I was only acting over again what [the stranger] had experienced before me. His legacies had served to involve me in the bitterest and most unheard of miseries, but were wholly destitute of ability to rescue from the evils themselves created” (335).

In *St. Leon*, no clean break with the past is possible, and its influence is never entirely escaped. Old modes of thinking and acting are replicated in the next generation in spite of its rejection of the previous, and the former remains obligated to the latter in ways it would be loath to acknowledge. The novel comes perilously close, in fact, to suggesting that history’s trajectory is circular and repetitive rather than linear and progressive, although the location of this “history” in the remote sixteenth century and the progressivist philosophy of even the later editions of *Political Justice* imply that Godwin is not quite so pessimistic. Conditioned

⁴⁵ Handwerk, “History, Trauma, and the Limits of the Liberal Imagination,” 74-75.

by historical traumas and by inherited socio-political prejudices, however, Godwin's characters never prove capable of carving out for themselves a space free from the determining power of the past and, indeed, are implicated in replicating its patterns in spite of their best efforts.

While *St. Leon* is critical of this notion of the past determining the future, however, the novel insists that plans for meaningful change cannot be realised “outside” of history—that is, through an approach that circumvents the interconnectedness of past, present, and future. Once St. Leon is in possession of the philosopher's stone, he plots to return his family to a position of prominence. Each step he takes toward this end is subjected to intense scrutiny (by his family, other French nobles, various authority figures, and so on), and each time he retreats to a position of silence. By seeking to evade empirical inquiry, St. Leon isolates himself from humanity. As he learns, “no man stands alone in the world, without all trace of what he has been, and with no one near, that thinks himself entitled to scrutinise his proceedings and his condition” (193). He fails to aggrandise his family because his sudden rise defies the usually slow operations of history. For similar reasons, his plans to aid the starving people of Hungary also prove abortive. In spite of his recognition that “the distribution of gold” will not help the nation achieve lasting prosperity and his desire to instead inspire a renewed “spirit of industry” (363), his efforts to relieve the poor, while effective in the short term, cause the same kind of inflation revolutionary France experienced. Not only does St. Leon attempt to introduce change too quickly, but he also ignores the country's existing contexts. When he finally realises that he “was not alone equal to the task [he] had undertaken” (373), he seeks aid from the nation's various political factions. In

enlisting this assistance, however, he neglects the divisions that, historically, have separated those parties. His benevolent project meets its end at the hands of Bethlem Gabor, the nobleman he engages to help him but who is scarred so deeply by his country's past that he resists even the attempt to better his homeland. St. Leon's efforts to improve the circumstances of his family and the Hungarian nation fail because the philosopher's stone—which creates wealth out of nothing and introduces change irrespective of prior circumstances—forces him to operate in a historical vacuum.

Godwin's depiction of the defeat of St. Leon's reformist effort in Hungary is thus a commentary on the failed promise of the French Revolution and the various hopes for reform that it inspired. As many critics of the novel have noted, St. Leon is associated with a number of characteristics that recall Godwin's reformist contemporaries: a thirst for knowledge, a history of persecution at the hands of superstitious mobs and orthodox authorities, and a desire to help humanity. St. Leon's failure to effect any lasting improvement, however, is a criticism not of his desire for change but of the approach he adopts. The wish to bring about change actively rather than to encourage discussion and inquiry with the goal of creating a new consciousness that would enable that change is, as Godwin argues elsewhere, misguided and potentially dangerous. "The great cause of humanity which is now pleading in the face of the universe," he writes in one of the chapters he revised for his 1796 edition of *Political Justice*,

has but two enemies; those friends of antiquity and those friends of innovation, who, impatient of suspense, are inclined violently to interrupt the calm, the incessant, the rapid and auspicious progress which thought and reflexion [*sic*] appear to be making

in the world. Happy would it be for mankind, if those persons who interest themselves most zealously in these great questions, would confine their exertions, to the diffusing in every possible mode of spirit of enquiry, and the embracing every opportunity of increasing the stock and generalising the communication of political knowledge! (4: 127)

Echoing Godwin's plea to pursue a more gradualist approach to reform, St. Leon realises (in a passage that foreshadows the collapse of his own reformist efforts) that the kind of immediate change the philosopher's stone enables is, in fact, its greatest weakness:

I had hitherto committed the fault so common to projectors, of looking only to ultimate objects and great resting places, and neglecting to consider the steps between. This was an omission of high importance. Every thing in the world is conducted by gradual process. This seems to be the great principle of harmony in the universe. Nothing is abrupt; one thing is so blended and softened into another, that it is impossible to say where the former ends and the latter begins. (193)

That St. Leon's attempts to bypass this complex process usually leave those he seeks to help in worse circumstances than those in which he found them is an unambiguous statement on the inefficacy of his approach. Historical change happens, Godwin suggests here, in a slow manner; because different eras are "so blended and softened" into one another as to defy easy separation, change is never so simple a process as breaking away from a readily isolated past. For Godwin, the project to uproot and discard the past is as ineffectual as the mythical

philosopher's stone.⁴⁶ St. Leon's approach to introducing change, like those of the French Revolutionaries and their like-minded British supporters, fails because it betrays a desire to stand "outside" of history, to evade the complexities from which humans, as historical beings, can never extract themselves. Godwin's *St. Leon* is designed to elucidate those complexities and to condemn any approach that would dismiss them.

Godwin's post-*Political Justice* writings, as Handwerk notes, "tur[n] increasingly to the problem of history,"⁴⁷ and *St. Leon* is no exception. In his final fictional work of the revolutionary decade, Godwin examines "the problem of history," engaging it in a number of ways: he continues the attack on the determining power of the past familiar from other Jacobin novels; he complicates our understanding of the nature of the relationship between past, present, and future with his analysis of historical trauma; and, responding to both his anti-Jacobin critics and radical proponents for change, he insists that historical change must be gradual rather than immediate. In this way, *St. Leon* addresses the unsatisfying solution of a novel such as Smith's *The Old Manor House*, in which the past and so most obstacles to reform fall away with the passing of the previous generation. In some ways, the inadequate ending of Smith's novel may be attributed to its reliance on the marriage plot of romance, which is inherently future-oriented in its focus on the young lovers' triumph over the

⁴⁶ In this respect, I am contesting St. Clair's suggestion that "Godwin uses the myth [of the philosopher's stone] to illustrate the difficulties faced by original thinkers in winning acceptance of their views" (213-14). See St. Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys*, 210-20.

⁴⁷ Handwerk, "Historical Trauma," 72-73. See also Rowland Weston, and Jon Klancher, "Godwin and the Genre Reformers: On Necessity and Contingency in Romantic Narrative Theory," in *Romanticism, History, and the Possibilities of Genre*, ed. Tilottama Rajan and Julia M. Wright, 21-38, and "Godwin and the Republican Romance: Genre, Politics, and Contingency in Cultural History," *Modern Language Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (1995): 145-65.

previous generation. Godwin, conversely, employs a generational plot that reveals the complex ways in which the past interpenetrates the present and so denies access to a moment of radical disjunction that allows one to be separated from the other. If, however, there is one consolation which Godwin's reformist contemporaries could take away from *St. Leon*, it is that, while the novel is critical of attempts to effect change from a position "outside" of history, the weight of its analysis falls on the problematic approach and not the ideals that inspire its "hero." Certainly, in the scope of the novel, the prospect is bleak that the father or the son will progress beyond the ideology that dooms St. Leon to a life of misery and isolation. As in *Caleb Williams* (1794), the possibilities for progress are not embodied in *St. Leon*'s protagonists but exist instead in the realm of ideas that the novel sets in motion and which the reader potentially realises. In critiquing St. Leon's means rather than his end, Godwin implies what he made explicit in the revised editions of *Political Justice*: for meaningful change to occur, opinions must first be changed through discussion and the gradual operations of "Time" (4: 127).

**"TALES OF OTHER TIMES": REFORM, REACTION, AND THE POLITICS OF
REPRESENTING HISTORY IN MARIA EDGEWORTH'S *CASTLE RACKRENT*
(1800)**

Setting Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* in the company of Jacobin novels such as *The Old Manor House* and *St. Leon* first requires a few words of explanation. Critics of *Castle Rackrent* often focus on the "Irishness" of the novel and its author, seeing the work as

arguing for or against Union with Britain, British imperialism, or the Protestant Ascendancy.⁴⁸ My own reading locates *Castle Rackrent* in the broader context of reaction to the French Revolution. There are a number of reasons, this chapter will suggest, for doing so. The history of Ireland in the 1790s is invariably tied up in British anxieties about, and political responses to, the threat of French-style revolution at home and across the empire. Radical Irish associations such as the United Irishmen, for instance, were deeply indebted to the Paineite discourse of “the rights of man,” and—in the wake of the English and Scottish sedition trials (1792-93), the declaration of war between France and Britain (1793), the French Terror (1793-94), the English Treason Trials (1794), and the “Gagging Acts” (1795) passed by William Pitt’s government—they were suppressed for the same reasons that British reform associations such as the Society for Constitutional Information were. British fears about French invasion were realised (on however minute a scale) when 1000 troops landed in County Mayo in late August of 1798 to aid the Irish rebellion. When the threat of

⁴⁸ See Kit Kincade, “A Whillaluh for Ireland: *Castle Rackrent* and Edgeworth’s Influence on Scott,” in *An Uncomfortable Authority: Maria Edgeworth and her Contexts*, ed. Heidi Kaufman and Chris Fauske (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 250-69; Frances R. Botkin, “The Keener’s Cry in *Castle Rackrent*: The Death of Irish Culture?” in *An Uncomfortable Authority*, ed. Heidi Kaufman and Chris Fauske, 84-101; Fraser Easton, “Cosmopolitan Economy: Exchangeable Value and National Development in Adam Smith and Maria Edgeworth,” *Studies in Romanticism* 42, no. 1 (2003): 99-125; Rebecca Shapiro, “Educating the English: Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* and *Essay on Irish Bulls*,” *Women’s Writing* 10 (2003): 73-92; Lisa L. Moore, “Acts of Union: Sexuality and Nationalism, Romance and Realism in the Irish National Tale,” *Cultural Critique* 44 (2000): 113-44; David O’Shaughnessy, “Ambivalence in *Castle Rackrent*,” *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 25, no. 1/2 (1999): 427-40; Colin Graham, “History, Gender, and the Colonial Moment: *Castle Rackrent*,” in *Gender Perspectives in Nineteenth-Century Ireland: Public and Private Spheres*, ed. Margaret Kelleher and James H. Murphy (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1997), 93-103; Corbett, “Another Tale to Tell: Postcolonial Theory and the Case of *Castle Rackrent*,” *Criticism* 36, no. 3 (1994): 383-400; Yasushi Saito, “Looking for Mr. Good-Landlord: *Castle Rackrent* and the Union,” *Shiron* 30 (1991): 1-14; and George Watson, Introduction to his edition of *Castle Rackrent*, vii-xxv.

revolutionary violence forced the Edgeworths to evacuate their home in early September,⁴⁹ just days after the French landing, a family as politically involved and informed as theirs was surely aware that the causes of this turmoil and the political changes it ultimately effected in Ireland—namely, the Act of Union (1800), which was an immediate consequence of the rebellion—were international as well as local in origin.

There are other factors in Edgeworth's life and in *Castle Rackrent*'s thematic concerns that encourage a reading of the novel in the context of British reaction to the French Revolution. While the novel was published in 1800, Edgeworth in fact wrote it over the course of the 1790s, first putting pen to paper no later than 1794.⁵⁰ The text is in some ways clearly a response to the rebellion and the impending Union, but the history of its development suggests that Edgeworth's original motivations for writing it were antecedent to both events. Even if the French Revolution was not the immediate or only occasion for the novel, it certainly deals with issues familiar from the Revolution debate. As in Smith's *The Old Manor House*, Edgeworth's use of the trope of the decaying, mismanaged estate in her novel, for instance, subversively recalls Burke's oft-invoked metaphor. Her "portrayal of a community in crisis, of rampant corruption and pervasive chaos," as Nancy E. Johnson observes in a study of the English Jacobin novel that includes a consideration of *Castle*

⁴⁹ For an account of the Edgeworths' experience of the rebellion, see Butler, *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 137-41.

⁵⁰ Butler has shown that the first part of the work was written from 1794 to 1795, the second part from 1796 to 1798, and the Glossary and the Preface in 1799. See the Introduction to Butler's edition of *Castle Rackrent and Ennui* (London: Penguin, 1992), 4-5; the Introductory Note to *Castle Rackrent* in Edgeworth, 1: vii-xiv; and Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 353-56.

Rackrent, “offers an additional representation of ‘things as they are’ in need of reform.”⁵¹

Moreover, Edgeworth had an interest in Burke and his writings: as late as 1805, for example, she was contemplating writing an essay on “the genius and style of Burke,” although she never pursued it.⁵² While John Langan, the Irish steward of the Edgeworth estate, has long been recognised as the real-life inspiration for Thady, it is at least conceivable that Thady is also intended in part as a caricature of Burke, depicting him in the cynical light in which many of his reformist contemporaries saw him.⁵³ At the very least, these details raise the possibility that *Castle Rackrent* is not only a consideration of the state of the Irish nation, but also a contribution to the debate that the French Revolution sparked. The nature of that contribution becomes clearer, I suggest, if we attend to the ways in which the novel engages the period’s historical discourses.

Castle Rackrent subjects the Burkean discourse of history to a broad (if uneasy)

⁵¹ Nancy E. Johnson, *The English Jacobin Novel*, 169.

⁵² Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 239. A small number of critics have considered Edgeworth’s fiction in light of Burke’s ideas: see, for example, Deane, *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing since 1790* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), chapter 1; Ester Wohlgemut, “Maria Edgeworth and the Question of National Identity,” *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 39, no. 4 (1999): 645-58; Corbett, “‘Another Tale to Tell,’” 393-95; and W. J. McCormack, *Ascendancy and Tradition in Anglo-Irish Literary History from 1789 to 1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), chapter 3.

⁵³ The following details are germane to this point: *Castle Rackrent* is a nostalgic celebration of an old order that has passed (as reformers similarly characterised the *Reflections*) narrated in the Irish vernacular (Burke was frequently mocked for his Irish accent) by an absurdly loyal old servant to “the family” (Burke similarly served the British royal family for nearly 30 years in his capacity as an MP) who has benefited financially from the given social arrangement (Burke’s critics suggested that his defence of the British constitution was compromised by the fact that he had a vested interest in maintaining the *status quo*), and yet whose loving portrait of his masters condemns them in spite of his intentions to the contrary (Burke’s opponents viewed his articulation of the values that implicitly underlay Britain’s hierarchical order as a death-knell he had unintentionally rung). As Butler observes, however, noting the possibility that Thady is designed to recall James Butler, second Duke of Ormond (1666-1745), the novel “hardly reads like a fully sustained political allegory” (14); see Butler, Introduction to her edition of *Castle Rackrent and Ennui*. Butler pursues the idea that Thady is a parody of the Duke of Ormond at greater length in “Edgeworth’s Ireland: History, Popular Culture, and Secret Codes,” *Novel* 34, no. 2 (2001): 267-92.

critique, modelling a sceptical approach to reading the past and destabilising the logic of accretion. The novel's Preface draws attention to the artificiality of "official" history and celebrates such private, domestic narrative forms as the anecdote and the memoir as more profoundly historical. With a delicate irony, the Preface praises these biographical forms in particular for their transparency: the historical value of a narrative such as Thady's lies in the fact that the author's biases, omissions, and distortions are so glaring that they allow for a reconstruction of the events he is incapable of accurately representing. In doing so, the novel pursues an approach to history that has much in common with other, more overtly reformist texts of the period. Edgeworth also uses the textual battle between the novel's two distinct voices (the narrator, Thady, and the unnamed male Editor) to cast a critical eye on the inherited cultural influences Burke celebrates as essential to the maintenance of order. Thady's narrative draws attention to the ways in which customs, prejudices, and traditions infuse the lives of its subjects, and the Editor in turn historicises these phenomena in his Glossary entries, detailing their ignoble origins, their degraded status, and their complicity in supporting the kinds of oppressive social practices and distinctions reformers loathed. But however much the novel insists that it is a "'tal[e] of other times'" (1: 6) and thereby attempts to associate the unenlightened and often tyrannical forces of the past it exposes with a remote era whose time has come and gone, *Castle Rackrent* remains (as Seamus Deane writes) "a work of startling incoherence."⁵⁴ Some aspects of the novel, most of which concern Jason's rise, are notoriously difficult to reconcile with an easy endorsement of the reformed social order it implicitly looks forward to but which it refuses to describe. While it

⁵⁴ Deane, *Strange Country*, 39.

undermines the “official” narratives of history upon which Burkean discourse relies and rejects as strangely out of place or oppressive the inherited cultural influences Burke celebrates, *Castle Rackrent* is the work of an author not entirely confident or comfortable with the forces of change that seek to correct what she readily acknowledges as the shortcomings of “things as they are.”

The Preface⁵⁵ to *Castle Rackrent* affirms the project of history while critiquing its most characteristic form and shifting the grounds upon which it is conducted, thereby replicating a manoeuvre familiar from a radical text such as Godwin’s unpublished “Of History and Romance” (1797). While celebrating “[t]he prevailing taste of the public for anecdote” as evidence of the “profoundly philosophic temper of the present times” (1: 5), the Preface also describes non-biographical modes of historical narrative (that is, histories of men acting in the public sphere) in terms that suggest their constructedness and proximity to other, more imaginative genres such as drama and the novel. “The heroes of history,” it asserts,

are so decked out by the fine fancy of the professed historian; they talk in such measured prose, and act from such sublime or such diabolical motives, that few 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. (1: 5)

⁵⁵ Scholars are uncertain whether Maria or R. L. Edgeworth wrote the Preface, and whether or not one aided the other. Butler speculates that R. L. Edgeworth “probably” authored it, but “perhaps” with Maria’s assistance: see Marilyn Butler, ed., *Castle Rackrent and Ennui*, 347n, and Edgeworth, 1: 309n.

Similarly, Godwin's "Of History and Romance" lauds history as "ranked among those pursuits which are most worthy to be chosen by a rational being," but then goes on to detail the inadequacies of "[g]eneral history" (by which he means "the study of mankind in a mass, of the progress, the fluctuations, the interests and vices of society") and the superiority of "individual history" (by which he means biography).⁵⁶ Godwin argues that the writer of "general history" is susceptible to the same criticisms of "invention" as the author of a romance (464-65), a point *Castle Rackrent*'s Preface implicitly echoes when it describes "[t]he heroes of history" in terms drawn from more imaginative genres. In both works, the idea of history meets with approval, while its characteristic narrative form (historiography) is cast as generically suspect because of its often unacknowledged reliance on invention, a move that undercuts history's claims to a fully accurate representation of the past. Such a manoeuvre also creates problems for Burkean discourse by destabilising the narratives of "official" history which it often employs to resist and discredit proposals for change.

"Of History and Romance" and the Preface to *Castle Rackrent* pursue similar strategies, however, for substantially different reasons. In "Of History and Romance," Godwin challenges the genre hierarchy whereby the solemn "reality" of history trumps the trivial fictionality of the novel (or romance), and then momentarily defines the latter as a "species of history" (464) in order to claim for it a more serious purpose. "True history," he argues, is to be found in the novel, which "consists in a delineation of consistent, human character, in a display of the manner in which such a character acts under successive

⁵⁶ Godwin, "Of History and Romance," in *Caleb Williams*, ed. Gary Handwerk and A. A. Markley (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2000), 453, 456, 453, 455. References are to this edition.

circumstances, in showing how character increases and assimilates new substances to its own, and how it decays, together with the catastrophe into which by its own gravity it naturally declines” (466). By detailing the operations of “human character” under a variety of circumstances, Godwin asserts, the novel performs a historical function which, if not as valuable as general history,⁵⁷ is also significant. Conversely, the Preface to *Castle Rackrent* celebrates public preference for “secret memoirs and private anecdotes” in order to claim a higher truth value for private, domestic narratives such as Thady’s. Biographical modes of history, it argues, admit readers “behind the scenes, that we may take a nearer view of the actors and actresses [...] [a]fter we have beheld [them] playing their parts on the great theatre of the world, with all the advantages of stage effect and decoration” (1: 5). The Preface thus ironically praises “those [authors], who [...] simply pour forth anecdotes, and retail conversations, with all the minute prolixity of a gossip in a country town” (1: 6) because, while their narratives cannot be taken at face value, they have no power to deceive the reader. Thady’s memoirs, the Preface assures readers, have “upon these grounds fair claims to the public favour and attention” (1: 6). The unique historical value of a narrative such as Thady’s is not that it explicitly or accurately relates “the truth,” but rather that his “partiality to *the family*, in which he was bred and born” (1: 6) is so obvious to readers that it enables them to see beyond his misrepresentations to gain access to a “true” history of the Rackrents that

⁵⁷ Despite its oft-quoted, euphoric exclamation—“Dismiss me from the falsehood and impossibility of history, and deliver me over to the reality of romance” (466)—“Of History and Romance” finally withdraws from its potentially radical subversion of the genre hierarchy. The historian “recover[s] his advantage upon the writer of romance,” Godwin writes in the penultimate paragraph, because “the events [he describes] are taken out of his hands and determined by the system of the universe, and therefore, as far as his information extends, must be true. The romance writer, on the other hand, is continually straining at a foresight to which his faculties are incompetent, and continually fails” (467).

Thady never would have narrated or, probably, even understood.⁵⁸

The Preface thus makes explicit one of *Castle Rackrent*'s implicit objectives, which is to model an "enlightened" approach to reading the past, one that encourages the reader to think of "real" history as submerged and hidden, as obscured and distorted by the prejudices and biases of its original tellers. Thady is spectacularly unaware of—or, if one agrees with the James Newcomer thesis, a master at masking the fact that he is aware of—the full import of his narrative and the conclusions that it enables his readers to draw. The Editor has at length persuaded him to tell his story of the Rackrents for "*the honour of the family*" (1: 6): "as I have lived so will I die," he states in his introduction, "true and loyal to the family" (1: 10). Thady believes his memoirs show the family in the same favourable light in which he holds them, but his own words fatally undermine his portrait, exposing the Rackrents' way of living and the values for which he celebrates them to be extravagant and socially oppressive. Meanwhile, the Editor—with his footnotes and Glossary entries, his Preface and concluding remarks—surrounds the narrative with an editorial apparatus that further subverts Thady's remembrances and, in the process, encourages readers to adopt a similarly distanced

⁵⁸ There is a long-standing critical debate as to whether or not Thady is merely a loyal, naïve retainer who lovingly recalls his former masters, or a duplicitous figure who intentionally draws attention to their faults and supports his son's usurpation of the Rackrent estate. Like Butler (*Maria Edgeworth*, 358) and Brian Hollingworth (*Maria Edgeworth's Irish Writing: Language, History, Politics* [Basingstoke: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997], 92), I read Thady along the former lines and would argue that James Newcomer and his followers assign Thady a subtlety that belongs instead to the novel as a whole. For the classic reading of Thady to the opposite effect, see Newcomer, "The Disingenuous Thady Quirk," *Studies in Short Fiction* 2, no. 1 (1964): 44-50. For a more recent reading in this vein, see Michael Neill, "Mantles, Quirks, and Irish Bulls: Ironic Guise and Colonial Subjectivity in Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent*," *Review of English Studies* n.s., 52, no. 205 (2001): 76-90.

perspective.⁵⁹ The entire novel, as Butler argues, depends on the reader's ability to see past Thady's sentimentalist point of view: "*Castle Rackrent* does not rely on Thady's wisdom, but on our ability to see through his folly. The 'true' theme, the ruin of the estate, is apparent to us, the 'philosophical' interpreters whom the Preface addresses, but not to the characters, their memorialist Thady included."⁶⁰ With its naïve narrator and its editorial apparatus, the novel engages in the sceptical approach to reading the past it endorses, reproducing the hermeneutics expressed in a reformist text such as Mackintosh's *Vindiciæ Gallicæ*.⁶¹ Just as Mackintosh read the history of 1688 in that text to argue subversively that "England had so long suffered" the "true" principles of the Revolution "to repose in impotent abstraction" (155), so Edgeworth's novel posits a wide gulf between the tale Thady narrates and the tale he actually tells. The "true" history of the Rackrents, like the "true" principles of 1688, lies encoded in the historical record, even if its narrator remains oblivious of that fact.

If *Castle Rackrent* complicates the notion of history upon which Burkean discourse relies in a manner familiar from other reformist texts, it also similarly rejects as absurd or oppressive the influence of the inherited cultural forces Burke celebrates. The novel regularly achieves this effect by contrasting observations in Thady's narrative with those of the Editor in his Glossary notes. Thady cites various customs and traditions throughout his memoirs, which he views as normative, and the Editor in turn scrutinises each one. When Thady points

⁵⁹ On the relationship between Thady and the Editor, and the main narrative and the editorial apparatus, see Susan Glover, "Glossing the Unvarnished Tale: Contra-dicting Possession in *Castle Rackrent*," *Studies in Philology* 99, no. 3 (2002): 295-311, and Kathryn Kirkpatrick, "Putting Down the Rebellion: Notes and Glosses on *Castle Rackrent*, 1800," *Éire-Ireland* 30, no. 1 (1995): 77-90.

⁶⁰ Butler, Introduction to her edition of *Castle Rackrent and Ennui*, 8.

⁶¹ See chapter 1, pp.15-37.

to the “fine whillaluh” (1: 11) or death lamentation Sir Patrick receives at his funeral as evidence that he was widely loved by his tenants, for example, the Editor attaches a long Glossary note. At first, the note (in antiquarian fashion) faithfully details the mechanics of the tradition, but then it goes on to “observe how customs and ceremonies degenerate” (1: 57). The whillaluh, the Editor shows, has lost much of its former dignity and meaning: the participants (who, he claims, are eager to join in the funeral march to avoid the day’s work) are figured as following an empty tradition, being ignorant even of the names of those they mourn. On two separate occasions in the note, the Editor “quotes” Irish villagers participating in a whillaluh to this effect: “Arrah! who is it that’s dead?—who is it we’re crying for?” (1: 57); “Arrah now, honey, who is it we’re crying for?” (1: 58). The Editor’s analysis thus undercuts Thady’s point entirely: whatever the whillaluh at Sir Patrick’s funeral might mean to Thady and his idea of his master, it is comically clear from the text that the custom is little more than an empty form followed partly out of a sense of routine and partly out of self-interest. The Editor ends his note with one of the ideologically resonant comments he intersperses throughout the Glossary—and which, in the atmosphere of the 1790s, functions as an ironic glance at a Burkean adherence to the logics of inheritance and accretion. “Those who value customs in proportion to their antiquity, and nations in proportion to their adherence to ancient customs,” the Editor writes after he has thoroughly deconstructed the whillaluh to reveal its degraded status, “will, doubtless, admire the Irish *Ullaloo* [i.e., the whillaluh], and the Irish nation, for persevering in this usage from time immemorial” (1: 58). When read in conjunction with the Editor’s note, the whole force of the scene is that Thady’s interpretation of the significance of the “fine whillaluh” at Sir Patrick’s funeral is just as

mistaken and poorly reasoned as the view that a nation's well-being can be measured by how strictly it follows its "ancient customs."

Similar challenges to Burkean values can be found throughout the novel. When, in Thady's narrative, Sir Condry expresses a wish to see his wake before he dies, the Editor attaches a Glossary note on wakes. As in the previous example, the Editor details how the custom has degenerated and then observes, in a comment that has reformist implications, "how good and bad are mingled in human institutions" (1: 67). When Thady describes how "the tenants [...] were sent away without their whiskey" (1: 11) during Sir Murtagh's reign, the Editor appends a Glossary note which explains what Thady means by the expression and the curious logic it betrays. In the time of Sir Patrick, tenants were customarily given a glass of whiskey on the day they paid their rents. "Thady calls it *their* whiskey," the Editor explains, "not that the whiskey is actually the property of the tenants, but that it becomes their *right*, after it has been often given to them" (1: 58). Thady, in other words, calls the whiskey "theirs" because he subscribes to the view that rights are prescriptive, a view Burke propounded in opposition to the Painite notion of the inalienable "rights of man."⁶² "In this general mode of reasoning respecting *rights*," the Editor concludes, "the lower Irish are not singular, but they are peculiarly quick and tenacious in claiming these rights" (1: 58). Far from being politically innocent, the Editor's observation here comments sardonically on the notion of prescriptive rights heralded "tenaciously" in Britain by one Irishman in particular

⁶² Burke appealed to "*prescriptive rights*," for instance, when he argued that the violence that may mark a nation's origin is no reason to tear down the socio-political order and begin again: "it is *old violence*; and that which might be wrong in the beginning, is consecrated by time, and becomes lawful" (6: 95); see Letter to Captain Thomas Mercer, 26 February 1790 (6: 92-98).

and by the forces of conservative reaction in general.

While these scenes and their corresponding Glossary entries expose the absurdity of overvaluing the processes of cultural inheritance and accretion, *Castle Rackrent* also explores the more insidious ways in which customs, prejudices, and traditions perpetuate socio-political inequities. The best instance of such an analysis occurs in the note on “fairy mounts.” In the main narrative, Thady ignores the signs—such as a “cough with a spitting of blood” (1: 14)—which suggest that Sir Murtagh is dying of consumption and instead attributes his death to the fact that “[h]e dug up a fairy-mount against [Thady’s] advice, and had no luck afterwards” (1: 13-14). The Editor, for the most part, treats such an explanation as the product of “popular illusions or vulgar errors” (1: 61), the offspring of an ignorant, superstitious mind. But like so many other erroneous beliefs, he continues, “[s]ome remote origin [...] may often be discovered” (1: 61). “[N]ear the ancient churches” of Ireland, the Editor notes,

caves of various constructions have from time to time been discovered, which were formerly used as granaries or magazines by the ancient inhabitants, and as places to which they retired in time of danger. There is [...] a particular account of a number of these artificial caves at the West end of the church of Killossy, in the county of Kildare. Under a rising ground, in a dry sandy soil, these subterraneous dwellings were found: they have pediment roofs, and they communicate with each other by small apertures. (1: 61)

For the Editor, these “artificial caves” are the origin of myths about “fairy mounts,” and the persistence of such erroneous superstitions, he insists, has concrete social implications. In his

final assessment, the Editor implicates traditions such as that of the “fairy mounts” in the perpetuation of superstitions and prejudices that serve the interests of the ruling classes. “All these things show,” he concludes, “that there was a real foundation for the stories which were told of the appearance of lights, and of the sounds of voices near these places. The persons who had property concealed there very willingly countenanced every wonderful relation that tended to make these places objects of sacred awe or superstitious terror” (1: 61).

Superstition and social oppression, the Editor implies, are mutually reinforcing; the propertied classes benefit from and therefore promote the traditions that secure their advantages. In *Castle Rackrent*, inherited cultural forces are not only often absurd, but—as notes such as those on “duty-work,” “duty fowls,” “duty turkeys [*sic*],” and “duty geese” also suggest (1: 12-13, 59)—they may also further shore up an unjust political order.

In spite of the reformist implications of these strategies, however, the political position of Edgeworth’s novel is surprisingly ambiguous.⁶³ *Castle Rackrent* seemingly revels in exploiting the inadequacies of Burkean historical discourse, but it also expresses ambivalence toward the characters who participate in that critique. While the Glossary notes display the Editor’s superior intelligence and diligence (relative to Thady), they also betray

⁶³ Edgeworth continues to defy political labels, although most critics agree that she was not comfortable with the brand of radical politics associated with, for example, Paine. Such indecision is apparent in, for instance, Julie Nash’s introduction to a recent collection of essays on Edgeworth: “Edgeworth’s writings embody a curious tension between Edgeworth the dutiful daughter of patriarchy and Edgeworth the surprisingly progressive iconoclast. [...] Edgeworth’s life and work—at once moralistic and doubting, conservative and radical—resists easy categorization[.] Her copious works move uneasily between an enthusiastic espousal of a progressive paternalist social model and a more radical ideology that embraced change” (xiv-xv). See Nash, ed., *New Essays on Maria Edgeworth* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006). See also Hollingworth, 25, and Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 391, and the Introduction to the latter’s edition of *Castle Rackrent and Ennui*, 13-15, 19, and 28.

his pedantic tendencies⁶⁴ and his pompous condescension as he insults his English readers as “ignorant” (1: 6) and “lazy” (1: 56), and belittles the people and subjects on which he comments. Similarly, the narrative refuses to celebrate in any straightforward manner Sir Condry’s defeat or Jason’s replacement of him.⁶⁵ It is clear from the text that the Rackrent family, by virtue of its history of corruption and exploitation, has forfeited its right to social pre-eminence, but Jason’s rise to power hardly promises much improvement. Cold and calculating, Jason is (as Butler notes) a “parasite” of the old order and not an exemplary representative of a new one based on the middle-class values with which he, in contrast to Sir Condry, is associated (merit, frugality, industry, and prudence), but which nevertheless fail to ennoble or even make palatable his rise.⁶⁶ Nor is it clear that Jason’s emergence signals a moment of radical disjunction from an oppressive past. As Anthony Mortimer observes, Thady’s narrative ends with Jason embroiled in a legal battle (he is “going to law” about the jointure [1: 54] that Sir Condry bestowed on his wife), raising the possibility that Jason is another Sir Murtagh just as Sir Condry was another Sir Patrick.⁶⁷ As in Godwin’s *St. Leon*, the threat of circular history hovers in the background of *Castle Rackrent*. Even the novel’s attempts to locate the scenes it describes in a remote past that, it repeatedly insists, has since

⁶⁴ Some of the Editor’s footnotes, as Hollingworth observes of the entries on Thady’s “mantle” (1: 9n) and Judy’s “mark” (1: 28n), have “a strong element of parody” about them (104).

⁶⁵ Kelly, in fact, goes so far as to argue (against Butler) that Edgeworth intended the reader to sympathise with the dispossessed Sir Condry: “Thady’s sympathy for his ‘master’s’ distresses is evident, and evidently meant to be shared by the reader, especially in the face of Jason’s relentless pursuit of the now ruined master of Castle Rackrent. The conclusion is: better to be Sir Condry with all the faults of his class than to be the new man, Jason Quirk, attorney, with all his professional virtues” (75); see Kelly, *English Fiction of the Romantic Period*, 74-78.

⁶⁶ Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 357.

⁶⁷ Anthony Mortimer, “*Castle Rackrent* and its Historical Contexts,” *Etudes Irlandaises* 9 (1984): 116.

been displaced are, given its thematic concerns, not entirely convincing.⁶⁸ The very notion that a future separate from the past has emerged since 1782 is rendered problematic by *Castle Rackrent*'s persistent engagement with the Burkean historical paradigm associated primarily with the novel's more hopelessly antiquated figures. Far from being a relic of the past, the Burkean paradigm, as Edgeworth's contemporary British readers would have been aware, continued to shape British political discourse in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The notion that the Rackrents represent a superseded past that has little or no bearing on the present, in other words, is dramatically undercut once the reader recognises that the novel invests considerable energy in challenging a logic that powerfully survives in the rhetoric of the forces of reaction.

While this pervasive ambivalence lingers throughout the novel, it does not prevent an assessment of the significance of Edgeworth's attempt to represent the past. However much readers in the 1800s and early 1810s associated her with the "'true' and 'solemn' discourses" of history and philosophy,⁶⁹ and however much current students praise her work for its documentary-like interest in the facts of everyday life,⁷⁰ Edgeworth represents the past to

⁶⁸ Among the more notable ways in which the novel attempts to signal the pastness of its subject are its subtitle (*An Hibernian Tale Taken from Facts, and from the Manners of the Irish Squires before the Year 1782*), its declaration in the Preface ("The editor hopes his readers will observe that these are 'tales of other times:' that the manners depicted in the following pages are not those of the present age" [1: 6-7]), and its italicisation of the past-tense words that the Editor uses in his footnotes and Glossary entries when he explains some of Thady's references ("formerly" [1: 14n, 58], "was," and "were" [1: 15n, 16n]).

⁶⁹ Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, 62.

⁷⁰ See, for example, Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 484-85.

assert its difference⁷¹ and so to “make the past irrelevant.”⁷² The Editor calls Thady’s stories “tales of other times” (1: 6) to suggest that the age described in the narrative has come and gone: “the manners depicted in the following pages are not those of the present age: the race of the Rackrents has long since been extinct in Ireland” (1: 6-7). But as Ferris perceptively observes, “[t]his insistence signals not so much a historical understanding [...] as an ethical and political hope.”⁷³ That hope, expressed in one of the final paragraphs of the Preface, is for the emergence of a future unrelated to a past that, in fact, can now be laughed at: “There is a time, when individuals can bear to be rallied for their past follies and absurdities, after they have acquired new habits, and a new consciousness. Nations as well as individuals gradually lose attachment to their identity, and the present generation is amused rather than offended by the ridicule that is thrown upon its ancestors” (1: 7). From the perspective of the student attuned to the historical discourses of the 1790s, however, throwing “ridicule” upon “ancestors” is by no means politically anodyne. Such a project, I suggest, would have been very unlikely to provoke “a smile of good-humoured complacency” (1: 7) from those Britons who lived through the events of the 1790s and came to adopt a Burkean worldview that committed them to looking to the past for wisdom and guidance. Edgeworth’s representation of history, like those of her more overtly reformist contemporaries, Smith and Godwin, is

⁷¹ Hollingworth argues at length, for instance, that Edgeworth had no “clear understanding of the significance of what she was doing” (8) when she allowed Thady to tell his story in vernacular Irish. Instead, Hollingworth contends, she uses Thady’s speech as an index to his suspect otherness: Thady’s “use of the despised vernacular is a reiterated sign of [his] naivety. In using ‘vulgar’ speech, Thady is, by common understanding, using a language which cannot move beyond the immediate, which lacks the potential to explore cause and effect, or to analyse motive” (92).

⁷² Mortimer, 121.

⁷³ Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, 116.

motivated by concerns that are as much political as they are aesthetic, and it reflects a familiar desire to resist the determining influence of the past whenever it opposes progress or enables socio-political oppression.

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In one of the early chapters of *The Young Philosopher*, Smith details the historical education of her hero, George Delmont. The narrator informs us that Delmont, under the tutelage of his reformist mother, “had at a very early age acquired a more general and correct knowledge of history than is usually obtained” (30). His response to his reading is, predictably, largely one of disgust: “Mrs. Delmont had sometimes found it necessary to check the indignation of her infant politician; who, after he was nine or ten years old, never voluntarily sat down to read pages that seemed almost exclusively the annals of fraud and murder, of selfish ambition, or wicked policy, involving millions in misery for the gratification of a few” (30). Only a few of the heroes of classical history—those Romans who “contend[ed] for the rights of humanity against the selfish usurpations of the rich,” for example, or who otherwise resisted tyrants (30)—attract his admiration and approval. A number of issues worthy of note arise from this scene. First, by insisting that the progressive Delmont knows his history well, Smith answers the familiar anti-Jacobin charge that reformers lack a basic knowledge of the past. Second, in a perhaps overzealous attempt to mark Delmont as a sensitive child of nature who intuits many premises of the reform movement, she gives her “infant” hero a keen understanding of history as well as an

appropriately critical disposition toward the barbarities and absurdities of the past. (Such statements, after all, also play into the hands of the anti-Jacobins in some ways: the idea that a boy of “nine or ten” has read enough history to have developed an informed opinion on the subject is certainly open to satiric readings.) Finally, by drawing attention to a long tradition of individuals who opposed the abuse of power, Smith subversively identifies a number of revolutionary precursors who resisted the general trajectory of history—which, if not cyclical, is infused with a sense of repetition—and, occasionally, with some lasting success.

Smith’s efforts here to define her hero in ways that connect the cause of reform with a historical awareness crudely mirrors some of the strategies adopted by the novelists studied in this chapter. As British enthusiasm for the French Revolution waned dramatically over the course of 1790s in response to the violent turn of events in France, reformist novelists such as Smith, Godwin, and Edgeworth recognised a need to contest Burke’s and his followers’ attempts to enlist the authority of history for the loyalist cause. The argument of Burke’s *Reflections*, as they knew, was touted among the forces of reaction as possessing a higher truth value than the arguments of his radical counterparts precisely because it, supposedly, had history on its side: as the hero of Bisset’s *Douglas* asserts, “the principles, arguments, and inferences of Burke were, on the whole, justified by historical facts [...]. There was not [...] an instance, in the annals of mankind, of a nation acting on such principles, or any principles nearly similar, and continuing long flourishing and happy” (1: 213). As the above example from *The Young Philosopher* suggests, Smith, Godwin, and Edgeworth respond to this challenge in a variety of ways. Each contests the logics of inheritance and accretion; each depicts the influence of the past as oppressive and debilitating; each subjects the tropes Burke

employs (castles and estates) and the inherited cultural forces he celebrates (customs, prejudices, and traditions) to devastating critiques. In their own individual ways, too, they attempt to strengthen their ideological positions by affirming their commitment to their distinctive understandings of history. They use historical parallels to attack British policies toward the French Revolution (Smith); they explicitly reject as misguided and dangerous ahistorical approaches to effecting change (Godwin); and they re-define history as a genre, praising biographical modes to privilege a subversive approach to reading history, and casting as generically suspect the narratives of “official” history upon which Burkean politics depend (Edgeworth). One consequence of this novelistic engagement with the period’s historical discourses is an increased interest in representing the past. Granted, in *The Old Manor House* and *St. Leon*, the endeavour is dominated primarily by political agendas, and even in *Castle Rackrent* Edgeworth’s documentary impulse is partnered with a politically inspired desire, however complicated by the novel’s notorious ambivalence, to reject the inequities and absurdities of an antiquated past. Still, even with such qualifications, the struggle for the authority of history initiated by the French Revolution debate provided novelists with the motivation to represent the past, with Edgeworth’s approach to doing so proving to be the more significant for its time. As the next chapter explores, early historical fiction in Britain, if it did not originate in the political turmoil of the 1790s, is deeply indebted to the novelistic developments it prompted.

CHAPTER FOUR

*Representing History in a Post-Revolutionary Age: Varieties of Early
Historical Fiction, 1803-14*

Tracing the tumultuous events of the seventeenth-century English Civil War through an awkward fusion of standard novelistic devices (courtship and generational plots) and panoramic summaries culled from Lord Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England* (c. 1646-74), Jane West's *The Loyalists: An Historical Novel* (1812) can be classified as a didactic historical text, but it is also, as Grenby notes, a very late anti-Jacobin novel.¹ In his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), Edmund Burke had some twenty years prior drawn on imagery from the Civil War to recast supporters of the French Revolution as the spiritual progeny of the regicides.² A supporter and eulogist of Burke's,³ West, as she intimates in her introductory chapter, was well aware of the potential to extend that strategy in a work of fiction:

The tale she now chooses as a vehicle, aims at conveying instruction to the present times, under the form of a chronicle of the past. The political and religious motives, which convulsed England in the middle of the seventeenth century, bear so striking a resemblance to those which are now attempted to be promulgated, that surely it must

¹ Of the 58 novels that Grenby identifies as "anti-Jacobin," only 5 were published after 1805; West's *The Loyalists* carries the latest publication date. See Grenby, 243-46.

² See chapter 1, pp.31-32.

³ See West, *An Elegy on the Death of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*.

be salutary to remind the inconsiderate, that reformists introduced first anarchy and then despotism, and that a multitude of new religions gave birth to infidelity.⁴

In a review hostile even by early nineteenth-century standards, the writer for the *Eclectic Review* records his impatience with *The Loyalists*, seeing it not as a historical work but a piece of embarrassing propaganda, a point he conveys through an ironic list of the novel's supposedly central "proposition[s]":

King Charles the first, seeing that he was *King* Charles the first, was the most innocent, most excellent, and most injured of blessed martyrs.

All opposers of this innocent prince were, without doubt, the wickedest miscreants of mankind—Judas and Pontius Pilate (not) excepted.

No language is sufficiently expressive and heart-rending, to describe the final crime of these regicides; the bare recollection of which, is ever to plunge all loyal subjects in extremest despondency.

Nevertheless, they are, at all times, seasons and opportunities, as in duty bound, to recollect the same.

The church, such as it was then, such as it is now, such as we devoutly hope it ever will be, is immaculate, infallible, and is to be defended by all her dutiful offspring, whether agreeably to truth and conscience,—or otherwise.

All separatists from this church, (with one single exception for the sake of charity,) were and are enthusiasts or hypocrites, or, as much as possible, both.

All persons desiring to see with their own eyes, are enemies to our holy religion;

⁴ West, *The Loyalists: An Historical Novel* (1812; Boston: Bradford and Read, 1813), 1: 6.

or dangerously presumptuous in their state of mind—no layman being capable thereof. Or, finally, if he were, he had better not.⁵

Cringing at what he perceives as West's idealising, unhistorical treatment of the past, the reviewer advises her to leave history to those who are, by gender and station, more suited to the task, reminding her "that the retired occupations of a 'Mother,' or the story of a 'Gossip,' are best suited to her situation, her opportunities of research, and her ability to reason."⁶ "[T]o consign King Charles to the care of Lord Clarendon, and the Established Church to that of Bishop Hooker," he wryly concludes, "might be nearly as politic, as to stake their reputation upon the learning and the arguments, of Mrs. West,—an *eminent* novel writer of the nineteenth century."⁷

The *Eclectic's* protest against West's overtly ideological use of history identifies one of the more pronounced features of early historical fiction written between the waning of the anti-Jacobin novel and the publication of Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1814). As chapters 2 and 3 suggest, the enlistment of history for ideological purposes in early nineteenth-century historical fiction continues a pattern established in novels of the 1790s. Yet, by 1805, the production of Jacobin and anti-Jacobin novels had all but ended,⁸ and late anti-Jacobin examples such as West's *The Loyalists* were regarded as embarrassing anachronisms. As

⁵ Anonymous, review of *The Loyalists*, by Jane West, *Eclectic Review* 9 (March 1813): 253, 254.

⁶ Anonymous, review of *The Loyalists*, by Jane West, *Eclectic Review* 9 (March 1813): 263. For a gender-sensitive account of reviewers' increasing dissatisfaction with the didactic content of novels produced by women in the years leading up to the publication of Walter Scott's *Waverley*, see Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority*.

⁷ Anonymous, review of *The Loyalists*, by Jane West, *Eclectic Review* 9 (March 1813): 263.

⁸ See Grenby and Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel 1780-1805*.

their rapid decline implies, the novelistic forms that had emerged in the 1790s to convey the contest between opposed visions of the past and the nature of historical change were too rooted in the historical moment that fostered them to thrive after its passing. Implicit in the *Eclectic's* assessment of *The Loyalists*, however, is the recognition that, although outmoded, the novel of the 1790s has a legacy of its own in early nineteenth-century historical fiction. Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* stands as a strong example of the complexity of this inheritance: even as it resists easy classification as a Jacobin or anti-Jacobin novel, it participates in the debate over history those two sub-genres engaged, and, at the same time, responds to other, more localised pressures raised by Ireland's political situation.

This chapter examines some of the more prominent varieties of early nineteenth-century historical fiction that developed as Jacobin and anti-Jacobin novels receded to the cultural margins.⁹ Drawing on Jane Porter's *Thaddeus of Warsaw* (1803) and *The Scottish Chiefs* (1810), Sydney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806), and Scott's *Waverley*, I investigate the ways in which the authors of these early historical fictions variously adopt, re-deploy, and finally reject the tactics used by their immediate predecessors to represent the past and its relationship with the present and future. The structure of my analysis reflects the contours of what I am suggesting are the principal characteristics marking the transitions from the highly politicised novels of the 1790s, to the more overtly historical fictions of the 1800s and 1810s, and finally to Scott's *Waverley*. The first transition involves a shift in

⁹ Schöwerling identifies 211 novels published between 1762 and 1814 that are broadly historical in their subject matter; the vast majority of these—193 in total—were published in between 1790 and 1814, the period under study in the present work. As a consequence, the novels chosen for discussion in this chapter are necessarily representative. See Schöwerling, 253-62. Schöwerling's list is probably now in need of updating in light of the publication of Garside, Raven, and Schöwerling, *The English Novel 1770-1829*.

attitude toward the intensely partisan use of history witnessed in the 1790s, a movement defined by continuity (Porter), re-configuration (Owenson), and finally departure (Scott). The second entails a new emphasis on the history-function (the documentary-like representation of the events of the past) as opposed to the ideological-function (the shaping of that representation to comment on the present) of novelistic renditions of the past, best illustrated in an observable change in the depiction of historical and national difference (two concepts that are, as we will see, closely intertwined in the fictions discussed here). Alongside a growing number of critics suspicious of the claim that the historical novel suddenly emerges with Scott, I suggest that *Waverley* is best understood within the context of a variety of historical fictions in the period that developed out of contemporary experiments with novel and history.¹⁰

Porter's, Owenson's, and Scott's fictions each make unique contributions to the generic changes traced in this chapter. A novel with strong anti-Jacobin elements, *Thaddeus of Warsaw*, under the guise of historical fiction, celebrates Britain's current socio-political order by depicting Polish national difference in terms that evoke contemporary Britishness. Porter's *Scottish Chiefs*, by contrast, provides a remarkable example of a novel whose historical form and content similarly demonstrate an adherence to the Burkean logic of inheritance even as it, too, re-codifies historical and cultural otherness as contemporaneously British in order to provide models for the present. Further registering a move away from revolutionary anxieties, Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* performs two manoeuvres that signal

¹⁰ Schöwerling; Garside, "Popular Fiction and the National Tale" and "Walter Scott and the 'Common' Novel, 1808-1819"; Trumpener, chapter 3; Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, chapter 4; Richter; Stevens; and Buzard, chapter 4.

its debts to, as well as its departures from, the historical fictions of the period. First, her *National Tale* appropriates Burkean historical discourse to celebrate Irishness, thereby implicitly mounting a challenge to British order. Second, and more importantly, her novel invests considerable energy in sympathetically portraying historical and cultural difference (although her reasons for such depictions remain, like her immediate predecessors', blatantly ideological). *Waverley* continues this process of differentiating itself from its predecessors' strategies for representing history. Significant continuities exist, to be sure, but Scott's novel is ultimately too far removed from the crisis moment of the Revolution simply to replicate that earlier period's terms and methods. Instead, *Waverley* registers otherness as a distinct feature of an irrecoverable past and, in stressing the history-function of the novel, begins at the same time to make possible a representation of the past on its own terms. This is not to deny that a political position is inherent in Scott's novel—critics often read it as an affirmation (however cautious) of the Hanoverian succession and the socio-political order it created¹¹—but rather to emphasise that it foregrounds its history-function by its consistent attention to how things have changed from “then” (a past which it depicts sympathetically and whose difference it largely respects) and “now” (a present which it suggests has emerged out of a violent confrontation with the past, and which it is also capable of celebrating).

One of the more remarkable achievements of Scott's *Waverley*, this study concludes, is the realisation of a new form—what we now call the historical novel—which, crucially, effects a kind of reconciliation between the competing historical discourses that divided the

¹¹ For a reading of *Waverley* along these lines, see especially James Kerr, *Fiction against History: Scott as Storyteller* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), chapter 2.

novelists of the 1790s and their immediate successors. Scott's novel subsumes and re-combines the contrasting historical paradigms articulated during the struggle for the authority of history in the revolutionary decade, thereby giving shape to a form that accommodates aspects of both historical visions. Against the generalisation of the past as a barbaric bump in the road toward an enlightened, utopian future (as it is often theorised in the works of Paine, Godwin, and Wollstonecraft, and in turn re-configured in the works of like-minded novelists), *Waverley* bestows a certain dignity on the past and probes its difference to promote an appreciative, historicist understanding. Against the insistence that history functions in ways analogous to the "inheritable principle" (as is detailed by Burke and re-configured in the works of like-minded novelists), Scott's novel denies the history-as-continuity model such an understanding fostered. But, despite the contrary views of modern interpretations that develop, on the one hand, from Scott's oft-cited conservatism or, on the other hand, from Georg Lukács's progressivist model, *Waverley* advances a historical vision in which political allegiances remain unresolved. Instead of choosing sides, Scott's novel takes as its subject the cultural tension of its age, with two voices of a partisan debate becoming its single aesthetic focus. The end result of that negotiation is a novel whose orientation towards the past—elegiac in its documenting of what has been lost, cautiously affirmative of what has been gained—combines aspects of the competing historical discourses of the 1790s, but which leaves behind in the process the overtly political legacy of historical representation in the novel.

**"THE PRINCIPLE OF KINDRED, OF INHERITANCE, AND OF VIRTUE":
HISTORY AS CONTINUITY IN JANE PORTER'S *THADDEUS OF WARSAW*
(1803) AND *THE SCOTTISH CHIEFS* (1810)**

In the years in between the publication of *Thaddeus of Warsaw* and Scott's *Waverley*, the Porter sisters, especially the elder Jane, enjoyed immense popularity. Jane's *Thaddeus* and, later, her *Scottish Chiefs*, were by all accounts literary sensations at the time of publication, and they remained in circulation throughout the century.¹² Not all of Porter's contemporaries, especially those who figure prominently in our current understanding of the nineteenth century, thought favourably of her work and sometimes said as much—James Hogg reports Scott saying of *The Scottish Chiefs*, "I cannot bear to see the character of Wallace frittered away to that of a fine gentleman," while a young Thomas Carlyle complained that "novelists and poetasters" such as Porter have made Wallace "into a sentimental philosopher, a woe-begone lover, a mere 'carpet knight'"—but they read her

¹² Michael Adams, for instance, notes that "*Thaddeus* went through at least eighty-four nineteenth-century editions and printings, *The Scottish Chiefs* roughly seventy-five" (264); Devoney Looser, drawing on archival evidence, demonstrates how Porter was "a young woman writer who was the toast of the town" (246) when she arrived in Bath in February 1804; and Herbert M. Vaughan reports that *Thaddeus* "had an immense vogue" (129). See Adams, "Jane Porter," in *British Romantic Novelists, 1789-1832*, ed. Bradford K. Mudge, vol. 116 of *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Detroit: Gale, 1992), 264-70; Looser, "Another Jane: Jane Porter, Austen's Contemporary," in vol. 2 of *New Windows on a Woman's World: Essays for Jocelyn Harris*, ed. Colin Gibson and Lisa Marr (Dunedin: English Department of the University of Otago, 2005), 235-48; and Vaughan, *From Anne to Victoria: Fourteen Biographical Studies between 1702 and 1901* (London: Methuen, 1931), 122-37.

work all the same.¹³ How much of this hostility can be traced back to rival authorial views¹⁴ or historical revisionism in light of the great success of Scott's work is not clear. Scott, it is said, admitted in a conversation with King George IV that *The Scottish Chiefs* had been an inspiration for his first novel,¹⁵ and an 1815 letter written by Carlyle describes *Thaddeus* (which he had recently read alongside *Waverley*) as an "interesting" work that, in spite of its "deficiencies," "fully deserves" his correspondent's recommendation.¹⁶ Whatever they thought about her abilities as a novelist, Porter's now canonical contemporaries recognised that she was too popular a figure to simply ignore.

Porter, however, has not received the kind of critical attention that her contemporary popularity would seem to invite. Scholarly biographies of her are few and almost invariably brief,¹⁷ and the necessary spade work of identifying her canon has only been undertaken in

¹³ Hogg, *The Domestic Manners and Private Life of Sir Walter Scott* (Glasgow: John Reid and Co.; Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd; London: Whittaker, Treacher, and Co., 1834), 128; Carlyle, review of *Metrical Legends*, by Joanna Baillie, *New Edinburgh Review* 1 (October 1821): 403.

¹⁴ Ian Dennis, *Nationalism and Desire in Early Historical Fiction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 12.

¹⁵ See Ann H. Jones, *Ideas and Innovations: Best Sellers of Jane Austen's Age* (New York: AMS Press, 1986), 132-33, and A. D. Hook, "Jane Porter, Sir Walter Scott, and the Historical Novel," *CLIO* 5, no. 2 (1976): 181. The idea that *The Scottish Chiefs* influenced the writing of *Waverley*, we now know, may be chronologically possible. As Garside has discovered, the earliest surviving part of Scott's manuscript is written on paper that shares the same 1805 watermark with manuscripts written as late as 1810—the year *The Scottish Chiefs* was published—which casts some doubt on Scott's account (in the novel's famous introductory chapter) of the work's inception in 1805. See Garside, "Popular Fiction and National Tale."

¹⁶ Letter to Robert Mitchell, 25 March 1815, in *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, ed. Charles Richard Sanders (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 1970-), 1: 42.

¹⁷ See Jones, 114-37; Adams; Linda Mills Woolsey, "Jane Porter and Anna Maria Porter," in *British Short-Fiction Writers, 1800-1880*, ed. John R. Greenfield, vol. 159 of *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Detroit: Gale, 1996), 265-74; Vaughan; and Dorothy McMillan, "Jane Porter," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004-08), n.p.

earnest in the last twenty years.¹⁸ Among the ten novels she produced, only *The Scottish Chiefs* has recently become available in modern scholarly editions.¹⁹ Her most popular and best-selling work in her own day, *Thaddeus of Warsaw*, remains out of print. With important exceptions,²⁰ she is usually left out of studies of the novel in the period or, if mentioned, buried in the footnotes, named and quickly passed over, or compared unfavourably (and unfairly, given her very different concerns and approach) to Walter Scott.

Modern criticism has by and large founded its neglect of Porter on the premise, drawn from Lukács's *The Historical Novel* (1937), that the principal feature of the historical novel is its understanding of history as change—a criterion that eliminates from consideration a wide variety of historical fiction produced around the turn of the nineteenth century. For Lukács, Scott is the first historical novelist because he “presents history as a series of great crises. His presentation of historical development [...] is of an uninterrupted series of such revolutionary crises.”²¹ As critics have noted, however, Lukács's claims are not

¹⁸ See Adams; Woolsey; Fiona Price, “Jane Porter and the Authorship of *Sir Edward Seaward's Narrative*: Previously Unpublished Correspondence,” *Notes and Queries* 49, no. 1 (2002): 55-57; and Nicholas A. Joukovsky, “Jane Porter's First Novel: The Evidence of an Unpublished Letter,” *Notes and Queries* 37, no. 1 (1990): 15-17.

¹⁹ Kelly, ed., *The Scottish Chiefs*, vols. 4 and 5 of *Varieties of Female Gothic* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2002), and Fiona Price, ed., *The Scottish Chiefs* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2007).

²⁰ Among the most significant recent considerations of Porter are Fiona Price, Introduction to her edition of *The Scottish Chiefs*, 9-33, and “Resisting ‘the Spirit of Innovation’: The Other Historical Novel and Jane Porter,” *Modern Language Review* 101, no. 3 (2006): 638-51; Kelly, Introduction to his edition of *The Scottish Chiefs*, vii-lxiv, and *English Fiction of the Romantic Period 1789-1830*; Thomas McLean, “When Hope Bade the World Farewell: British Responses to the 1794 Kosciuszko Uprising,” *Wordsworth Circle* 29, no. 3 (1998): 178-85; Dennis; Lynn Hamer, “Folklore and History Studies in Early Nineteenth-Century England: Jane Porter and Eliza Bray,” *Folklore Historian* 10 (1993): 5-28; Nicola Watson; Jones; and Hook.

²¹ Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (1937; London: Merlin Press, 1962), 53. References are to this edition.

unproblematic.²² First, his praise of “Scott’s conception of English history” as “a ‘middle course’ asserting itself through the struggle of extremes” (37) is a reflection of his own Marxist commitment to Hegelian dialectic. In a very real way, that is, Lukács privileges Scott over “a long list of second and third-rate writers [...] who were supposed to be important literary forerunners of his” (30) because Scott’s conception of history as he understands it is closest to his own. Second, Lukács’s account of the historical novel is guided by his sympathy with the reformist historical discourse of the period he is studying. His sense of history as a “struggle of extremes,” for instance, recalls the reformist narrative of the printing press, in which historical development occurs in ways that mirror the competitive processes of print culture.²³ Even more revealing is the polemical tone he adopts when describing the period’s opposing paradigm of history.²⁴ Lukács’s dismissal of historical fictions by writers like Porter as “second or third-rate” should come as no surprise given that the foundations of her novels lie, as Fiona Price forcefully argues, in an insistence on history as continuity.²⁵

In response to perceived threats against Britain in the form of radicalism from within and imperialism from without, Porter’s *Thaddeus of Warsaw* and *The Scottish Chiefs*, I

²² Criticisms of Lukács’s theory of the historical novel are registered in, for instance, Fiona Price, “Resisting ‘the Spirit of Innovation,’” 638-39; Trumpener, chapter 3; Stevens, para. 4-5; Richter, 79-80; and Keane, “The Importance of Elsewhere: Romantic Subjectivity and the Romance of History,” *Wordsworth Circle* 27, no. 1 (1996): 16-21.

²³ See chapter 1, pp.54-59.

²⁴ Consider, for instance, the following statements: “the extraordinary historical achievements of Montesquieu, Voltaire, Gibbon, etc.,” he argues at one point, destroy “the Romantic-reactionary legend which denies to the Enlightenment any sense or understanding of history and attributes the invention of historical sense to the opponents of the French Revolution, Burke, de Maistre etc.”; the latter’s sense of history as “a silent, imperceptible, natural, ‘organic’ growth”—a conception he describes as “by its nature pseudo-historical”—is for Lukács a sign of their “ideological mediocrity” (20, 26-27).

²⁵ See the Introduction to her edition of *The Scottish Chiefs* and “Resisting ‘the Spirit of Innovation.’”

argue, imaginatively activate Burkean historical discourse to further an aggressive nationalist agenda. Porter's novels focus in detail on moments in history that she in turn develops to comment on her own. Poland in the 1790s in *Thaddeus* and Scotland at the turn of the fourteenth century in *The Scottish Chiefs* stand as analogues for an imagined Britain threatened by a combination of internal and external (revolutionary) forces. This is not to deny that Porter's novels attend to the historical record—indeed, as contemporary reviewers acknowledged, the innovative quality of her works lies in their successful incorporation of historical research—but rather to stress that her attention in the novels is at best divided between the development of their history-function and their ideological-function. Such division is registered in the novels structurally as well as thematically. In *Thaddeus*, for instance, Porter abandons the Polish setting after volume one and, even when she details Polish life in that part of the work, her strategy is one of importing the British context into the Polish. Similarly, in *The Scottish Chiefs*, the manners and values of its Scottish protagonist are not indigenous to the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries but are rather largely those of nineteenth-century British patriots at war with imperialist France. Because Porter wishes to demonstrate that the heroes of history are ancestors connected to her readers by blood and shared ideals, and therefore provide suitable models for imitation, her novels systematically translate national and historical difference into familiar, corresponding British codes. Such a procedure is consistent with her nationalist agenda and her commitment to a hyper-Burkean insistence on history as continuity, but—as her reviewers increasingly began to complain in the 1810s without, however, fully diagnosing the nature of the problem—is at odds with the history-function her readers thought the genre

could and should serve.

In the Preface to the 1810 London edition of *The Scottish Chiefs*,²⁶ Porter claims that the form of her novel is rooted in the Burkean injunction to look to the past for guidance, demonstrating an awareness of the nature of her project that is strangely absent from the Preface to the 1803 London edition of *Thaddeus*.²⁷ The Preface to the latter work neither registers her innovative engagement with history nor expresses much confidence in the audience's appetite for it.²⁸ Instead, she awkwardly claims to be following in the tradition of Samuel Richardson, stating that she chose Poland as her setting because it was best suited to her subject, "*magnanimity*" (1: 7). She also expresses anxiety over the perceived propriety of

²⁶ Porter chronically revised her works throughout her life, adding new prefaces and passages and editing older ones for their many new editions. For *Thaddeus*, there are at least three distinct editions (1803, 1831, and 1844), and I suspect further research will discover more; for *The Scottish Chiefs*, as Fiona Price reports in her edition of the novel (14), there are seven distinct editions (1810, 1811, 1816, 1820, 1828, 1831, and 1840). Without access to a library collection that holds multiple editions of the novels, it is not always possible to determine when a given part of the text was added or revised, especially in the case of *Thaddeus*. A chronological list of Porter's revisions to both novels is still needed to understand their textual evolution.

For *Thaddeus*, I consulted the 1st London edition (4 vols.; London: Printed by A. Strahan for T. N. Longman and O. Rees, 1803), the 1st American edition (2 vols.; Boston: Lemuel Blake, 1809), a reprint of what appears to be the 1831 Standard Novels edition (New York: Frank F. Lovell, n.d.), and a reprint of what appears to be the 1844 edition (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, n.d.). References are to the 1st American edition, which is taken from the 4th London edition and is, with the exception of minor revisions, substantially the same as the 1st London edition.

For *The Scottish Chiefs*, I consulted the 1st London edition (5 vols.; London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1810), two modern scholarly editions based on the 1st London edition (Price's and Kelly's editions), and two reprints of later editions (London: Ward, Lock, and Co., n.d.; Chicago: Donogue Brothers, n.d.). References are to Price's edition.

²⁷ That Porter had read Burke is evidenced by her notebooks, which contain extracts from the works she read; see Kelly, Introduction to his edition of *The Scottish Chiefs*, xi. For the most sustained reading to date of Porter in relationship to Burke's ideas, see Fiona Price, "Resisting 'the Spirit of Innovation.'"

²⁸ As Jones reports, the Porters "were seen [by their contemporaries] as producing a new kind of historical romance by giving an imaginative treatment to carefully researched historical facts" (185). See also McLean, who notes that Porter's *Thaddeus* was "one of the first serious attempts in British fiction to describe a historical military campaign. [...] Early readers admired Porter's grasp of historical detail" (172); see McLean, "Jane Porter's Portrait of Benjamin West," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 66, no. 1/2 (2003): 169-75.

her inclusion of historical and political materials customarily regarded as “extraneous” to the novel: “I must beg him [i.e., the reader] to peruse the *whole first* volume,” which details the destruction of Poland in the 1790s; “[h]e needs not be alarmed at the battles; they are neither frequent nor do they last long; and, I request him, not to pass over any scene as extraneous, which, though it begins like a political paper, or a sermon, always terminates by casting some new light on the portrait of the hero” (1: 8). Written after the commercial success of *Thaddeus*, conversely, the Preface to *The Scottish Chiefs* confidently details Porter’s method and articulates her reasons for adopting it. Abandoning an appeal to Richardson’s authority, she aligns her novel with history, stressing the thoroughness of her research: “I have spared no pains in consulting almost every writing extant which treats of the sister kingdoms during the period of my narrative. [...] [A]ll who are well acquainted with our old British historians, must perceive on reading the *Scottish Chiefs*, that in the sketch which history would have laid down for the biography of my principal hero, I have not added to the outline” (41). And rather than begging her readers to bear with the “extraneous” part of her narrative, she now lovingly draws attention to her novel’s historical content, positioning it as a corrective to (implicitly revolutionary) assaults on “ancestry”:

While tracing the characters of my personages in the Scottish annals, it was with infinite pleasure that I found those virtues in the fathers, which have attached me to their posterity. Delighted with this most dear proof of kindred, I have fondly lingered over my work; re-enjoying in its visionary scenes, hours fled to heaven; I have again discoursed, and mingled my soul, with friends whose nobility of spirit honoured the illustrious stems from which they sprung:—But like the blossomed bough torn from

its branch, they are gone; and spread fragrance in my path no more.

It is the fashion to condemn even an honest pride in ancestry. But where is the Englishman who is not proud of being the countryman of Nelson? Where the British sailor that does not thirst to emulate his fame? If this sentiment is right, respect for noble progenitors cannot be wrong; for it proceeds from the same source: the principle of kindred, of inheritance, and of virtue. Let the long race of Douglas, or the descendants of the Percy, say, if the name they bear is not as a mirror to shew them what they ought to be, and as a burning-glass to kindle in their hearts the flame of their fathers? (41-42)

Citing “respect for noble progenitors” and “the principle of kindred, of inheritance, and of virtue” as the concepts that inspire and underwrite her text, Porter explicitly invokes Burkean historical discourse to authorise her historical fiction.

The narratives of *Thaddeus* and *The Scottish Chiefs* reinforce this invocation of Burkean authority by employing tactics familiar from the anti-Jacobin novel. Much like the villains in Walker’s *The Vagabond* (1799), for instance, *The Scottish Chiefs*’s Edward I is repeatedly described as a destroyer of cultural memory: “[h]e has not left a parchment, either of public records, or of private annals, in any of the monasteries or castles around Montrose,” reports one character; “all have been searched and plundered” (54; see also 158, 167). Edward I is not, of course, anachronistically figured as a Jacobin; instead, Porter adopts the trope to current circumstances, making it suitable to the call for an assault on expansionary imperial powers (such as Napoleonic France) rather than a reference to the revolutionary ideals of the 1790s. Similarly, bloodlines in the novels largely determine the

dispositions of characters: in *Thaddeus*, the male Tinemouths are the source of antagonism, while in *The Scottish Chiefs*, the Cummins are identified as the wellspring of treason. The case of Lady Joanna Mar in the latter novel is particularly revealing in this regard: as the main operative villain of the work and its model for aberrant femininity, she is carefully distanced from the loyal Mars, being the *step*-mother of the virtuous Helen Mar and a descendent of the Cummins.²⁹ Furthermore, characters' actions toward the "noble dead" in the novels act as indexes to their moral standing. In *Thaddeus*, the narrative roundly condemns Lord Tinemouth's treatment of his wife's body after her death: "[c]ould you not," Thaddeus cries as Lady Tinemouth's body is hurried away, "allow this poor corse a little rest? Must her injuries be extended to the grave? Must her cold relics be insulted, be hurried to the tomb, without reverence, without decency?" (2: 222). In *The Scottish Chiefs*, the hero's much-discussed (and ahistorical) policy of clemency toward defeated enemies contrasts sharply with Edward I's determination to have Wallace's "body dismembered and his limbs sent as terrors to rebellion, to the four capital fortresses of Scotland" (692), a barbarous act narrowly avoided only through the intervention of the Earl of Gloucester. This recurring use of memory, history, kinship, and other similarly coded notions to guide readers in their interpretations of characters and plots is familiar from the loyalist novels of the 1790s.

Perhaps the most audible echo of the anti-Jacobin novel occurs, however, at the level

²⁹ For gender analysis of *The Scottish Chiefs*, see especially Miriam Elizabeth Burnstein, *Narrating Women's History in Britain, 1770-1902* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 80-81, and Rhonda Batchelor, "The Rise and Fall of the Eighteenth Century's Authentic Feminine Voice," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 6, no. 4 (1994): 347-68.

of structure: the plots of both novels focus on inheritances that are endangered but happily restored. Although volume one of *Thaddeus* details Poland's destruction in the 1790s, the novel's main narrative concern revolves around the eponymous hero's mysterious English lineage; the belief that he is the son of the dastardly Lord Tinemouth, a possibility infused with disaster given the implicit understanding running throughout the text that worth is hereditary; and the revelation that he is actually the son of the morally superior (if haunted) Sir Robert Pembroke, whose betrayal of the hero's mother is explained away as the result of an insidious plot perpetrated against him. Freed from the taint of bad blood at the novel's end, Thaddeus's lost heritage / inheritance is re-instated, giving him the financial security and social standing he needs to marry his love, Mary Beaufort.³⁰ Similarly, *The Scottish Chiefs*'s primary narrative concern is Wallace's struggle to restore the hereditary crown seized by Edward I. This central notion of a usurped inheritance manifests itself materially in the form of "a small iron box" (50) that no one (upon the final orders of the previous sovereign, Baliol) but the restored Scottish king is to open, and that contains, we later learn, "the *Regalia of Scotland*" (721). The mysterious box functions as a sign of Edward I's usurpation of the crown—recalling its alienation from its rightful owners, its persistent absence and inaccessibility—and so becomes an emblem for the stolen inheritance at the centre of the novel. Its appearance at crucial moments in Wallace's narrative—serving as the reason for his call to patriotic action (volume 1, chapter 1-3), the "relic" upon which the Scottish army

³⁰ In this regard, it is important to note that Nicola Watson's reading of the conclusion of *Thaddeus*, in which the hero is revealed as "a legitimate descendant of the Young Pretender" (122), is based on a greatly expanded ending to the novel that Porter added to the text much later in life, probably for the 1844 edition. See Nicola Watson, 118-23.

swears to maintain his cause before the final battle at Stirling (volume 5, chapter 18), and the object that elicits Bruce's eulogy for his unwavering protection of the hereditary rights of the crown (volume 5, chapter 19)—effectively establishes Wallace as a champion of that once-waylaid inheritance. That identity, too, is further consolidated through Wallace's repeated rejection of the title of king, a position he maintains throughout the novel for principled as well as pragmatic reasons. In spite of their attention to actors, actions, and places far away or long ago, Porter's plots continue the anti-Jacobin strategy of affirming the "inheritable principle" using tactics familiar from a text such as Bisset's *Douglas* (1800).

While Porter's sustained attention to distant times and places marks a significant extension of anti-Jacobin practices, her reasons for representing the past nevertheless remain akin to those of her politically-minded predecessors. Volume one of *Thaddeus* takes place entirely in Poland; while it is structured around personages and events drawn from the historical record, however, there is little attempt to capture the cultural peculiarities of the Polish or their situation. Instead, Poland functions as a double for modern-day France (as a nation whose social hierarchy has been toppled) and Britain (as a nation threatened by expansionary forces). The parallel with the latter is particularly emphasised: the narrative, for instance, repeatedly celebrates "the happy tendency of the glorious [Polish] constitution of [seventeen-]ninety-one" (1: 42), a constitution which, as Nicola Watson observes, "sounds like a first cousin to that which Burke maintained had been guaranteed for England by the Glorious Revolution of 1688."³¹ Beyond dates and the names of actors and cities, *Thaddeus* takes few steps toward registering cultural difference and instead translates the sentiments

³¹ Nicola Watson, 120.

and situation of the Polish into familiar British terms. Similarly, *The Scottish Chiefs* is organised around biographical information made available to Porter by her sources; while dates, battle locations, and the names of actors and places are again drawn largely from the historical record, however, the novel pays scant attention to the historical peculiarities of late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century Scots. As some of Porter's more sympathetic critics have noted, *The Scottish Chiefs* does make a few gestures in this regard—the example of the blood-thirsty Sir Roger Kirkpatrick, for example, is often pointed to as an element of the story that, as Ian Dennis puts it, readers are meant to recognise as having “something to do with the roughness of medieval manners and morals”³²—but the overall effect of the novel, especially in its depiction of Wallace as a Christ-like figure, is less a faithful rendering of historical particularity than an idealising of a historical personage for the purpose of creating a moral tale whose relevance to the present is unmistakable. In advocating the defence of Scotland against expansionary England, Porter's novel comments directly on her own times, condemning by extension Napoleonic France's wars of aggression—a message certainly not lost on the French Emperor himself, who banned the novel soon after its translation into French.³³ Much like Walker's *The Vagabond*, in which the Gordon Riots act as a cipher for and so comment on revolutionary France, Porter's novels focus on moments in history for partisan reasons. More often than not, her depictions of the past serve a contemporary agenda rather than documentary or fully historicist impulses.

³² Dennis, 11.

³³ See McMillan, para. 8; Vaughan, 129; and Porter's “Preface to a subsequent edition, added in the year 1828,” which is reproduced in Price's edition of *The Scottish Chiefs* (723–27).

A survey of the reviews of Porter's novels reveals that her British readers were attuned to the contemporaneity of her themes and the nationalist component of her narratives. The writer for the *Annual Review* approvingly notes that "[t]he high spirit of patriotism which animates the bosom of Thaddeus, could not have been more opportunely displayed than at this moment," when the Treaty of Amiens (1802-03) failing, "the alarm is revived of a meditated invasion from the most implacable and unmerciful of foes."³⁴ He recognises and praises in particular *Thaddeus*'s propagandistic potential: "he who can read the exploits of a Kosciusko and a Sobieski, without feeling his bosom warmed with the generous emotions of patriotism, would hear the beat to arms in defence of his own shores with a cold and insensible heart. [...] [I]n order to give additional vigour and effect to that resistance [i.e., against France], let the massacres at Ismael and Prague be present to our recollection."³⁵ In its review of *The Scottish Chiefs*, similarly, the *British Critic* notes the "striking resemblance" between Porter's Scotland and "the state of Spain, when her patriot sons first unsheathed their swords against the present tyrant of the continent of Europe."³⁶ Figuring Porter's novel as a partner in the alliance against Napoleon (while displacing its nationalist implications onto Spain), the reviewer concludes that he "cannot help wishing that a good translation of the *Scottish Chiefs* into the Spanish language, were circulated through the whole peninsula, where so many patriots are without such a leader as Wallace, contending for the

³⁴ Anonymous, review of *Thaddeus of Warsaw*, by Jane Porter, *Annual Review* 2 (1803): 604.

³⁵ Anonymous, review of *Thaddeus of Warsaw*, by Jane Porter, *Annual Review* 2 (1803): 604.

³⁶ Anonymous, review of *The Scottish Chiefs*, by Jane Porter, *British Critic* 37 (March 1811): 247.

independence of their country against a tyrant more fell than our first Edward.”³⁷ Not only did Porter’s historical fictions have clear designs on the present, but contemporary readers were also well aware of the didactic and nationalistic tendencies of her works.

At the same time, however, Porter’s readers became increasingly critical of her novels’ inadequacies as works of history, especially in the immediate wake of the publication of *The Scottish Chiefs*. *The Scots Magazine* (in gentler terms than those used by Scott or Carlyle) disapprovingly notes Porter’s failure in *The Scottish Chiefs* to attend to historical particularity, complaining that “the characters and manners do not quite recal [*sic*] those of the age and of the history. Wallace, the fierce champion of Scotland in the field, and the terror of her enemies, suggests to us an idea of rough strength and austerity, which accords ill with his portrait in these volumes, where he is represented as a finished fine gentleman, and the idol of every female heart.”³⁸ *The Glasgow Magazine* provides similar reasons for the novel’s ineffectiveness as history. In a paragraph that anticipates some of the more significant generic features that would become standard to the historical novel, the reviewer details the “duties which devolve on those who attempt to become writers of historical Romances,” stressing in particular the necessity of faithfully depicting “the manners and customs of the characters exhibited, consonant to the ages in which they may be supposed to have existed.”³⁹ “These general rules,” he concludes,

we are sorry to observe are in many cases infringed upon by Miss Porter in the

³⁷ Anonymous, review of *The Scottish Chiefs*, by Jane Porter, *British Critic* 37 (March 1811): 255.

³⁸ Anonymous, review of *The Scottish Chiefs*, by Jane Porter, *Scots Magazine* 72 (April 1810): 279.

³⁹ Anonymous, review of *The Scottish Chiefs*, by Jane Porter, *Glasgow Magazine* 1 (September 1810): 72.

“Scottish Chiefs” [...]. We cannot admit [...] that tradition bids us view our immortal patriot in the light portrayed by her—Wallace, is generally understood to have been of a gigantic size, but of an heroic aspect; courageous and daring in the extreme. Miss Porter exhibits him as equally skilled in the ball-room as the field, and no less qualified to utter the insinuating language of compliment, than to embolden a race of uncultivated warriors by his powerful oratorical declamation. He is moreover, not only represented as a bold, magnanimous and accomplished hero, but is depicted as a *saint* in religion.⁴⁰

Both reviewers register, then, the absence of those elements that they found in a work such as Elizabeth Hamilton’s equally popular (and, for far different purposes, equally didactic) novel, *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* (1808): “the nice discrimination of” and “scrupulous attention to” the cultural and historical particularities of its subjects.⁴¹

Contemporary reviewers reveal the limits of their understanding of these novels’ problematic relationship with historicity, however, when they both praise their contemporary relevance and lament their deficiencies as historical accounts. Specifically, they fail to see that the one is the cause of the other: the inadequacy of Porter’s fictions as works of history, that is, is arguably a direct consequence of attempts at polemical intervention in the contemporary concerns of the nation. Rather than paint her heroes in all their historical particularity, she provides ones whose cultural and historical difference from the present is

⁴⁰ Anonymous, review of *The Scottish Chiefs*, by Jane Porter, *Glasgow Magazine* 1 (September 1810): 72-73.

⁴¹ [Francis Jeffrey], review of *The Cottagers of Glenburnie*, by Elizabeth Hamilton, *Edinburgh Review* 12 (July 1808): 402, 408. For the attribution to Jeffrey, see Walter E. Houghton, ed., *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals 1824-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966-89), 1: 443.

all but erased, and whose causes and sentiments therefore recall those of patriotic nineteenth-century Britons. Her protagonists uphold British values perceived to be threatened by French imperialism (especially Christianity), attack the ideals that underwrite that imperialism (Thaddeus and Wallace, for instance, both oppose wars of expansion and advocate defensive ones only), and, at least in the case of Thaddeus, are incorporated into the British fold. In the Preface to *The Scottish Chiefs*, Porter announces her reasons for overwriting the cultural and historical difference readers might have expected of the novel's central figures: her heroes, she declares, are designed to serve as "mirror[s]" to show her contemporaries "what they ought to be," and as "burning-glass[es]" to "kindle" them to imitative action (42). Committed to a "'propagand[ist] use of history,'" she substitutes familiarity for difference to convince her readers of the relevance of the past to the present, their proximity to history's heroes in spite of the miles or years that separate them, their common kinship and shared cultural values, and their collective participation in "a tradition of continuous heroism and self-sacrifice."⁴² Porter's configuration of history as continuity is a consequence of her nationalist agenda, and the price exacted on her novels in the process is, as her first readers noted without being able fully to explain why, the subordination of their history-function to their ideological-function.

⁴² Fiona Price, "Resisting 'the Spirit of Innovation,'" 640.

"IMMERSED AMIDST THE DECAYING MONUMENTS OF PAST AGES":

SYDNEY OWENSON'S *THE WILD IRISH GIRL* (1806)

When it was first published, *The Wild Irish Girl* was a wildly popular novel, attracting as wide an English readership as did other contemporary best-sellers such as Porter's *Thaddeus of Warsaw*, Hamilton's *Cottagers of Glenburnie*, and Hannah More's *Coelebs in Search of Wife* (1808). In its first two years alone, it went through seven London editions.⁴³ By all accounts, the novel was a cultural sensation that generated in its English readers a rage for what Dennis playfully describes as the "Wild Irish Look"—a fashionable trend that saw its more enthusiastic readers sporting the clothes and apparel modelled by its heroine, Glorvina.⁴⁴ It was also what Claire Connolly calls a "media event," in that it generated much discussion in reviews and newspapers of the day.⁴⁵ *The Wild Irish Girl* launched the writing career of Sydney Owenson (later Lady Morgan) and rapidly propelled her into prominent London social circles, attracting the attention of patrons, admirers, and detractors alike, all of whom furthered her fame whether they intended to or not. Unlike Porter, Owenson commanded the (begrudging) respect of some of her more notable

⁴³ Mary Campbell, *Lady Morgan: The Life and Times of Sydney Owenson* (London: Pandora Press, 1988), 71, and Colin B. Atkinson and Jo Atkinson, "Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan: Irish Patriot and First Professional Woman Writer," *Éire-Ireland* 15, no. 2 (1980): 79.

For modern editions of the novel, see Garland's facsimile (3 vols.; New York: Garland, 1979), introduced by R. L. Wolff; Brigit Brophy's (London: Pandora Press, 1986); Woodstock's facsimile of the 3rd edition of 1807 (Poole: Woodstock, 1995); Claire Connolly and Stephen Copley's (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2000); and Kathryn Kirkpatrick's (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). References are to this latter edition.

⁴⁴ Dennis, 49.

⁴⁵ Connolly, "'I accuse Miss Owenson': *The Wild Irish Girl* as Media Event," *Colby Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (2000): 98-115.

contemporaries; Scott and Edgeworth were warm supporters of her work, for instance, even though they seemed to value her more as an entertainer than as a stylist or a serious thinker, and were largely distrustful of her reformist politics.⁴⁶ For modern critics, Owenson's works are central to the development of the National Tale in the context of the Union and the question of Ireland and, more generally, to the genre experiments of contemporary novelists and Britain's responses to the socio-political problems raised by its empire.⁴⁷ In what follows, I consider Owenson's novel in relation to a parallel set of contemporary concerns. These involve, first, the relationship between past, present, and future—an issue, as we have seen, central to the ongoing debate over the state of the British nation and the desirability of reform in the wake of the French Revolution—and, second, the politicisation of novelistic representations of history evident in a variety of fictions in the 1790-1814 period.

Although the novel focusses on the state of Anglo-Irish relations in the post-Union era, *The Wild Irish Girl* is also firmly embedded in the debate over history described throughout this study, particularly as a consequence of its ideological use of the past. While Owenson's antiquarian background and researches help to explain the novel's historical content, questions of audience and historical moment also play a crucial role. Given that her intended readership was primarily the English, I argue that she strategically enlists the aid of Burkean discourse to win over an audience sceptical of her position but sympathetic to the

⁴⁶ For Scott's and Edgeworth's supportive comments on Owenson, see Lionel Stevenson, *The Wild Irish Girl: The Life of Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan* (1939; repr., New York: Russell and Russell, 1969), 79-80, 117, 166, 167, 176, and 288. For the ideological differences between Owenson and Edgeworth, see especially Thomas Tracy, "The Mild Irish Girl: Domesticating the National Tale," *Éire-Ireland* 39, no. 1/2 (2004): 81-109.

⁴⁷ On Owenson's role in the development of the National Tale, see especially Ferris, *The Romantic National Tale* and *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, and Trumpener.

logic she adopts. The celebration of Irish culture and history in *The Wild Irish Girl* remains, however, potentially subversive because it implicitly opposes British imperial interests: when applied to the Irish colonial context, Burke's conception of society as an inheritance to be carefully guarded comes to serve Irish-nationalist purposes and thus calls into question British colonial rule in Ireland.

Although Owenson, like so many contemporary novelists, enlists history for partisan purposes, her novel represents in addition a significant development in the historical fiction of the period. Whereas Porter's works largely fail to represent otherness, and Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* does so finally to suggest the necessity of leaving that negatively coded difference behind, Owenson's novel attempts to represent cultural and historical alterity in order to *celebrate* it. Her reasons are deeply political: by establishing that Ireland has its own ancient lineage, she is able to argue against narrow colonialist prejudices held by the English while asserting her country's cultural dignity and moral right to participate more equally in the empire. Unlike Porter's works, *The Wild Irish Girl* is especially attentive to cultural and historical particularity and makes it central (rather than ancillary) to the novel's project; unlike *Castle Rackrent* (or *The Cottagers of Glenburnie*), which depicts that particularity finally to insist on its deleterious effects, *The Wild Irish Girl* embraces that otherness.⁴⁸

As a consideration of its plot suggests, *The Wild Irish Girl* is closer to the 1790s' debates than one might expect of an Irish novel concerned primarily with post-Union

⁴⁸ As Ian Duncan has recently argued, Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* and Hamilton's *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* are key works in the tradition of "[n]ational fiction before Scott," which, he argues, "bears a didactic program that disciplines not only its characters but its readers, activating an aesthetic enjoyment (in local color) which it then suppresses and disavows (as dirt)" (72); see Duncan, *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press), chapter 3.

relations. It is not only “a novel about origins,” as Kathryn Kirkpatrick notes,⁴⁹ but also a novel about the *problem* of origins, an issue that lies at the heart of the period’s opposing historical paradigms.⁵⁰ The plot of Owenson’s novel centres on the ancient violence that one family / nation perpetuated against another: during Cromwell’s invasion of Ireland, the English Earl of M—’s ancestor murdered the Irish Prince of Inismore’s ancestor and confiscated his lands. As a result, the Prince of Inismore of the novel’s present day⁵¹ considers the M—s as his “hereditary enem[ies]” (40), against whom he holds a deep-seated prejudice, and from whom he can accept no obligation. Conscious of this ancient wrong, the novel’s hero (Horatio M—) and his father (the Earl of M—), secretly and unknown to one another, adopt assumed characters and pursue separate strategies to become intimate with the Inismore family with the hope of repairing the ancient wrong and restoring the stolen lands by marrying Glorvina, the Prince’s only child. In a very real way, then, the plot of *The Wild Irish Girl* articulates issues central to the 1790s’ debate over history: first, the violence present at the founding of social order and, second, the question of whether or not that old violence necessarily invalidates that order, or if prescription can render it legitimate. Owenson’s position, as it is expressed over the course of the novel, tends toward the latter proposition,⁵² though with a significant proviso: old violence can be overcome and the social

⁴⁹ Kirkpatrick, Introduction to her edition of *The Wild Irish Girl*, vii.

⁵⁰ See chapter 1, pp.38-81.

⁵¹ Critics largely agree that the action of the narrative takes place sometime after the Rebellion of 1798 and before the Union of 1801.

⁵² As Tom Dunne argues, the “primary dynamic function of [Owenson’s] characters’ confrontations with the past and its legacy” is “that it should be a healing process, and lead to reconciliation” (137); see Dunne, “Fiction as ‘the Best History of Nations’: Lady Morgan’s Irish Novels,” in *The Writer as Witness: Literature as Historical Evidence*, ed. Tom Dunne, (Cork: Cork University Press, 1987), 133-

order founded upon it legitimised if, as Mary Jean Corbett argues, the conquering power (Horatio / Britain) can unite itself with the conquered other (Glorvina / Ireland) in a mutually loving, respectful partnership. Simple union, in Corbett's formulation, is not enough for Owenson: "original dispossession" must be counteracted by the forging of "moral and affective" ties—as opposed to prescriptive and legal ties only, best represented in the text by the Earl of M—'s fatherly, patriarchal (rather than Horatio's passionate, husbandly) love for Glorvina—as well as the reformation of the conqueror through his encounter with the "transformative power" of the conquered other.⁵³ That the novel's plot is founded on the problem of societal origins indicates the extent to which Owenson's commentary on the Union is grounded in issues central to the Revolution debate about the past and its relationship with the present and future.

The Wild Irish Girl is carefully constructed in terms of form and content to target an English audience, and to invoke history as its principal means of conveying its didactic position to that audience. Formally, as a series of letters written by an Englishman recovering from dissipation who visits Ireland at his father's request, and who progressively falls in love with the country through Glorvina, the novel invites readers to trace that reformation of opinion in its (English) hero, which it, in turn, expects of its (English) readers. Narratively, an insistence on Ireland's ancient descent and respectable pedigree is adopted by Owenson to convince English readers of the dignity and worth of Irish culture, and, in doing so, force

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⁵³ Corbett, *Allegories of Union*, 61, 56. See also Corbett, "Allegories of Prescription: Engendering Union in *The Wild Irish Girl*," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 22, no. 3 (1998): 92-102, and Robert Tracy, "Maria Edgeworth and Lady Morgan: Legality versus Legitimacy," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 40, no. 1 (1985): 1-22.

them to revise their opinions of Ireland.⁵⁴ From protracted conversations about Irish culture between Horatio, Glorvina, Father John (a Catholic priest who resides with the Inismores), and the Prince of Inismore that do little or nothing to forward the plot, to copious footnotes—usually citing personal anecdotes and historical authorities to explain a range of Irish manners, cultural practices, and modes of dress—that crowd the text’s margins and sometimes overwhelm the page, one unmistakable thesis of *The Wild Irish Girl* is that Irish culture is old and largely derived from the ancient Greeks and other similarly venerable cultures. In a document designed to reform English opinions of Ireland as a barbarous, backward nation, Owenson’s allocation of so much textual space to historical information indicates its importance to the novel’s overall didactic enterprise and its anticipated effect on its English readers.

While some critics identify such historical content as evidence of *The Wild Irish Girl*’s participation in a fashionable antiquarianism,⁵⁵ the novel’s formal and narrative strategies for amending English attitudes toward Ireland suggest a more complex relation to its historical moment. Its publication in 1806 coinciding with the decline of the prominent sub-genres of the period, Jacobin and anti-Jacobin novels, *The Wild Irish Girl* entered upon a discursive field in which the notion of “history” had been the subject of an intense and

⁵⁴ For readings of the novel along these lines, see Jane Stevenson, “The Politics of Historiography: or, Novels with Footnotes,” in *Forging in the Smithy: National Identity and Representation in Anglo-Irish Literary History*, ed. J. Th. Leerssen, A. H. van der Weel, and Bart Westerweel (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1995), 195-206, and Newcomer, *Lady Morgan the Novelist* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1990), chapter 3.

⁵⁵ Barry Sloan, for instance, argues to this effect: “Lady Morgan exploits the ruins of former grandeur for sheer effect”; for her, he continues, it seems “as if the very fact that the old way of life existed only in fragments gave it an added exotic and nostalgic potency which she, with the Gothic novelist’s delight in sensation, was quick to utilize” (12). See Sloan, *The Pioneers of Anglo-Irish Fiction 1800-1850* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe; Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble), 1986.

protracted partisan struggle, with reformists and loyalists variously striving to co-opt its authority. In this sense, Owenson's "documentary preoccupation"⁵⁶ participates not only in the earlier form of history with which she is often connected, antiquarianism,⁵⁷ but also, and importantly, in the novelistic representation of the past that emerged in the wake of the French Revolution. As Trumpener reminds us, antiquarianism itself takes on in this period political inflections of the Revolution debate:

Although after 1800 the novel appears to take up exactly where the antiquarian theories and Enlightenment ethnographers of the late 1770s left off [...], the events of the 1790s have transformed the meaning of cultural nationalism. Proto-Jacobin in many respects during the last decades of the eighteenth century, cultural nationalism often appears in the 1810s and 1820s as reactive or reactionary, even if the possibility of a more radical deployment remains. The advent of a class-based cultural analysis and revolutionary politics fundamentally alters the ground of subsequent political life in Britain, so that the revival of cultural nationalism in the early nineteenth century has a very different meaning from what it had the first time around, despite an apparent continuity of rhetoric.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Jean Brihault, "Lady Morgan: Deep Furrows," in *Rural Ireland, Real Ireland?*, edited by Jacqueline Genet (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1996), 73.

⁵⁷ That antiquarian researches, in which Owenson was interested and involved, inform the historical content of her novel and her conception of Irish culture is undeniable. Jones, for instance, demonstrates that Owenson "had made an intensive study of Irish history and archaeology in preparation for writing this novel, obtaining advice from Joseph Walker, an antiquary, to whom [...] she was indebted for much misinformation" (190). See also J. Th. Leerssen, "Fiction Poetics and Cultural Stereotype: Local Colour in Scott, Morgan, and Maturin," *Modern Language Review* 86, no. 2 (1991): 273-84.

⁵⁸ Trumpener, 12. Similarly, Lee draws particular attention to the ambiguous place of antiquarianism in post-1789 Britain, arguing that, while its "activities may often have proceeded from a conscious sentimental desire to preserve or to restore a national patrimony, [...] the very egregiousness of this

In the early nineteenth century, Trumpener argues, antiquarianism is made to serve “reactionary” causes, albeit, “the possibility of a more radical deployment remains.”

Owenson’s antiquarianism thus has political consequences, just as do her contemporaries’ uses of history (as event, as record, as a category of empirical knowledge). Replicating the tactics Burke had employed in defence of Britain and the *ancien regime* in France, *The Wild Irish Girl* enlists the aid of “history” (understood especially as a genealogical inheritance) to plead for the dignity of Irish culture and Ireland as a whole. In the process of so doing, however, it also activates the latent “Jacobin” possibilities of late eighteenth-century antiquarianism that Trumpener identifies in order to articulate an implicit critique of British colonial rule in Ireland.

The Wild Irish Girl as a whole encompasses these two seemingly contrary possibilities. Perhaps the best example of Owenson’s deployment of them appear in Letter 12, where Horatio, guided by the Prince of Inismore, tours the latter’s ancient “banqueting-hall,” which has been transformed into “an armory, a museum, a cabinet of national antiquities, and national curiosities” (102). As Horatio walks through this “*emporium* of the antiquities of Inismore” (103), the various objects in the hall elicit commentary from the Prince and Father John, the main thrust of which is invariably to establish the antiquity and respectability of Irish culture. Horatio’s inquiry about a piece of military armour leads to a discussion of knighthood, which the Prince argues is “an institution” in Ireland “more ancient than any in England, by some centuries” (103). Horatio listens on, incredulous but incapable

antiquarian foraging drew attention to the troubling processes of loss and extinction that made the retrieval necessary” (77); see Lee, chapter 3.

of confuting the argument, as the Prince demonstrates that “the origin of knighthood may be traced in Ireland upon surer ground than in any other country whatever” (104). Owenson’s choice of topic here is not accidental. Chivalry is, as the (in)famous “lament” in the *Reflections* suggests, foundational to Burke’s understanding of the establishment of the system of polite, Christian European culture and manners he defends; by locating its origin in Ireland, Owenson establishes her country’s membership in that pan-European society.⁵⁹ Next, the Prince and Father John combine forces to show how, “from the testimony of tradition, from proofs of historic fact, and above all, from the internal evidences of [James Macpherson’s translations of] the poems themselves,” the Ossian tales are actually of “Irish origin” (106). Horatio again listens on helplessly as the two natives show that ancient Ireland, unlike Scotland, “was at that period [i.e., circa the fourth century] esteemed the most enlightened country in Europe” (107). Like Burke’s Britain or France, Owenson’s Ireland has similarly ancient, venerable foundations and traditions.

Owenson marshals Burkean historical discourse here to raise Ireland in the opinions of English readers, but the strategy is double-edged, awakening at the same time a keen awareness of the fact that her adopted homeland’s past consequence has been almost entirely

⁵⁹ Not surprisingly, Burke’s words make a number of appearances throughout *The Wild Irish Girl*. Horatio cites the phrase “swinish multitude” (9) just before he sets out on his journey, and in his description of Glorvina among her tenants at a funeral, he also lifts a sentence from Burke’s well-known account of Marie-Antoinette in the *Reflections* (slightly misquoted): “there was not an individual among this crowd of ardent and affectionate people,” he reports, “that would not risk their lives ‘to avenge a look that threatened her with danger’” (188). Additionally, a note approvingly cites a passage from Burke’s *Letter to a Peer of Ireland on the Penal Laws* (1782) to defend Catholic priests (126n), while, in the midst of Glorvina’s qualified defence of aristocracy and hierarchical order, an accompanying note cites another passage from the *Reflections* (also slightly misquoted): “[h]e feels no ennobling principles in his own heart, who wishes to level all the artificial institutes which have been adopted for giving body to opinion, and permanence to future esteem” (119n). With important exceptions such as Corbett, critics have not adequately acknowledged or accounted for Owenson’s engagement with Burke.

lost as a result of British interference. The hall of antiquities in the Prince of Inismore's ruined castle is, in the novel, proof of a remarkable ancient culture, but the fragmentary, dislocated status of its relics is also a bitter commentary on the state of present-day colonial Ireland. The past they recall is one from which the Irish are cut off, or to which they can only gain access through imagination: Horatio reports that, when the Prince enters the hall, "his gratified eye wander[s] over the scattered insignia of the former prowess of his family; his gratified heart expand[s] to the reception of life's sweetest ties—domestic joys and social endearments;—he forgets the derangement of his circumstances—he forgets that he is the ruined possessor of a visionary title; he feels only that he is a man—and an Irishman!" (103). The Prince's "museum" allows him to remember the ancient grandeur of Ireland and of his family, but it is a momentary comfort that sits awkwardly beside the sad reality that he is "the ruined possessor of a visionary title" living in a decaying castle on the edge of what was once his family's large estate. The text makes it clear, too, that this momentary comfort is a willfully maintained illusion: unable to bear the sight of the confiscated "'domains of his ancestors,'" the Prince has had the windows facing them in his hall of antiquities "closed up" (102). The realities of English colonisation and its attendant legal and political persecution of Irish culture (issues carefully documented throughout the novel) at times threaten to overwhelm the novel's main objective, which is to convince its readers (Ireland's colonial masters) that Irish culture has its own history and ancient dignity. Owenson's novel activates Burkean historical discourse to help plead for Ireland, but in so doing it also flirts subversively with a devastating critique of England as the destroyer of Irish history and

culture.⁶⁰

While Owenson's contemporaries were largely sympathetic toward her goal of speaking "a good word for Ireland,"⁶¹ they were vocal critics of the methods she adopted to achieve her end. The *Critical* reviewer, like many readers since, found *The Wild Irish Girl*'s incorporation of cultural and historical information disruptive. "[W]e cannot but observe," he writes, "the injudicious manner with which Miss O. has introduced her disquisitions on the manners of the Irish [...]. While the tear of sensibility is swelling in the eye of her fair reader at the woes and virtues of the interesting heroine, it is frequently checked by an elaborate dissertation on the Irish harp, or a lengthened argument on the comparative antiquity of the Scotch or Irish poetry."⁶² The *Literary Journal* bemoaned the novel's pretensions to non-novelistic discourses: "Of late it has become the fashion to introduce certain subjects into novels," he argues, "which [...] belong more directly to writings of a serious and scientific description," a trend he traces back to "the heat of party-politics" of the revolutionary

⁶⁰ Julia Anne Miller reads the novel almost exclusively along these lines, arguing that the novel figures the marriage between Horatio and Glorvina as a second, more insidious conquest that restores Glorvina / Ireland's lands at the cost of legitimising Horatio / England as their rightful owner, thereby "expos[ing] the founding violence beneath the proposed union"; "the heroine's historical memory," she concludes, "remains an indeterminate element that permanently destabilizes the union" (13). See Miller, "Acts of Union: Family Violence and National Courtship in Maria Edgeworth's *The Absentee* and Sydney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl*," in *Border Crossings: Irish Women Writers and National Identities*, ed. Kathryn Kirkpatrick (Tuscaloosa and London: Alabama University Press, 2000), 13-37.

⁶¹ [William Taylor], review of *The Wild Irish Girl*, by Sydney Owenson, *Monthly Review* n.s., 57 (December 1808): 379. For the attribution to Taylor, see Benjamin Christie Nangle, *The Monthly Review, Second Series, 1790-1815: Indexes of Contributors and Articles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 68, 177.

⁶² Anonymous, review of *The Wild Irish Girl*, by Sydney Owenson, *Critical Review* s. 3, 9 (November 1806): 328.

decade.⁶³ For the *Monthly* reviewer, Owenson's novel participates in the lamentable politicisation of the genre typical of the 1790s. "Romances and novels," he observes, "were formerly written to make old women sleep, and to keep young women awake. They interfered not with the serious affairs of the world"; but now, he continues, "they are frequently made the vehicles of the most marked and serious instruction; [...] they discuss and settle the most doubtful points in politics."⁶⁴ Each of these contemporary assessments registers (most often with displeasure) *The Wild Irish Girl*'s attempts to incorporate into the fiction "serious" discourses such as history and natural science, its explicitly political agenda, and its kinship with the novels of the 1790s. Owenson's attention to cultural and historical details, and the partisan deployment of such information, they recognised, align her work with the novels of the revolutionary period.

In spite of these ties to its predecessors, however, *The Wild Irish Girl* marks a significant departure from the culturally and historically oriented novels that came before it such as Porter's *Thaddeus of Warsaw* and Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent*. Specifically, in Owenson's novel, the propagandistic representation of otherness refuses systematic recodification to render it more familiar to contemporary English readers or to use that difference as a foil to point to alternate socio-political and cultural realities that have since, happily, replaced it. Instead, *The Wild Irish Girl* lovingly portrays that alterity to make it known to an English audience Owenson perceives as deeply prejudiced against Ireland.

⁶³ Anonymous, review of *The Wild Irish Girl*, by Sydney Owenson, *Literary Journal* n.s., 2 (December 1806): 582.

⁶⁴ [William Taylor], 378.

Owenson, it is true, sometimes negates that difference through comparisons to the English context: Horatio's first impression of Dublin is that of a "miniature copy of our imperial original [i.e., London]" (15-16), for instance, and though the lower orders indeed have an "accent," he reports, Glorvina speaks English "with an accent that could never denote her country" (132). The pervasive technique of tracing the roots of Irish customs, manners, dress, and traditions to other, older cultures, as Trumpener notes, also signals a failure to present that difference on its own terms: "the impulse to develop original, indigenous criteria for cultural evaluation," she notes, "is matched, or checked, by the resort to precedent."⁶⁵ While it cannot systematically present that otherness in all its particularity, the novel as a whole nevertheless promotes a sympathetic understanding of the cultural and historical difference that Owenson feels has been long viewed negatively by the English.

The vision of Irish culture offered in *The Wild Irish Girl*, however, is thoroughly romanticised and exoticised. The strings of the Irish harp are so "thrill[ing]," so sublime (52); the gaiety and warmth of Irish manners so contrary to the chilly prudence of their Scottish and English counterparts; the vivacity and naturalness of Glorvina so different, so attractive in comparison to all the English women Horatio has ever known; the Irish forms of Roman Catholicism so "seducin[g]," so "captivating," and the religion itself such "a *picturesque* faith" (50).⁶⁶ *The Wild Irish Girl* may not be able to register Irish otherness entirely in its own terms, but it does attempt "to affirm elements of Irish culture—to construct and perform a

⁶⁵ Trumpener, 143.

⁶⁶ On these points, see especially Leerssen, "How *The Wild Irish Girl* Made Ireland Romantic," *Dutch Quarterly Review* 18, no. 3 (1988): 209-27; Joseph W. Lew, "Sidney [sic] Owenson and the Fate of Empire," *Keats-Shelley Journal* 39 (1990): 39-65; and Thomas Flanagan, *The Irish Novelists 1800-1850* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1958), chapters 8 and 9.

certain sort of ‘romantic’ Irishness” as an object of interest in its own right.⁶⁷ As Horatio’s thoughts at the moment of his own conversion testify, too, the encounter with Irish otherness is a regenerative experience:

Thus suddenly withdrawn from the world’s busiest haunts, its hackneyed modes, its vicious pursuits, and unimportant avocations—dropt as it were amidst scenes of mysterious sublimity—alone—on the wildest shores of the greatest ocean of the universe; immersed amidst the decaying monuments of past ages; still viewing in recollection such forms, such manners, such habits (as I had lately beheld), which to the worldly mind may be well supposed to belong to a race long passed beyond the barrier of existence, with “the years beyond the flood,” I felt like the being of some other sphere newly alighted on a distant orb. [...] My soul, for the first time, had here held commune with herself; the “lying vanities” of life no longer intoxicating my senses, appeared to me for the first time in their genuine aspect, and my heart still fondly loitered over those scenes of solemn interest, where some of its best feelings had been called into existence. (51-52)

Revitalised through this, as it were, transportation back in time and the consequent experience of “mysterious sublimity,” Horatio / Britain “for the first time” holds “commune with” him- / itself and is reborn. Loving Union with Glorvina / Ireland, Owenson suggests, is the solution to Horatio’s persistent ennui and Britain’s correspondingly sickly imperial

⁶⁷ Corbett, *Allegories of Union*, 56. The National Tale as a genre, as Ferris argues, is designed to facilitate this purpose, compelling readers “to consider Ireland as a habitat (a native and independent place) and not simply as the primitive, ridiculous, or dangerous colony of English imaginings” (52) by substituting “the foreigner” of the travel tour genre for “the stranger-who-comes-nearer” (60); see Ferris, *The Romantic National Tale*, chapter 2. See also Ferris, “Narrating Cultural Encounter: Lady Morgan and the Irish National Tale,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 51, no. 3 (1996): 287-303.

relations.

THE "SEAMY SIDE" OF HISTORY: WALTER SCOTT'S *WAVERLEY* (1814)

Walter Scott was, as critics have recently reminded us, by far the most significant British novelist of the early nineteenth century. Marshalling a dizzying array of publication figures, William St. Clair's *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* demonstrates through sheer force of numbers the remarkable popularity and widespread circulation of Scott's works. Scott was, St. Clair's comprehensive study determines, "[b]y far, the most popular author of the romantic period and later, both in verse and in prose, not only in Great Britain but in English-speaking communities everywhere."⁶⁸ Ferris's *The Achievement of Literary Authority* demonstrates the pivotal role Scott played in earning cultural legitimacy for the novel, a suspect form previously denied a place in the hierarchy of prestigious genres: "[t]he Waverley Novels," her work concludes, "moved the novel out of the subliterate margins of the culture into the literary hierarchy."⁶⁹ Similarly, Homer Obed Brown's *Institutions of the English Novel* provides a compelling account of how the institution of the English novel, properly understood, is a nineteenth-century phenomenon, one consolidated under the Author of Waverley: "Scott," his study argues, "gave the 'genre' of 'the novel'

⁶⁸ St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 632.

⁶⁹ Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, 1.

material substance, identity, and a proper name.”⁷⁰ Scott’s centrality in the development of the novel and the Romantic period generally, then, has been widely acknowledged.

Recent Scott criticism situates the “Great Unknown” in relation to his contemporaries in a bid to understand the nature of his achievement through such contexts as the National Tales of Edgeworth and Owenson, the nationalist fictions of the peripheries, and the Edinburgh literary scene.⁷¹ While these approaches have greatly enriched our understanding of Scott and significantly expanded our knowledge of the novel in the Romantic era, they have also muted the relationship between his work and the political novels of the 1790s and 1800s, whose moment of cultural prominence coincided with his literary apprenticeship. In situating Scott in the context of the ideas about past, present, and future that commanded the attention of novelists of the revolutionary period, I further develop the historicist approach of Ferris and Trumpener. My argument re-confirms Scott’s participation in the concerns of contemporary novelists while clarifying his remarkable movement away from their overwhelmingly partisan aesthetics and agendas.

To illustrate Scott’s continuities with and departures from the fiction of the period, I look briefly at his first novel, *Waverley*, and at contemporary readers’ responses more generally to his fiction. Drawing attention to *Waverley*’s relationship to the generic and discursive features of reformist and loyalist novels alike, I argue that Scott’s work dialectically subsumes in order to incorporate elements of the opposing historical paradigms

⁷⁰ Homer Obed Brown, *Institutions of the English Novel: From Defoe to Scott* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), xx.

⁷¹ See Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, Trumpener, and Duncan.

of the earlier period. The result is a singular aesthetic—elegiac in its depiction of decaying cultures, but also affirmative of history’s progressive direction—that is a defining feature of the classical historical novel.⁷² A key factor in the development of this form is *Waverley*’s foregrounding of the work’s history-function as opposed to its ideological-function. In refusing to use the past primarily to comment on the present, as so many of his contemporaries had done, Scott shifts interest in the past away from its partisan potential and toward its historicist possibilities.

So delicately does Scott achieve the balance of his historical vision that readers have long disagreed as to where his “true” sympathies lie—with the past he laments, or the new order he affirms. In Lukács’s influential account of the historical novel, the latter narrative predominates: the *Waverley* plot depicts history as a process defined by change, just as reformists of the 1790s had done. Tellingly, however, some of his contemporaries subscribed to the former narrative, praising Scott’s fiction for doing precisely the kinds of cultural work that Burke’s discourse had done two decades before. The clear continuities between *Waverley* and the political novels of the earlier period thus encouraged an interpretation that saw his fiction as serving explicitly anti-revolutionary ends. From the detached vantage point of the present, however, *Waverley*’s achievement of a balance between the opposing historical discourses of the period appears to constitute the crucial moment in the evolution of the British novel when the form begins to leave behind the legacy of the 1790s—the politicisation of representations of the past—and to foreground the novel’s historicist

⁷² For an interpretation of Scott as a “moderate” operating in a world of extremes he rejected, see John P. Farrell, *Revolution as Tragedy: The Dilemma of the Moderate from Scott to Arnold* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1980).

potential.

While critics have long recognised the “conservative” elements of *Waverley*,⁷³ they have seldom noted that the work shares a number of significant narrative features with the earlier anti-Jacobin novel. Most prominently, Scott’s novel centres on a failed revolution (the Highland uprising of 1745), a plot familiar from works such as Walker’s *The Vagabond* or Charles Lucas’s *The Political Quixote* (1801), which depict the failures of the Gordon Riots (1780) and the Irish Rebellion (1798), respectively, as analogues for the French Revolution. *Waverley* is more subtle and historically sensitive than either of these in its location of revolution in a specific past that it recovers in detail, and in its general avoidance of anachronistic connections between 1745 and 1789. But despite these differences, *Waverley*, like the anti-Jacobin fictions, ultimately forecloses the possibility of legitimate revolution: not only does the Highland uprising fail (as, inevitably, all revolutions must in loyalist fiction), but it also does so because it is driven by the kind of selfish ambition associated in conservative discourse (especially Burke’s) with revolutionary figures. Fergus Mac-Ivor, one of the architects of the rebellion, is a Scottish noble raised in France, where he acquired the habits that have prepared him for his revolutionary career. While Scott is, on the one hand, merely incorporating historical fact here—Jacobite supporters in exile were indeed sheltered by the French court in the first half of the eighteenth century—on the other hand, the topical significance of Fergus’s French upbringing is unmistakable. “Accustomed to petty intrigue,

⁷³ For readings that locate Scott’s fiction in the context the Revolution debate, see, for instance, Farrell; Alexander Welsh, *The Hero of the Waverley Novels* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963); and Avrom Fleishman, *The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), chapter 3.

and necessarily involved in a thousand paltry and selfish discussions, ambitious also by nature,”⁷⁴ Fergus is a “residual Jacobinical philosopher-villain” or, in Grenby’s taxonomy, a variation of the Vaurien figure of the anti-Jacobin novel, a character whose idealism is fatally compromised by his appetitive interestedness.⁷⁵ “[H]is political faith,” Scott’s narrator says of Fergus, “was tinctured at least, if not tainted, by the views of interest and advancement so easily combined with it; and at the moment he should unsheathe his claymore, it might be difficult to say whether it would be most with the view of making James Stuart a king, or Fergus Mac-Ivor an earl” (100). The narrative turns upon Waverley’s dawning awareness of Fergus’s ambivalent character and, in Burkean fashion, his concerns for the pragmatic consequences of the Stuart uprising: since James II’s deposition, he reasons, “four monarchs had reigned in peace and glory over Britain, sustaining and exalting the character of the nation abroad, and its liberties at home. Reason asked, was it worth while to disturb a government so long settled and established, and to plunge a kingdom into all the miseries of civil war [...]?” (140–41). In its depiction of a failed rebellion headed by a Gallicised figure against a stable, prosperous order, *Waverley* (as Nicola Watson argues of Scott’s early novels in general) “succeed[s] at once in containing the French Revolution and in transforming its historical significance, carrying out an essentially counter-revolutionary remaking of the national past.”⁷⁶

At the same time, however, the novel also features narrative elements associated in

⁷⁴ Scott, *Waverley: Or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since*, ed. Claire Lamont (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 100. References are to this edition.

⁷⁵ Nicola Watson, 133, and Grenby, chapter 4.

⁷⁶ Nicola Watson, 127.

the period with the novel of reform. Most significantly, *Waverley* focusses on a moment in the past that implicitly calls into question an understanding of historical development founded on the notion of inheritance. The novel's representation of the violent displacement of one culture by another mirrors the progressive operations of history as understood by contemporary reformers, in which competing ideas clash in the discursive realm and are discredited or affirmed as reason and political society march on toward ever-more perfect states. History in *Waverley* is not a process whereby the benefits of previous generations are preserved and consolidated into a stable order bequeathed from generation to generation, but rather (as Lukács perceived) "an uninterrupted series of [...] revolutionary crises" (53) defined by the succession and displacement of various cultural orders and the logics that sustain them. Scott's novel also draws on narrative elements employed in reformist fictions of the period, incorporating, for instance, the hopelessly antiquated figure familiar from novels such as Smith's *The Old Manor House* or Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent*. Defined largely by his penchant for classical Latin quotations and his rigid adherence to outdated notions, the Baron of Bradwardine is a source of amusement to the novel's characters and readers alike because, for much of the work, he is absurdly concerned with the preservation and continuity of ancient customs. Even though it is largely loving, Scott's treatment of the Baron's management of the feudal ceremony of removing the king's boots after battle (a honour anciently bestowed on the Bradwardine house), for example, solidifies him as a character (like Mrs. Rayland or Thady Quirk) trapped in the past and superseded by new socio-political realities to which he has not reconciled himself. Balancing its disciplining of revolutionary energies, then, is the novel's commitment to reformist notions of historical

process and its use of plot features familiar from reformist novels of the earlier period.

While *Waverley* draws on discursive and genre features of the loyalist and reformist novels of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, however, the novel ultimately holds these opposing forces in unresolved tension by substituting a historicist for a partisan agenda. Hence the novel's subtitle, *'Tis Sixty Years Since*, a phrase often invoked over the course of the work to draw attention to its efforts at historical recovery. Hence, too, the narrator's announcement in the "Postscript, which should have been a Preface" that the novel was written "for the purpose of preserving some idea of the ancient manners of which I have witnessed the almost total extinction": "[t]here is no European nation," the narrator famously states, abandoning his stance of playful novelist and assuming that of the detached historian, "which, within the course of half a century, or little more, has undergone so complete a change as this kingdom of Scotland" (340). This goal was perfectly understood by his original readers: "The object of the work before us," Francis Jeffrey noted in his review of *Waverley*, "was evidently to present a faithful and animated picture of the manners and state of society that prevailed in this northern part of the island, in the earlier part of last century."⁷⁷ More recently, too, modern critics have widely acknowledged the historicist, even ethnographic nature of Scott's fiction: Ian Duncan extensively examines Scott's "historicization of regional difference" in the context of Scottish Enlightenment stadial notions of history, while James Buzard sees *Waverley* as anticipating the modern discipline

⁷⁷ [Jeffrey], review of *Waverley*, by Walter Scott, *Edinburgh Review* 24, no. 47 (November 1814): 209. On Scott's contemporary readers' approval of his attention to manners, see Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, chapter 3, and Ann Rigney, *Imperfect Histories: The Elusive Past and the Legacy of Romantic Historicism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), chapter 1.

of “cultural anthropology” in its “remorseless acknowledgement of the terms on which difference might be permitted to exist.”⁷⁸

Whether the novel recovers historical difference to celebrate or lament the passing of Scotland’s ancient feudal order, however, is an ambiguous point, and an exclusive reading of *Waverley* as progressivist or reactionary ignores substantial evidence to the contrary from within the text.⁷⁹ The “race” of the Jacobites, Scott’s narrator remarks in the “Postscript,” “has now almost entirely vanished from the land, and with it, doubtless, much absurd political prejudice; but, also, many living examples of a singular and disinterested attachment to the principles of loyalty which they received from their fathers, and of old Scottish faith, hospitality, worth, and honour” (340). If the emphasis in this passage seems to lie with what has been lost, the narrative that precedes it—with its depiction of Fergus’s courageous but dubious character, the Baron’s warm but outdated ways, and the sense of backwardness generally associated with the Stuart uprising—presents imposing challenges for such a reading. At the same time, such statements frustrate a reading of *Waverley* as an unproblematic affirmation of the Hanoverian succession and the order it established. The novel enables its readers to perceive the extent of the historical change to which it points, and equally to take stock of what has been lost and gained, but it refuses to engage in the

⁷⁸ Duncan, 71, and Buzard, 7, 100.

⁷⁹ Harry E. Shaw makes the point forcefully: “[a]ttempts to decide that Scott is a pure apostle of progress, or a nostalgic obscurantist, or that he takes some definite position between these two extremes, will never seem wholly convincing. On the level of absolute value, Scott remained, with excellent results for his fiction, divided between his love of the past and his respect for the present; on a pragmatic level, he knew that progress was inevitable” (152); see Shaw, *The Forms of Historical Fiction: Sir Walter Scott and his Successors* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1983), chapter 4. See also Fleishman, 50, and Fiona Robertson, *Legitimate Histories: Scott, Gothic, and the Authorities of Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 11.

aggressively polemical use of history so characteristic of contemporary novelists such as Smith, Edgeworth, Porter, and Owenson.

Judging from responses to the *Waverley* Novels written over nearly two decades after the publication of *Waverley*, however, some of Scott's readers failed to register the non-partisan nature of his representations of the past and instead understood them as participating in the debate over history initiated during the revolutionary period. These readers missed or ignored the simultaneously progressive and nostalgic sympathies that his fiction elicits, and defined his work in the ideological terms that (as Coleridge seems to have intuited) his aesthetic approach, in fact, eludes. That the reception of Scott's fiction generated a second-order echo of the polemical positions his work ambivalently records and effectively leaves behind is an ironic indicator of the lasting impact of the historical discourses of the revolutionary period well into the nineteenth century. That the terms of that partisan struggle do not accurately represent what Scott's historical representations actually achieve, by contrast, underscores the fundamentally different nature of his engagement with history.

It might come as something of a surprise to modern readers such as Lukács, but Scott's original admirers and detractors alike conceived of his historical representations as a continuation of the loyalist defence of Burkean values. His historical fictions, they argued in particular, resisted revolutionary change by cultivating reverence for the past. Whether such cultural work was seen as good or bad depended, of course, on the critic's political leanings. In, for instance, a long review of John Gibson Lockhart's (Scott's son-in-law) *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.* (1837-38) that lauds Scott, the *British Critic* writer asked (and then answered) the following rhetorical question:

Whatever of good feeling and salutary prejudice exists in favour of ancient institutions [...] is it not in good measure attributable to the chivalrous tone which [Scott's] writings have diffused over the studies and tastes of those who are now in the prime of manhood? His rod, like that of a beneficent enchanter, has touched and guarded hundreds, both men and women, who would else have been *reforming* enthusiasts. [...] Whether the impulse he has given prevail or no, surely to his writings, humanly speaking, we are mainly indebted for a comparative pause in the career of change on which we had entered: for any opportunity which may now seem afforded to us, of surveying and strengthening the bulwarks which yet remain.⁸⁰

Scott's fiction is figured here as a key contributor to British culture's stock of "salutary prejudice [...] in favour of ancient institutions" that curtailed reformist "enthusias[m]" and encouraged the "surveying and strengthening" of the societal "bulwarks" believed to be under attack.⁸¹ As this conservative reader understood, the act of representing history had political consequences.

This representation of the Waverley Novels was echoed by reform-minded critics, but

⁸⁰ Anonymous, review of *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.*, by John Gibson Lockhart, *British Critic* 24, no. 48 (October 1838): 473-74.

⁸¹ Later in the century, Leslie Stephen made a similar argument in his *Hours in a Library* (1874-79): "When the crash of the French Revolution came in Scott's youth, Burke denounced its *à priori* [*sic*] abstract reasonings in the name of prescription. A traditional order and belief were essential, as he urged, to the well-being of every human society. What Scott did afterwards was precisely to show by concrete instances, most vividly depicted, the value and interest of a natural body of traditions. Like many other of his ablest contemporaries, he saw with alarm the great movement, of which the French Revolution was the obvious embodiment, sweeping away all manner of local traditions and threatening to engulf the little society which still retained its specific character in Scotland. He was stirred, too, in his whole nature when any sacrilegious reformer threatened to sweep away any part of the true old Scottish system. And this is, in fact, the moral implicitly involved in Scott's best work" (163-64); see Stephen, *Hours in a Library*, new edition (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1892), 1: 127-68.

with the intent to damn Scott as unprogressive. In his essay on Scott in *The Spirit of the Age* (1825), for example, William Hazlitt draws on tropes familiar from the revolutionary period to describe Scott much as Wollstonecraft had depicted Burke in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*. According to Hazlitt, Scott “brood[s] over antiquity”: he “treasures up every thing brought to [him] by tradition or custom” and “shudders at the shadow of innovation.”⁸² Like Mackintosh’s or Paine’s Burke before him, Hazlitt’s Scott is a servant of tyranny who “administers charms and philtres to our love of Legitimacy, makes us conceive a horror of all reform, civil, political, or religious, and would fain put down the *Spirit of the Age*” (132). “Does he really think,” Hazlitt asks rhetorically,

of making us enamoured of the ‘good old times’ by the faithful and harrowing portraits he has drawn of them? Would he carry us back to the early stages of barbarism, of clanship, of the feudal system as ‘a consummation devoutly to be wished?’ Is he infatuated enough, or does he so dote and drivel over his own slothful and self-willed prejudices, as to believe that he will make a single convert to the beauty of Legitimacy, that is, of lawless power and savage bigotry [...]? (131)

For Hazlitt, Scott’s fiction participates in the polemical use of the past characteristic of the revolutionary period, attempting to “mak[e] us enamoured of the ‘good old times’” through his representations of history in a bid to stamp out calls for change and “carry us back” to those barbaric feudal times.⁸³ Hazlitt’s association of Scott’s fiction with Burke’s anti-

⁸² Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age*, in *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, ed. Duncan Wu (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998), 7: 124. References are to this edition.

⁸³ In *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), Mark Twain reads Scott in similar terms: “the Revolution broke the chains of the *ancien régime* and of the Church, and made of a nation of abject slaves a nation of freemen [...]. Then comes Sir Walter Scott with his enchantments, and by his single might checks this

revolutionary crusade is clinched in the essay's final paragraph, which quotes from Oliver Goldsmith's *Retaliation: A Poem* (1774)—a work in which Burke is damningly described as a man who sold his talents to party interest, a sentiment echoed by his detractors in the 1790s.⁸⁴ Like his famous ideological precursor, Hazlitt concludes, Scott is “a writer, who ‘born for the universe’ / —‘Narrowed his mind, / And to party gave up what was meant for mankind’” (133). Such responses to Scott's fiction tell us much about contemporary culture. Conditioned by the historical discourses that circulated in Britain for much of his adult life, Hazlitt, like the loyalist reviewer for the *British Critic*, understands Scott's attempts to represent the past as a partisan activity with clear political consequences.

While such contemporary readers failed to register the remarkable ambivalence of Scott's historical vision and continued to read his work in presentist, polemical terms, there were still other critics in the period who recognised the extent to which Scott had made the cultural tension of his age his subject. As Coleridge perceived early in Scott's career as a novelist, the clash of historical paradigms in *Waverley* was designed not in order to argue for

wave of progress, and even turns it back; sets the world in love with dreams and phantoms; with decayed and swinish forms of religion; with decayed and degraded systems of government; with the silliness and emptiness, sham grandeurs, sham gauds, and sham chivalries of a brainless and worthless long-vanished society. He did measureless harm; more real and lasting harm, perhaps, than any other individual that ever wrote” (327); see Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*, ed. James M. Cox (New York: Penguin, 1984), chapter 46.

⁸⁴ The substance of Goldsmith's quip is echoed, for instance, in Godwin's assessment of Burke shortly after the former heard news of the latter's death. In the 3rd edition of *Political Justice* (1798), Godwin added a note to a passage on “the enlightened and accomplished advocates for aristocracy” (3: 472). In it, Godwin argues that Burke's “principal defect consisted in this; that the false estimate as to the things entitled to our deference and admiration, which could alone render the aristocracy with whom he lived, unjust to his worth, in some degree infected his own mind. [...] [H]e entangled himself with a petty combination of political men, instead of reserving his illustrious talents unwarped, for the advancement of intellect, and the service of mankind. He has unfortunately left us a memorable example, of the power of a corrupt system of government, to undermine and divert from their genuine purposes, the noblest faculties that have yet been exhibited to the observation of the world” (4: 355).

one side or the other, but to dramatise and aestheticise the broad cultural tension between a historical vision that looked to the past for guidance and one that prioritised socio-political and intellectual progress:

Scott's great merit, and, at the same time, his *felicity*, and the true solution of the long-sustained *interest* novel after novel excited, lie in the nature of the subject [...]. [T]he essential wisdom and happiness of the subject consists in this,—that the contest between the loyalists and their opponents can never be *obsolete*, for it is the contest between the two great moving principles of social humanity; religious adherence to the past and the ancient, the desire and admiration of permanence, on the one hand; and the passion for increase of knowledge, for truth, as the offspring of reason—in short, the mighty instincts of *progression* and *free agency*, on the other. In all subjects of deep and lasting interest, you will detect a struggle between two opposites, two polar forces, both of which are alike necessary to our human well-being, and necessary each to the continued existence of the other.⁸⁵

Scott's novels, Coleridge argues, make the “contest” between “religious adherence to the past and the ancient” and “the passion for increase of knowledge, for truth” their object of focus. Not surprisingly, an astute reader such as Coleridge is entirely silent on the issue of where Scott's own loyalties lie in this “contest.” For him, the appeal of Scott's fiction lies in his choice of subject—one that had both universal and, as we have seen, unique contemporary appeal—and his forging of an aesthetic that straddles the “two polar forces [...] necessary

⁸⁵ Letter to Thomas Allsop, 8 April 1820, in *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956-71), 5: 34-35.

each to the continued existence of the other.” The subject-matter of Scott’s *Waverley*, then, is in important ways profoundly connected to the struggle for the authority of history that took place in the 1790s and beyond.

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Shortly after the Jacobites’ victory over an English force near Preston, Waverley discovers a “formal gazette” (239) that provides an account of the Baron of Bradwardine’s fulfilment of his ancient feudal duty to his king: the drawing off of his liege-lord’s boots after the battle. Waverley was not present for the ceremony, but, based on the conversation he held with Fergus, he is generally aware of its “ridiculous” nature and how it will in all probability expose the Baron to derision (232). The report of the ceremony in the gazette, however, is solemn and serious, detailing the titles of the participants and the forms of the “feudal homage,” and celebrating the event as a reminder of “the ancient days of Scotland’s glory” (239). Waverley responds to this account by pondering the gap between the complicated reality of the events and their historical representation: “‘Were it not for the recollection of Fergus’s raillery,’ thought Waverley to himself when he had perused this long and grave document, ‘how very tolerably would all this sound, and how little should I have thought of connecting it with any ludicrous idea! Well, after all, everything has its fair as well as its seamy side’” (240). As both participant in the events that will ultimately become the subject of historiography (the “seamy side”) and a consumer of those historiographical narratives (the “fair” side), Waverley finds the discrepancy between the two jarring at first but, as a

recovering romance reader, perhaps something to be expected after all.⁸⁶

Waverley's coming into awareness of history's "fair" and "seamy" sides calls attention to one of the central preoccupations of early British historical fiction written in the wake of 1789: the employment of history—as event (the past), as record (historiography), and as category of empirical knowledge (contrasted with subjective, imaginative genres such as the novel)—for political ends. Following the lead of Jacobin and anti-Jacobin novelists who imported the terms of the Revolution debate into their works, the authors of many early historical fictions incorporate representations of the past in a bid to shore up their ideological positions. Their depictions of history are often more complex and detailed than those of their predecessors, but the underlying goal of historical representation remains similarly didactic. Whether they draw on the past to suggest the necessity of its rejection (Edgeworth) or its preservation (Porter), or to re-negotiate colonial relations in the present (Owenson), these early historical fictions draw on the historical discourses of the revolutionary period and represent the past for political purposes.

Scott, in contrast, aestheticises the cultural tension underpinning these competing conservative and reformist socio-political visions of the 1790s and after. *Waverley's* indebtedness to these varied sources is quite clear: not only does it feature plot elements and explore subject-matter characteristic of the earlier political sub-genres of the novel, but it also was understood by its original readers as contributing to the same larger debate as those earlier forms. That these readers did so, however, tells us more about the remarkable staying

⁸⁶ For a more comprehensive analysis of this scene, see Garside, "Waverley's Pictures of the Past," *ELH* 44, no. 4 (1977): 659-82.

power and cultural currency of the historical discourses of the 1790s well into the nineteenth century than it does about the nature of Scott's accomplishment. *Waverley* ultimately foregrounds its history-function at the expence of its ideological-function: whatever affirmation of Lukácsian historical progress the novel may offer is balanced against a poignant sense of what has been lost in the process, and Scott's announced historicist intention is to preserve the particularities of the past. As Coleridge seems to have intuited, Scott's novel refuses wholly to endorse one of "the two great moving principles of social humanity" over the other, recognising in them instead a unified cultural tension with broad aesthetic possibilities. *Waverley* takes as its subject the clash of historical paradigms that circulated in British culture for the previous two-and-a-half decades and, in refusing to resolve their tension, represents the past with a complexity characteristic of the unresolved-ness or divided-ness of history itself. Scott's adoption of this cultural tension as his subject marks the moment in the history of the British novel when a historicist rather than a political agenda begins to take precedence in novelistic representations of the past.

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