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Labouring Bodies, Feeling Minds: Intellectual
Improvement and Scottish Writing, 1759-1828

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Abstract

This thesis traces the dynamic between labour and learning as it was figured by Scottish writers in the period 1759-1828. Vocational specialization and engagement with a literary field that traversed professional and disciplinary boundaries were the twin imperatives of the Scottish Enlightenment's modernising credo. But the division of labour was also associated with a narrowing of intellectual and moral capacity thought to be incompatible with the exhortations of politeness and civility. Leisured cultivation offered readers and writers a middle ground in which to negotiate between these contradictory demands.

This study explores the way in which this culture of intellectual improvement was claimed by authors and readers involved in manual labour as a counterinfluence to the rigours of work, and as a civilizing prerogative that extended to all social levels. But others registered significant anxiety towards the destabilising effects of excessive delicacy or refinement, and feared that these might be exacerbated by contact with the necessity of bodily labour. I argue that this contributed to a redressing of the content and purpose of popular education that sought to match it to the role of the lower classes within the economic and political order. Particular attention is paid in the following study to authors who either claimed or were ascribed a labouring identity such as Robert Burns and James Hogg, but I also deal with lesser-known writers, and frame their engagement with intellectual improvement through broader eighteenth-century discourses on the division of labour and the theory of mind. In doing so, I discuss a variety of genres and forms, including philosophical and economic treatises, poetry, memoir, biography, the novel, and the literary periodical.

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1

Labour, Enlightenment and Scottish Romanticism: An Overview

His epistles to brother poets, in the rank of farmers and shopkeepers in the adjoining villages, – the existence of a book-society and debating-club among persons of that description, and many other incidental traits in his sketches of his youthful companions, – all contribute to show, that not only good sense, and enlightened morality, but literature, and talents for speculation, are far more generally diffused in society than is generally imagined; and that the delights and the benefits of these generous and humanizing pursuits, are by no means confined to those whom leisure and affluence have courted to their enjoyment.

From Francis Jeffrey's review of R. H. Cromek's *Reliques of Robert Burns*, *Edinburgh Review*, 26 (January 1809)¹

1.1 The Romantic periodical and the labouring-class writer

Francis Jeffrey's reflections on Robert Burns's intellectual milieu of debating clubs and book-societies for the *Edinburgh Review* firmly establish the centrality of the late poet and his works both to the field of Romantic literature, and to nineteenth-century debates on the value and purpose of popular education. Jeffrey makes his remarks on Burns's exemplarity as an enlightened member of the Scottish lower classes in an 1809 review of R. H. Cromek's *Reliques of Robert Burns*, but it's clear that the real issue at stake here is the poet's legacy in a rapidly changing nineteenth-century literary culture, rather than the merits of Cromek's idiosyncratic collection. Established by Francis Jeffrey, Henry Brougham and Francis Horner in 1802, the *Edinburgh Review* was the quarterly public organ for a 'philosophic Whiggism' first delineated in the gradualist social philosophy of

¹ [Francis Jeffrey] 'Art.1. Reliques of Robert Burns, consisting chiefly of Original Letters, Poems, and Critical Observations on Scottish [sic] Songs. Collected and Published by R.H. Cromek', *Edinburgh Review*, 26 (1809), 230-276 (p.275).

the Edinburgh University professor Dugald Stewart, whose lectures Jeffrey and Brougham had attended as students.² In his landmark study of 1987, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, Jon P. Klancher characterises the project of the *Edinburgh Review* as that of consolidating a middle-class audience whose ‘hegemonic cultural power’ would exert a stabilising influence upon public life in Britain, forestalling the sort of cataclysmic overturn of the status quo which had occurred in the French Revolution a decade earlier, and creating the conditions for the gradual liberalisation of economic and political life tentatively described in Stewart’s lectures.³ What the founders of the *Edinburgh Review* hoped to achieve in a middle-class context through the concretisation of a critical reading audience, Jeffrey imagines education accomplishing for the lower classes, by offering an apparent framework for social mobility which would provide its participants with a stake in the maintenance of the social order, and the intellectual mettle to resist the exhortations of Jacobin authors and agitators. Within the Union and Empire, the example of Scotland and its ‘excellent institutions for parochial education’ was to demonstrate the capacity of widespread education and literacy to promote the compliance of the lower orders in the face of political and economic development. Schooling would ensure that a class with no proprietary interest in the emerging economic dispensation would be: ‘able to appreciate the advantages of its condition, and fit to be relied on in all emergencies where steadiness and intelligence may be required.’⁴

This Whig configuration of Burns’s cultural significance would of course be hotly contested by a Tory Romantic cultural formation which cast the rustic poet as a glorious aberration produced by the endowments of natural genius rather than a particular intellectual milieu. In his 2005 study *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine*, David Higgins argues that Jeffrey’s review of Cromek’s *Reliques* is representative of his characteristically ‘punitive attitude’ towards the moral self-entitlement of poetic genius, which cast it ‘as an example of the latent Jacobinism that he had also identified in the

² For discussion of the term ‘philosophic Whiggism’ see Henry Cockburn, *Life of Lord Jeffrey*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1852), also Biancamaria Fontana, *Rethinking the Politics of Commercial Society: The Edinburgh Review 1802-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.183, and Alex Benichmol, *Intellectual Politics and Cultural Conflict in the Romantic Period: Scottish Whigs, English Radicals and the Making of the British Public Sphere* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), p.103. I discuss Stewart’s lectures in Chapter 2 of the current thesis.

³ Jon P. Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790-1832* (London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), p.48.

⁴ Jeffrey, Review of Cromek’s *Reliques*, p.276.

work of the Lake Poets.’⁵ As Higgins argues, Jeffrey’s conviction that literary genius was a species of permissiveness with the potential to upset the fragile balance of progress and stability maintained by the intellectual culture which it was the job of the critic to police, could hardly be more different from that espoused by the writers of *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*. Established in 1817 as a Tory counterblast to the reformism of the *Edinburgh Review*, the mission of *Blackwood’s* was, in Ian Duncan’s words, the ‘marshalling of cultural nationalism against Whig political economy’.⁶ In an essay that appeared in the magazine in 1819, *Blackwood’s* doyen John Wilson refutes the earlier arguments of Francis Jeffrey, contending that to explain the literary achievements of Scotland’s rural lower classes, ‘we must look [...] to a far higher source than the mere culture of the mind by means of a rational and widely extended system of Education.’⁷

The occasion of Wilson’s assertions is a comparison between the poetry of Burns and that of his fellow *Blackwood’s* contributor James Hogg, a contrast which I reflect upon in more detail in Chapter 4 of this study. Here, it will suffice to say that Wilson’s attribution of Burns and Hogg’s poetry to a Romantic co-origin of national culture and natural genius represents a crucial moment in the ideological occlusion of the relationships of both writers to their material and intellectual contexts. For Wilson, Burns’s poetry is nothing less than: ‘essentially true to human life, but tinged with that adorning radiance, which emanates only from the poet’s soul in the hour of his inspiration.’⁸ Here, Wilson claims a stance elaborated by William Wordsworth in his 1816 *Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns* – itself a polemical refutation of many of Francis Jeffrey’s earlier claims regarding the poet’s shortcomings – in which he praises ‘the intrinsic efficacy’ of Burns’s poetry, and judges that his ‘poetic fabric, dug out of the quarry of genuine humanity, is airy and spiritual’.⁹ This trope of transcendental truth revealed through the local or particular formed the discursive bedrock of the Blackwoodian opposition to the *Edinburgh* reviewers’ qualified advocacy of economic progress and public education as

⁵ David Higgins, *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine: Biography, Celebrity and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p.15.

⁶ Ian Duncan, *Scott’s Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p.26.

⁷ John Wilson, ‘Some Observations on the Poetry of the Agricultural and that of the Pastoral Districts of Scotland, Illustrated by a Comparative View of the genius of Burns and the Etrick Shepherd’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 23 (1819), 521-529 (p.521).

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.524.

⁹ William Wordsworth, *A Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns: Occasioned by an Intended Republication of the Account of the Life of Burns, by Dr. Currie; and of the Selection Made by Him from his Letters* (London: 1816), pp.20-21.

complementary guarantors of social stability. John Gibson Lockhart, another *Blackwood's* contributor, occupies this position with even greater confidence in his 1819 work *Peter's Letters to His Kinsfolk*, a performance which Duncan credits with 'the first programmatic account of the ideological formation of a romantic cultural nationalism.'¹⁰ There, Lockhart writes of Burns that 'within the limits and ideas of the rustic life of *his* country, he could find an exhibition of the moral interests of human nature, sufficiently varied to serve as the broad and sure foundation of an excellent superstructure of poetry.'¹¹ There are echoes here of Wordsworth's contention in the Preface to the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, that 'the essential passions of the heart find a better soil' in '[l]ow and rustic life'.¹² Lockhart's 1828 *Life of Robert Burns*, continues in the same vein, but also functions as a vehicle for overt party polemic, with the author identifying the Edinburgh *literati* of the late eighteenth century as a self-serving Whig cabal, who readily excluded Burns from their ranks in order to preserve their 'unquestioned superiority.'¹³ In part, this was an appropriation of a position earlier occupied by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who had laid the responsibility for Burns's death at the door of the corrupt Scottish establishment which had failed to offer him adequate patronage.¹⁴

Wilson and Lockhart's reflections on Burns aver Higgins's argument that *Blackwood's* pursued the 'construction of a version of genius that is fundamentally conservative' in its offer of a transcendent spiritual lyricism in lieu of political reform, and its implicit decoupling of literature from the material conditions of the writer.¹⁵ For Higgins, this underlines Jerome J. McGann's argument that '[o]ne of the basic illusions of Romantic Ideology is that only a poet and his works can transcend the corrupting appropriation by "the world" of politics and money.'¹⁶ For Wilson *et al*, social cohesion would be ensured by a shared investment in the transcendent national culture represented by writers like Burns and Hogg, rather than the careful orchestration of stratified reading audiences under the intellectual leadership of critics like Jeffrey.

¹⁰ Duncan, p.47.

¹¹ John Gibson Lockhart, *Peter's Letters to His Kinsfolk*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: 1819), iii, p.331.

¹² William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads, with Other Poems*, 2 vols. (London: 1800), i, xi.

¹³ Lockhart, p.164, 179.

¹⁴ See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Poetical Works*, ed. J. C. Mays, 6 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), i, pp.269-272. See also Nigel Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral: Poetry and Improvement in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p.279.

¹⁵ Higgins, p.20.

¹⁶ Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p.13.

Whether avowedly or not both of these positions were fundamentally influenced, though in different ways, by the findings of Burns's posthumous editor and biographer James Currie, a Liverpool-based and Edinburgh-educated physician. Currie's 'Life of Burns', and the 'Prefatory Remarks on the Character and Condition of the Scottish Peasantry' that accompanied his 1800 edition of the poet's *Works*, set the tone for much of the Romantic debate on the significance of Burns and his writing, and as I argue in Chapter 3 of this thesis, marked a watershed in cultural attitudes towards labouring-class intellectual activity.¹⁷ In its allusion to the capacity for lower-class literacy to act as an incentive for civil obedience, Jeffrey's review implicitly avers Currie's description of Burns's genius as an 'inordinate sensibility', necessitating containment by the 'regular and constant occupation', of schooling or employment. (Currie I 238-39) Currie's views and their endorsement by the Whigs of *the Edinburgh Review*, cemented Burns's position as evidence of the desirability of institutionalised literacy, as well as the pitfalls that awaited talented members of the lower classes, propelled by inappropriately intellectual educations, towards goals that exceeded their proper social and vocational realm. By the same token, Currie's very accrediting of Burns's genius, and his assertion in his 'Prefatory Remarks on the Character and Condition of the Scottish Peasantry', that traditional Scottish songs 'exhibit a perfect knowledge of the human heart', arguably foregrounded the later Blackwoodian discourse on transcendent genius and national culture (Currie I 15).

The contestation of Burns's cultural symbolism within the literary politics of the Romantic era, partly explains why his relationship to the broader intellectual ecosystem of the late eighteenth century, obvious to Jeffrey in 1809, is all but disavowed by a later *Edinburgh Review* contributor, Thomas Carlyle, who responding to Lockhart's 1828 biography of the poet, argues that 'Burns first came upon the world as a prodigy' who wrote with access to 'no furtherance but such knowledge as dwells in a poor man's hut.'¹⁸ Born in 1795 to a Dumfriesshire stonemason, Carlyle eschewed a potential career in the Kirk to become a writer whose broad ranging cultural authority, as Ralph Jessop notes, caused his nineteenth-century readers to categorise him variously as: 'Preacher, Teacher,

¹⁷ James Currie ed., *The Works of Robert Burns; with an Account of his Life, and a Criticism of his Writings. To which are prefixed, Some Observations on the Character and Condition of the Scottish Peasantry*, 4 vols. (Liverpool, London, Edinburgh: 1800). Further references are given after quotations in the text and are abbreviated to 'Currie'.

¹⁸ Thomas Carlyle, 'The Life of Robert Burns, By J.G. Lockhart', *Edinburgh Review*, 48 (1828), 269-312 (pp.270-71).

Reviewer, Philosopher, Prophet, Poet, Artist, Man of Letters, Social and Political Commentator, Sage.¹⁹ The diversity of these epithets reflects Carlyle's status as a chief inaugurator of an 'elitist bourgeois cultural politics of the Victorian period', which would cast Britain's nascent industrial modernity as antithetical to its own aesthetic values, even as the architects of those values derived increasing political and economic power from the mechanisation and expansion of manufacturing.²⁰ Carlyle's configuring of Burns as the heroic author of a poetry which transcended the constraints of penury and hard manual labour that crushed its creator, accorded with both post-Romantic notions of the literary imagination and with the nineteenth century's *laissez-faire* attitude to the condition of the labouring poor, the worthy among whom, it was trusted, would ape Carlyle's rise to the top through hard work and natural endowments.²¹ A Robert Burns or a James Hogg whose writing reflected an occasionally privileged involvement in the diffuse intellectual culture of the long eighteenth century was of little use to such constructions.

1.2 Situating Scottish Romanticism

More recent critical efforts have done much both to salvage the writing of Burns, Hogg and others from ahistorical notions of natural genius and national character, and to interrogate their seedbed in a Romanticism whose under-criticised discursive formations – beneath that which McGann in his study of the same name dubbed 'the Romantic Ideology' – pervaded academic constructions of the literary field well into the last quarter of the twentieth century. The past few decades have seen a concerted effort by scholars to reassert not only the continuity between Romantic-era thought and culture and the intellectual practices and institutions of the Enlightenment, but the distinctiveness of Scottish Romanticism within an archipelagic 'four-nations' model of literary culture in the British Isles over the long eighteenth century.

Within this broader trend, North-American scholars have tended to lead the way in mapping out Scottish Romanticism as a distinctive academic field, which considers the manifold complexity of Scotland's neither entirely peripheral nor dominant status in

¹⁹ Ralph Jessop, *Carlyle and Scottish Thought* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 1997), p.17.

²⁰ Ben-Chimol p.106, see also Thomas Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', *Anticipation; or an Hundred Years Hence; The Rise, Progress, and Present State of Public Opinion in Great Britain; The Last Days; or, Discourses on These our Times, By the Rev. Edward Irving*, *Edinburgh Review*, 49 (1829), 439-59.

²¹ Christopher A. Whatley, "'It Is Said That Burns Was a Radical": Contest, Concession, and the Political Legacy of Robert Burns, ca. 1796–1859,' in *The Journal of British Studies*, 50:3 (2011), 639-66 (pp.643-44).

relation to both an emergent Britishness, and the political, economic and cultural dynamics of empire during the period. Leith Davis's 1998 *Acts of Union: Scotland and the literary negotiation of the British nation*, and Janet Sorensen's 2000 *The Grammar of Empire*, adapt post-colonial models of criticism to study the tensions and affinities between Scottish and British, and Scottish and English, linguistic and literary traditions in the period following the Parliamentary Union in 1707. Such work relates Scottish Romanticism to a dialogic production of centre and periphery by both Scottish and English writers, interrogating the critical fallacy of a unitary Anglophone literature, as well as that of a naturalized Scottish or Celtic otherness. In his introduction to the 2011 *Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Romanticism*, Murray Pittock credits Katie Trumpener's 1997 *Bardic Nationalism* with having 'invigorated the idea of a powerful and dynamic Scottish Romanticism'.²² In his 2008 study of *Scottish and Irish Romanticism*, Pittock builds a case for a pluralised Romantic criticism, capable of accommodating the distinct national literatures of Scotland and Ireland, which for Pittock are partly characterised by the 'inflection of genre towards a distinctively national agenda of selfhood', and the occasionally coded reclamation of national pasts, and which in Scotland's case found early expression in the 'Doric' poetry of Allan Ramsay in the 1720s.²³ Indeed, at points both Robert Burns and James Hogg position themselves and their work in relation to a Scottish literary tradition in which Ramsay's *Gentle Shepherd* is a major fixture, and which predates the Blackwoodian account of national culture.

In their introduction to an important 2004 collection of essays, *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism*, Leith Davis, Ian Duncan, and Janet Sorensen take a different tack, configuring Scottish Romanticism as a tool of critical practice, and suggesting that: '[t]he case of Scotland may thus provoke a salutary defamiliarization of some of the fundamental categories that structure literary history, including the temporal borders of periodization and the topological borders of nationality.'²⁴ Such an approach promises to avoid the uncritical Anglocentricism and periodic rigidity that potentially attend scholarly models of Romantic literature. It also preserves a sense of the way in which Scottish writing of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries interacted with a transnational literary

²² Murray Pittock, 'Introduction: What is Scottish Romanticism?' in *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Romanticism*, ed. by Murray Pittock (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp.1-9, 1.

²³ Murray Pittock, *Scottish and Irish Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.7.

²⁴ Ian Duncan, Leith Davis and Janet Sorensen, 'Introduction' in *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism*, ed. by Leith Davis, Ian Duncan, and Janet Sorensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp.1-19 (p.10).

field – not least through reciprocal exchanges with its contemporary English equivalent. As the editors of *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism* acknowledge, such a project was pioneered in Susan Manning's 1990 study, *The Puritan-Provincial Vision: Scottish and American Literature in the Nineteenth Century*, which explores the discursive commonality between Protestant writers on both sides of the Atlantic, and earlier, in Andrew Hook's 1975 *Scotland and America: A Study of Cultural Relations, 1750-1835*.

To defamiliarize 'the temporal borders of periodization and the topological borders of nationality' is partly to recognise the ambiguities encountered by both Scottish writers and writers about Scotland in the century following the Union of 1707. Penny Fielding's 2008 discussion of *Scotland and the Fictions of the Geography* shows the ways in which the Enlightenment interest in 'stadial history', the influence of topography on economic development, and the measuring and production of place and spatiality through statistical and cartographical mapping, contributed to a generative Romantic paradox of how to simultaneously situate and distinguish the local within the universal, that often manifested itself around questions of the place – geographical, cultural and political – of Scotland within Britain. Nowhere is this ambiguity more succinctly expressed than in the figure of 'North Britain', a late eighteenth-century attempt to render Scotland politically 'neutral', which nonetheless registers the desire of a Scottish élite to assert their cultural centrality within the Union.²⁵

If national space has proved to be a fruitful topic of 'defamiliarization' within recent scholarship, the same is true of historicity. In their introduction to *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism*, the editors draw attention to James Chandler's 1998 study, *England in 1819*, which attempts to reflexively relate the historicist turn of Romantic criticism in the 1980s and 1990s, to a deeply historicized 'Spirit of the Age', and to the exploration of 'topicality as a cultural system', both of which are, for Chandler, already defining aspects of Romantic discourse.²⁶ Davis, Duncan, and Sorensen suggest the ways in which this approach casts the historical preoccupations of Scottish Enlightenment philosophers and their nineteenth-century heirs, 'as productive rather than blocking forces in the cultural field of British Romanticism.'²⁷ For Chandler, the representation of Scotland

²⁵ Penny Fielding, *Scotland and the Fictions of Geography: North Britain, 1760-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p.16.

²⁶ James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp.105-14, p.488.

²⁷ *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism*, p.9.

was a key site for the configuration of Romantic ‘anachronism’: ‘a new preoccupation with the dating of the cultural place, the locating of the cultural moment.’²⁸ Chandler argues that the figure which ‘undergirds’ Scotland’s privileged status within the Romantic construction of historical time and contemporaneity is that of ‘uneven development’.²⁹ Eighteenth-century Scotland in particular was configured as an archetypal site of anachronism, where the achievements of literary, commercial and agricultural modernity neighboured a primitive and impoverished Highland periphery, and were interspersed with frequent pockets of underdevelopment in the Lowlands.

Late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century writers commonly describe the internal relations between Scotland’s various topographies and regions, and the position of the nation as a whole within Britain through a differential of political-economic progress, or in terms of ‘improvement’. In his important 2010 monograph on *Robert Burns and Pastoral*, Nigel Leask shows that the immediate context of Burns’s poetry was precisely the broad culture of ‘improvement’ that saturated public life in late eighteenth-century Scotland, both as a rhetoric of civility and as a material process of social and economic change. Moreover, Leask makes the case that ‘[s]cholars of the Scottish enlightenment have tended to undervalue the links between the philosophical spirit of the age and agricultural improvement’.³⁰ As Leask and others have emphasised, the term improvement is not one that historians have applied to the social and economic changes of the eighteenth century retrospectively, but was ubiquitous within the rhetorical ecosystem of the period, and used to denote forward progress and the drive for refinement in a variety of cultural, intellectual and economic arenas, among which agriculture held a certain pre-eminence. Following the parliamentary union of the two countries in 1707, Scotland had lagged behind England in terms of agricultural modernisation, with the result that when the improving impetus among the nation’s elite reached full force later in the century, it was characterised by an extraordinary pace and intensity. The historian T. M. Devine writes that: ‘nowhere else in western Europe was agrarian economy and society altered so quickly and rapidly in the eighteenth century.’³¹ As a national cause, the project of agricultural improvement in Scotland was borne on a raft of literary, institutional and

²⁸ Ibid, p.108.

²⁹ Ibid, p.131.

³⁰ Nigel Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral: Poetry and Improvement in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p.15.

³¹ T. M. Devine, *The Transformation of Rural Scotland: Social Change and the Agrarian Economy, 1660-1815* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), p.61.

cultural forms. Organisations such as ‘The Honourable the Improvers in the Knowledge of Agriculture in Scotland’ and the ‘Society for the Improvement and Promoting of Agriculture and Manufactures at Ormiston’, founded in 1723 and 1737 respectively, were among the earliest manifestations of Enlightenment ‘clubability’ in eighteenth-century Scotland.³² The collaborative, rational ethos of these institutions was materialised in Sir John Sinclair’s *Statistical Account of Scotland* (1791-1799). A twenty-one volume survey of the demographic, economic, cultural, topographical and agricultural characteristics of every parish in Scotland, compiled from the responses of local ministers, the *Statistical Account* was emblematic of both the ambitious scope of the project of improvement and its tendency to consolidate apparently disparate spheres in its drive for progress. For Mark Salber Phillips, the *Statistical Account*, ‘was a milestone in the Enlightenment’s drive to apply the methods of science to the materials of social life.’³³ Here we might also mention the establishment, again under Sinclair’s impetus, of the British ‘Board of Agriculture and Internal Improvement’, which commissioned a series of per-county reports on the state of farming and rural economy. The ‘anachronistic’ turn of Romantic historicism as discussed by Chandler, and the sense of historical turbidity that partly characterises eighteenth-century Scottish writing, is arguably a symptom of both the ideology and rapid material implementation of improvement as described by Devine and others.

But if recent scholarship has drawn productively on the manifold complexities raised by Scotland’s relationship to its own peripheries, to Britain, and to the emergence of a global economic system, this has not precluded attention to the civic and social institutions which shaped Scottish culture in the years following the Union. Scotland retained much of its civic apparatus, even as it ceded political administration to the Parliament in London. Crucially, this included the autonomous Church of Scotland, its annual General Assembly and system of rural parish schools, a separate legal tradition with its own institutions, such as the Edinburgh-based Faculty of Advocates, and a civically oriented University system, with its major centres based in the cities of Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow. In his innovative 1976 effort to approach the subject in terms of *A Social History*, Anand Chitnis avers that ‘the milieu of the Scottish

³² See D.D. McElroy, ‘The Literary Clubs and Societies of Eighteenth Century Scotland, and their influence on the literary production of the period from 1700 to 1800’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1952).

³³ Mark Salber Phillips, *On Historical Distance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), p.99.

Enlightenment lay in the universities and ecclesiastical professions'.³⁴ The research of D.D. McElroy in the 1950s provided detailed evidence of the way in which these institutions generated further sites and circuits of intellectual exchange and production, in the form of clubs and societies formed by the professional class they produced.³⁵

Of the civic institutions preserved within the Treaty of Union, it was perhaps the Kirk that exerted the greatest influence on eighteenth-century Scottish life. For Callum G. Brown, Lowland Scotland in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries constituted a 'parish state', its social, cultural and political life to a large degree structured around the diffusive influence and institutions of the Church.³⁶ After 1707, issues of religious organisation and principle, particularly those relating to the appointment of local clergy, arguably acted as a de facto politics in Scotland. The Kirk was divided into two power blocks: the minority Moderate or 'new licht' party which promoted an ideology of religious civility, and the majority Popular party or 'auld lichts', who adhered to orthodox Calvinist principles.³⁷ Crucially, the Moderates upheld the legitimacy of the 1712 Patronage Act, which had placed the appointment of parish Ministers in the hands of local landowners rather than congregations.³⁸ For the Popular party, appointment by patronage undermined the basis of Presbyterianism, setting the terms for a dispute which would dominate religious life in Scotland for almost the entire eighteenth century.³⁹ The Moderates were strongly associated with Scotland's centres of intellectual production and debate, to the extent that their cause of 'civil religion' is to some extent inseparable from the literary and discursive enterprise of the Scottish Enlightenment.⁴⁰

But the distinction between progressive Moderates and regressive 'auld lichts' should not be overstated. All of Scotland's clergymen were university educated, and as I note in the following chapter, figures from both ends of the theological spectrum eagerly participated in the intellectual life of eighteenth-century Scotland. In Chapter 5 of the current study, I discuss the reformatory social projects of the evangelical Minister Thomas

³⁴ Anand Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment: A Social History* (London; Croom Helm, 1976), p.5.

³⁵ See McElroy.

³⁶ Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland Since 1707* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p.9.

³⁷ See Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity, 1689-c.1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.185-204.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.186.

³⁹ See Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral*, p.181.

⁴⁰ Kidd, p.188; see also Richard Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985).

Chalmers in 1820s Glasgow.⁴¹ In leading the so-called ‘Great Disruption’ of 1843, which ended the dispute over clerical patronage with the establishment of the Free Church of Scotland, Chalmers might be seen to have effected one of the most significant revolutions in Scottish civic life in over a century.

While the Kirk’s internal fractions loomed large within post-Union Scottish civic society, its structures of ecclesiastical governance were also part of a broader Scottish ‘public sphere’ which facilitated the intellectual ventures of the Scottish Enlightenment. Drawing on the work of social and intellectual historians such as David Allan, Nicholas Phillipson, Richard Sher, Anand Chitnis and others, Alex Benchimol, argues that ‘the key features of the liberal public sphere in Edinburgh took shape amidst the unique political circumstances of Scotland at the beginning of the eighteenth century’, constituting ‘an important local variation to the narrative of institutional development’ elaborated by the cultural theorist Jürgen Habermas.⁴² In his 2010 study of *Intellectual Politics and Cultural Conflict in the Romantic Period*, Benchimol further develops Klancher’s nuancing of the Habermasian model in *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, as a site of class and ideological opposition in early nineteenth-century Britain. Benchimol broadens the scope of Klancher’s account of an adversarial Romantic print culture, by exploring the opposition between the bourgeois intellectual politics of the *Edinburgh Review* – a post-French Revolution metamorphosis of an institutionally grounded Scottish Enlightenment, which projected the political and economic progressivism of Dugald Stewart and his predecessors into the expanding realm of literary commerce – and an English plebeian radicalism represented by publications like William Cobbett’s *Political Register*, that had its roots in the popular politics of the seventeenth century.

The critical paradigm of a Scottish Romanticism grounded in a post-Enlightenment cultural and intellectual context is both nuanced and entrenched in Ian Duncan’s 2007 study, *Scott’s Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh*. While Biancamaria Fontana’s 1985 discussion of the *Edinburgh Review* as ‘the first major vehicle for the popularisation of the doctrines of political economy in 19th-century Britain,’ draws explicit discursive links between the Scottish Enlightenment and the Whig cultural enterprise of the Romantic period, Duncan explores the way in which Walter Scott inflected the

⁴¹ See Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral*, pp.179-209 and James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, ed. by P. D. Garside (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001).

⁴² Benchimol, p.42.

historiographical legacy of the Enlightenment through Humean scepticism, to produce an alternative account of civilized progress to that offered by the economic rationalism of Jeffrey and his cohort.⁴³ Duncan casts the various cultural projects fielded by the Scottish capital's early nineteenth-century literati as constitutive of a transferal of cultural authority from the academic and ecclesiastical institutions of the Scottish Enlightenment – hobbled by the aggressive counter-revolutionary intercession of the nation's Tory elite – to a literary marketplace in which novels and periodicals circulated the fiction of a forward-moving modernity, soundly couched in the conservative Romance of a shared national past. In *Intellectual Politics and Cultural Conflict in the Romantic Period*, Benchimol explicitly relates the institutional displacement of the Scottish Enlightenment narrated by Duncan to a Habermasian account of the Scottish 'public sphere'. For Duncan, Walter Scott's *Waverley* novels (1814-1831) are a sophisticated development of the Scottish Enlightenment insistence on the epistemological centrality of conjectural social history, in which: '[f]ollowing Hume, Scott made fiction the performative technique of a liberal ideology – an ideology that stakes its modernity on the claim of having transcended primitive modes of belief (superstition and fanaticism) through a moral and cognitive abstraction from the submerged life of history, the blind rage of politics.'⁴⁴

As Duncan's work illustrates, key to the study of Scottish Romanticism in the first decade-and-a-half of the twenty-first century, has been the reassertion and exploration of the historical links between Romantic culture and Scottish Enlightenment thought. Cairns Craig's 2007 *Associationism and the Literary Imagination*, pursues the influence of Enlightenment epistemology from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, while a collection of essays on *Romantic Empiricism* published in the same year and edited by Gavin Budge, revises, among others, the notion that a German Idealism popularised by Coleridge wholly replaced the epistemologies of John Locke and David Hume within early nineteenth-century theories of mind and the aesthetic. The epistemological shifts of the long eighteenth century, particularly the gradual devaluation of an empirical, associationist model of mind, are a running concern of the current study, and are explored in more detail in Chapters 3 and 5. My treatment of these themes is also influenced by Jon Mee's complementary studies of cultural and discursive regulation in the long eighteenth

⁴³ *Rethinking the Politics of Commercial Society: The Edinburgh Review, 1802-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.2.

⁴⁴ Ian Duncan, *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p.29.

century: *Romanticism, Enthusiasm and Regulation* (2005), and *Conversable Worlds* (2011).

1.3 Distinctions of rank and the diffusion of knowledge in the long eighteenth century

The work of those above has firmly established the links between Scottish writing in the Romantic period and the institutions and discourses of the Scottish Enlightenment, and I intend this study as a contribution to the critical domain mapped-out by these and other scholars. Edinburgh's status as a centre of print production during an era in which the literary periodical and historical novel dominated intellectual culture, provides ample grounds for Duncan's description of the city in *Scott's Shadow* as the 'Capital of the Nineteenth Century'.⁴⁵ However the largely metropolitan focus of Scottish Romanticism after 1800 has tended to occlude the less centralised field of literary production and dissemination which arguably operated in the decades preceding the turn of the century. Perhaps less secure or obvious in current scholarship on Scottish literature of the long eighteenth century then, is a sense of how the more informal or diffuse aspects of Enlightenment intellectual and cultural practice figured in the writing of the period.

This is significant for a number of reasons, but not least because two of the authors made to bear a disproportionate symbolic weight within the politics of Scottish Romantic periodical culture – Robert Burns and James Hogg – were frequently represented as peasants, labourers or rustics, both in their own writing and in that of their contemporary and posthumous critics. Indeed, the major literary and emblematic status of Burns and Hogg might be viewed as a key point of difference between Scottish and English Romanticism. Among English Romantic writers, perhaps only John Clare stands as a poet of labouring-class origins, who simultaneously claimed a degree of cultural centrality during his lifetime and critical significance after it, despite the fact that: 'plebeian poets, both men and women, were a popular, uninterrupted feature of eighteenth and nineteenth-

⁴⁵ See *Scott's Shadow*, pp. 3-45.

century literary culture'.⁴⁶ The discrepancy is remarked upon by Jeffrey in his 1809 review of Cromeek's *Reliques*, where he writes:

Burns is certainly by far the greatest of our poetical prodigies – from Stephen Duck down to Thomas Dermody. *They* are forgotten already; or only remembered for derision. But the name of Burns, if we are not mistaken, has not yet 'gathered all its fame;' and will endure long after those circumstance are forgotten which contributed to its first notoriety.⁴⁷

As Alan Richardson and Paul Keen note, lower-class English writers were often bracketed-off as the undesirable detritus of an expanded reading public, a withholding of legitimacy that reflected the association of popular literacy with plebeian radicalism.⁴⁸ Burns of course did not entirely escape such associations, having courted radical politics during the 1790s: an element of his life and works which his posthumous middle-class promoters tended to apologise for or disavow. As Richardson notes, a distinctive category of English lower-class writing was consolidated by Robert Southey's 1831 essay 'On the Lives and Works of Our Uneducated Poets'. For Richardson, '[b]y labelling these poets "uneducated" rather than "self-educated," Southey implies that, by definition, their works gain their facility from native wit rather than self-culture and their interest from novelty rather than art.'⁴⁹ Arguably, the posthumous figure of Burns would perform a comparable categorising function for labouring-class Scottish writers – and writers in Scots – through the dubious descriptor which James Hogg once summarised as that of 'imitators of Burns'.⁵⁰ Moreover, as Christopher Whatley has shown, in the nineteenth century Burns's legacy became a voluminous carrier for a variety of conflicting social and political identities, so that he was simultaneously, 'held in especially high regard by the mainly skilled and literate, independent, usually protestant and largely sober segments of the

⁴⁶ William J. Christmas, *The Lab'ring Muses: Work, Writing, and the Social Order in English Plebeian Poetry, 1730-1830* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2001), p.18. For the key study of Clare's work see John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 1730-1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972). For comparison of Clare and Burns see Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral*, p.20.

⁴⁷ Jeffrey, Review of Cromeek's *Reliques*, p.276.

⁴⁸ See Alan Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994), pp.213-259 and Paul Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s: Print Culture and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.142-170.

⁴⁹ Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism*, p.257.

⁵⁰ James Hogg, *The Forest Minstrel*, ed. by P.D Garside and Richard D. Jackson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p.7.

respectable working class in town and country’, and fêted by ‘Scotland’s manufacturing and commercial elite.’⁵¹ By the end of the nineteenth century, Burns had been an icon for Whigs, Tories, Chartists, Republicans and Loyalists alike, just as, in William J. Christmas’s words, he had come to act ‘as the point of origin, so to speak, for labouring-class poetic genealogy’ and ‘a powerfully inspiring figure for later labouring-class poets.’⁵²

As I suggest below, labels such as ‘lower-class writer’ or ‘uneducated poet’ can tend to be inherently problematic, but it’s also the case that one of the specific effects of their ideological application to certain Scottish authors during the Romantic period has been to obscure the relationship between the reading and writing practices of both some of its key and marginal literary figures. Accordingly, the topic of this study is precisely that which was obfuscated by the political wrangling over the respective ideological valences of Burns and Hogg in the pages of the Edinburgh periodicals: the ways in which writers in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Scotland configured the relationship between literary activity – reading and writing in a variety of genres and forms – and the emergence of a political-economic regime based on a division of labour whose strata often conformed to a hierarchy of social rank. Thus, this thesis is partly a study of labouring-class Enlightenment, but one that is also concerned with how such designative categories were discursively and historically produced: labour and the social order were subjects of intense conceptualisation and interrogation in eighteenth-century writing, not least within a burgeoning field of political economy whose scope was yet to be limited to the study of markets or subordinated to a ‘utility of poverty doctrine’.⁵³

The attention paid to questions of labour, hierarchy and their ethical implications in works such as Adam Ferguson’s 1767 *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, John Millar’s 1771 *Observations Concerning the Distinctions of Ranks in Society*, and Adam Smith’s 1776 *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, did not lead directly to a coherent theory of social class based on the distribution of economic power, or necessarily reflect the formation of such a system in the society these writers observed. Indeed, critics and historians of eighteenth and nineteenth-century labouring and working-class literature tend to emphasise the unreliability of class descriptors in this context, and

⁵¹ Whatley, ‘Contest, Concession, and the Political Legacy of Robert Burns,’ p.644.

⁵² Christmas, pp.34-35.

⁵³ Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996), p.76.

often cite E. P. Thompson's influential statement that during the earlier period, 'class was not available within people's own cognitive system.'⁵⁴ Rather, eighteenth-century writers referred to a hierarchical distinction of 'rank' that was not yet articulated by a fully capitalist mode of production and social relations. Eighteenth-century writers from a variety of social backgrounds were, however, aware of and deeply interested in the figure of manual labour, in terms of the subjective experience of those who carried it out, the role it played in underpinning the commercial society in which they lived and wrote, and the way in which it thus inflected social relations and necessarily shaped projections of economic and cultural progress.⁵⁵

The work of exploring the links between Scottish writing, labour, and intellectual improvement in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries has been granted impetus in recent years by innovative contributions to the fields of book and reading history. In his pioneering bibliographical 2006 study of publishing and authorship during the period, *The Enlightenment and the Book*, Richard Sher emphasises that the literary culture that emerged in eighteenth-century Scotland was distinguished by the collision of the London and Edinburgh publishing trades with: 'a continuous period of intellectual discourse and social interaction, which encompassed several generations of Scottish men of letters and permeated the Scottish universities.'⁵⁶ Sher argues that the Scottish Enlightenment can be productively understood as a 'book culture' centred around a core of 'best sellers' and a 'contemporary canon of distinguished Scottish Enlightenment authors', popular not only among British readers but circulated internationally.⁵⁷ Sher's study qualifies and refines the historiographical configuration of the Enlightenment, or at least the distinctive literary culture of the eighteenth century, as in Roy Porter's words a 'print explosion', and in John Brewer's a 'print revolution'.⁵⁸ Moreover, Sher refutes some of the claims made in another relatively recent contribution to the bibliographical history of the long eighteenth century, William St. Clair's 2004 *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*. Sher finds that St. Clair's emphasis on the importance of the abolition of perpetual

⁵⁴ Quoted in *Class and the Canon: Constructing Labouring-class poetry and poetics, 1780-1900* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p.4.

⁵⁵ See for example, Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (Edinburgh: 1767), John Millar, *Observations Concerning the Distinction of Ranks in Society* (London: 1771), and Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 2 vols. (London: 1776). Further references are given after quotations in the text and are abbreviated to 'WN'.

⁵⁶ Richard Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book: Scottish Authors and their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland and America* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), p.143.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.77.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.2.

copyright in 1774 in dictating contemporary reading habits to be ‘unwarranted’, though assents to his concept of an ‘old canon’ of books whose relative cheapness ensured their ubiquity and popularity among readers long after their publication.⁵⁹

The contributions of bibliographical, social and intellectual history over the past thirty or so years have contributed to a model of the Scottish Enlightenment as an elite enterprise that was nonetheless heavily invested – at least on a rhetorical level – in the dissemination of certain modernising values. However by focusing on extant evidence of eighteenth-century reading experiences in the form of library records and catalogues, marginalia and commonplace book entries, recent studies have done much to suggest how the contemporary reception of Scottish Enlightenment texts took place outwith the institutional formations and social milieus which produced them, offering grounds on which to reassess their impact on lower-class, provincial and rural readers and writers. The important studies of R.M. Towsey and K.A. Manley – which build in part on the earlier work of David Allan and Paul Kaufman – have evinced that the impact of the Scottish Enlightenment, at least that of its distinctive ‘book culture’ as discussed by Sher, extended beyond an urban milieu of universities and select intellectual societies. Towsey argues that ‘provincial readers developed their own brand of Enlightenment, which was distinct in a number of important ways from that produced by the Edinburgh *literati*’.⁶⁰ For Manley the eighteenth-century records of Scottish subscription and circulating libraries show:

that the search for knowledge was not confined to an intellectual elite. The desire for reading is found equally among the Leadhills miners of the 1740s, the clergy and gentry of the Borders in the 1750s, and the Glasgow weavers of the 1790s [...]⁶¹

Manley and Towsey’s studies of private and social readers in eighteenth-century Scotland and the reading infrastructure that surrounded them, broadly suggest that the reception of Scottish Enlightenment books by readers outwith the circles of the nation’s professional *literati* and landed elites, comprised more than the trickling-down of a pre-formed body of values and knowledge to be uncritically consumed by lower and middle-class readers.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p.30, see also William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁶⁰ R. M. Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment: Books and their Readers in Provincial Scotland, 1750-1820* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010), p.20.

⁶¹ K. A. Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders: Scottish Circulating and Subscription Libraries before 1825, A Survey and Listing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Bibliographical Society in Association with The National Library of Scotland, 2012), p.1.

Rather, a literature of ‘useful knowledge’ was received and circulated by readers who invested both socially, and financially in the case of library subscribers, in a culture of what the Leadhills miners called ‘mutual Improvement’.⁶²

1.4 Labour and the limits of improvement

Robert Burns and James Hogg, the most prominent ‘rustic’ Scottish authors of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries respectively, occupy an axial relationship to one another within the present study. My intention in following this structure is to both reflect and comment on the manner in which the two writers were played off against each other in the Romantic periodical press. But through this approach I also hope to facilitate a comparison of the differing extents to which the literary works, identities and intellectual milieux of Burns and Hogg, as a proverbial ploughman and a shepherd respectively, were shaped by their contrasting situations within an increasingly theorized division of labour. In the following chapter, I examine Burns’s engagement with a discourse of literary sentimentalism that both complements and contradicts the contemporary eighteenth-century ethos of improvement. I explore the influence of the sentimental turn on Burns’s poetry, and on his involvement in labouring-class intellectual improvement, and argue that in both fields, Burns draws upon the authority of sentimental literature to valorise recreational reading as a form of cultivation that militates against the reductive imperatives of labour and self-interest, while never quite proposing an autonomous moral and aesthetic realm, entirely distinct from that of political economy.

Chapter 3 deals with a debate that followed Burns’s death in 1796, between his brother Gilbert Burns, and his posthumous biographer and editor, James Currie. While discussing Burns’s intellectual milieu in his ‘Life’ of the poet, Currie expressed misgivings about the suitability of a literature of taste as reading matter for the labouring-class cohort of the debating clubs in which Robert and Gilbert Burns had been involved. In response, Gilbert penned a letter to Currie in which he vigorously defended the cultivation of politeness in a rural labouring-class context. Their exchange, I argue, illuminates a crucial moment in the shift away from the socially diffuse and permissive approach to intellectual improvement characteristic of the late-eighteenth century, and towards a

⁶² Ibid.

disciplinary model that made the strengthening of the subject's volition, rather than intellectual or sentimental refinement, the object of improvement. Gilbert's letter was incorporated into later printed editions of Currie's popular biography and collection of Burns's *Works*, making public their debate on the fundamental purpose of labouring-class education. As such, it provided a context for later labouring-class readers of Burns who sought to emulate his pursuit of intellectual improvement, and a source of authority for middle-class philanthropists and reformers, who saw the potential of popular enlightenment to guarantee social tranquillity in the face of an unfolding industrial modernity.

Chapter 4 examines the relationship between James Hogg, touted by *Blackwood's* contributor John Wilson as Burns's 'only worthy successor', and a culture of intellectual improvement strongly grounded in the georgic concerns of agricultural modernisation.⁶³ I argue that while Hogg is counter-exemplary of the sentimental model of cultivation developed by Burns, this partly reflects the way in which he was able to inflect his background as an improving shepherd with the aesthetic concerns of a nascent Romanticism. I suggest that the early writing of this supposed poet of residual pastoral primitivity, is in fact more amenable to, and more directly informed by, the imperatives of improvement than that of Burns, and that Hogg's professional milieu placed him within the margins of a Borders enlightenment that was supported by the georgic concatenation of agricultural improvement and recreational reading.

Arguably, one of the key roles played by the literary canonisation of Burns and Hogg within the competing narratives of the *Edinburgh Review* and *Blackwood's Magazine*, was to displace the spectre of a growing industrial and urban proletariat, whose political interests were beginning to radically diverge from those of the middle classes – this polarisation is hardly surprising given that Scotland's march towards economic modernity would bring no real increase in lower-class wages until the mid-nineteenth century.⁶⁴ For a polite periodical readership, a supposed ploughman or a shepherd may have offered a less threatening synecdoche for the lower classes than a restive weaver from one of the growing manufacturing towns of Scotland's central Lowlands. While

⁶³ Wilson, 'Some Observations on the Poetry of the Agricultural and that of the Pastoral Districts of Scotland, Illustrated by a Comparative View of the genius of Burns and the Etrick Shepherd', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 4:23 (1819), p.521

⁶⁴ J. V. Smith, 'Manners, Morals, and Mentalities: Reflections on the Popular Enlightenment of Early Nineteenth-Century Scotland', in *Scottish Culture and Scottish Education, 1800-1980*, ed. by Walter M. Humes and Hamish M. Paterson (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1983), pp.25-54 (p.30).

Scotland's economy was still predominantly agricultural by the 1820s, manufacturing employed an increasingly significant proportion of its labouring classes, as changing patterns of land use in the arable Lowlands and pastoral clearance in the Highlands, forced the landless and jobless to migrate to the nation's burgeoning manufacturing centres.⁶⁵ Textile manufacturing in particular, was thus coming to account for a major section of Scottish labouring-class experience by the early nineteenth century.

For this reason, I have attempted to counterpoint and complement my focus on the agriculturally oriented literary and non-literary work of Burns and Hogg, by discussing the writing and intellectual backgrounds of Charles Campbell and his contemporary Alexander Richmond, a cotton spinner and operative weaver respectively. At various points, both Campbell and Richmond found employment in early nineteenth-century Glasgow and its manufacturing environs. Of these, the weaving communities of Paisley in particular became renowned for the production of poetry and song, and for their members' widespread participation in reading societies.⁶⁶ In the 1990 collection *Radical Renfrew*, the poet Tom Leonard collates the work of a range of writers from Paisley and its neighbouring towns, producing a compelling account of the literary culture that thrived in the area between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. Of these writers Robert Tannahill (1774-1810) and Alexander Wilson (1776-1813) are perhaps the most celebrated.⁶⁷ For the purposes of this study however, I have chosen to focus on the writing of the lesser-known Campbell and Richmond, as taken together, their work offers opportunities both to examine how the legacy of Burns influenced later Scottish labourers in their pursuit of recreational reading, and to investigate how this intellectual culture intermeshed with the labour-politics of urban Scotland in the early nineteenth century. My final chapter focuses primarily on Campbell's *Memoirs* of 1828, in which he couches his account of his adolescent forays into the circulating libraries and debating clubs of an early nineteenth-century manufacturing community in terms of a then widespread desire to emulate the literary success of Burns.

Problematically however, Campbell wrote his *Memoirs* while serving an indefinite prison sentence for murdering his wife during a fit of insanity. Campbell is ultimately

⁶⁵ Christopher A. Whatley, *Scottish Society 1707-1830: Beyond Jacobitism, Towards Industrialisation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2000), pp.221-222.

⁶⁶ Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven: London: Yale University Press, 2001), pp.59-60.

⁶⁷ [Tom Leonard] *Radical Renfrew: Poetry from The French Revolution to The First World War, by poets born, or sometime resident in, the County of Renfrewshire* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1990).

unable to present a framework for the utility of his pursuit of intellectual improvement, and his defence of recreational reading accords neither with a Romantic notion of the innate aesthetic value of literature, nor with the emerging configuration of labouring-class education as character formation espoused by reformers. Rather, his lapse into madness seems to confirm Currie's anxieties towards the cultivation of taste and sensibility among manual labourers. I compare Campbell's *Memoirs* with Richmond's polemical autobiography of 1828. There, Richmond, a labouring-class activist turned government spy, justifies his apparent betrayal by constructing a sophisticated political-economic account of the gradual devaluation of labour through the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Richmond's *Narrative* represents a political-economic approach to intellectual improvement that counterpoints the variegated and *belle-lettristic* model of cultivation adapted from Burns by Campbell. I also argue that Richmond's resort to spying is strangely redolent of a contemporary scheme devised for the amelioration of Glasgow's urban poor by the Presbyterian minister Thomas Chalmers. Between 1819 to 1823, during which time Campbell worked as a spinner and the post-war political and economic tensions wracking Scottish society flared up in the violence of the so-called 'Radical War', Chalmers, driven by the economic pessimism of Thomas R. Malthus's 1798 *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, attempted to improve a Glasgow parish through a combination of moral surveillance and the first attempt to implement Scotland's parochial school system in an urban context. Together, I argue that the writing and designs of Campbell, Richmond and Chalmers are symptomatic of the displacement of the eighteenth-century model of popular intellectual improvement by a disciplinary regime geared towards the production of tranquil and self-governing subjects, rather than the diffusion of sensibility and reflection. It's a progression which ultimately affirms Michel Foucault's famous assertion that the Enlightenment 'invented the disciplines', though in the course of my argument I emphasise that the transition from improvement to disciplinarity was unsteady, contested, and only accomplished under the aegis of social concerns not available to the writers of the late eighteenth century.⁶⁸

I hope through this selection of writers to partly address the inevitably rural focus of Romantic accounts of lower-class Scottish life in the nineteenth century, and to more

⁶⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. By Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p.222.

fully reflect the ways in which the changing nature of manual labour – and a preoccupation with the division of labour and its results – partly structured the sense of historical ‘topicality’ or ‘Spirit of the Age’ which Scottish Romantic writers, following their Enlightenment predecessors, both observed and discursively produced. Because I focus on writers, and in Hogg’s case, a nationally renowned, professional writer, this study is not, in the sense of Richard D. Altick’s book of the same name, ‘[a] social history of the mass reading public’.⁶⁹ Nor do I present it as a study of historically marginalised labouring-class writing in the manner of Donna Landry’s 1990 *The Muses of Resistance: Laboring Class Women’s Poetry in Britain, 1739-1796*, or William J. Christmas’s 2001, *The Lab’ring Muses: Work, Writing and the Social Order in English Plebeian Poetry, 1730-1830*. Rather, my exploration of the dynamic between intellectual cultivation and the division of labour in Scottish writing between 1759 and 1828 – the years of Robert Burns’s birth and the publication of Charles Campbell’s *Memoirs* respectively – is intended as a contribution to the current critical understanding of the interface between the Scottish Enlightenment and Scottish Romanticism. Where available, I draw on historical evidence to illustrate how the engagement of certain writers with the culture of intellectual improvement, the diffusion of knowledge, and with specific texts took place, but throughout I explore the broader discursive construction of the relationship between labour and intellectual improvement in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Scottish letters.

In this study, I do not pursue the task which Landry describes as that of producing a literary history ‘written from below’, or, in Christmas’s terms, of recovering “voices from below”.⁷⁰ The work that I discuss is chosen to illustrate the ways in which intellectual cultivation was both discussed as a crucial civic and moral prerogative, and practised as a means of refining the taste, acquiring knowledge, and participating in the wider literary life of the nation during the long eighteenth century, by Scottish writers who claimed labouring backgrounds or identities. In doing so, these writers both reflected and interrogated developing elite configurations of the relationship between social rank, vocation, and learning. The mode of intellectual activity I discuss does not necessarily correspond to or even foster explicitly radical or plebeian political stances, although it

⁶⁹ See Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957).

⁷⁰ Donna Landry, *Muses of Resistance: Laboring-Class Women’s Poetry in Britain, 1739-1796* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p.3. Christmas, *The Lab’ring Muses*, p.35.

often intersects with them. While its concerns are partly inflected by questions of rank and labour politics then, the writing that I discuss is not necessarily counter-hegemonic, but rather situated in a historical interstice between the expansion of reading and writing in the eighteenth century, and the consolidation of industrial capitalism in the nineteenth, which heralded a more prescriptive approach to the education of the labouring classes.⁷¹

Within these parameters, the place of women writers is doubly problematic. During the eighteenth century, women from elite or middling social strata were often active participants in the intellectual life of the nation's cities, provincial towns, and rural libraries, but predominantly as readers rather than writers of books.⁷² Michelle Levy writes that in Britain prior to 1800, the periodical press may have been the most important platform for women writers, who 'wrote anonymous reviews and sent contributions (usually anonymous or pseudonymous) in vast quantities to periodicals and newspapers.'⁷³ Yet few Scottish women writers claimed a labouring identity or background in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Nor, as Anna Clark notes, did the political radicalism and commitment to literary learning often espoused by labouring-class Scottish men, necessarily foster egalitarian attitudes towards gender. Clark cites the Paisley poet Alexander Wilson's commercially successful poem of 1792, 'Watty and Meg; Or the Wife Reformed', in which a domineering wife is brought into line by her husband, to illustrate the way in which radical labouring-class writers could simultaneously 'advise men to demand submission from their wives and encourage them to defy aristocratic power.'⁷⁴ The nature of the work which women tended to perform in the period, further contributed to the difficulties of adopting a labouring or labouring-class authorial voice. As Donna Landry notes, in the eighteenth century, '[t]he most common forms of women's work are not nearly so visible or so often represented as the forms of agricultural work [...] [h]ousekeeping, in cottages and in the houses of the middle class, gentry, and aristocracy, remains the primary form of women's work.'⁷⁵ The experience of domestic service was not immediately adaptable to the eighteenth century's dominant poetic genres of georgic

⁷¹ See Smith, 'Manners, Morals, and Mentalities', p.30.

⁷² See Katharine Glover, *Elite Women and Polite Society in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2011), pp.50-78.

⁷³ Michelle Levy, 'Women and Print Culture, 1750-1830', in *The History of British Women's Writing, 1750-1830*, ed. by Jacqueline M. Labbe (New York; Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp.29-46, p.29.

⁷⁴ Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1995), p.1.

⁷⁵ Landry, *Muses*, p.27.

and pastoral, especially when compared to the ploughing or shepherding voices available to Burns and Hogg.

An exception was Burns's contemporary, the Dumfriesshire born poet Janet Little (1759-1813). Like Burns, Little was only able to pursue her poetic avocation by negotiating the complex world of eighteenth-century patronage relations, through which she was able to maintain a position as the supervisor of the dairy at Loudon Castle in Ayrshire, while continuing to write the Scots and English verse that appeared in her 1792 collection *The Poetical Works of Janet Little, The Scotch Milkmaid*.⁷⁶ The form and extent of Little's education is unclear, though her writing clearly indicates her familiarity with the work of Alexander Pope and his Augustan contemporaries.⁷⁷ As Leith Davis notes, Little's work frequently engages with that of Burns – her major contemporary – while simultaneously alluding to the gendering of literary authority that precludes her from writing as his poetic equal. For Davis, Little's poetry expresses an awareness that, 'while Burns was a shock to the literary tradition, he was able to alter that tradition [...] as a working-class woman, Little is barred from performing a similar task.'⁷⁸ Similarly, Landry argues that Little's poetry reflects her 'sense of marginality and vulnerability as a literary voice.'⁷⁹ To a greater extent than Burns, 'she capitalizes on her rustic quaintness, her literary "backwardness," in an appeal to a mock-primitivism that ironizes her achievements'.⁸⁰ Perhaps evident here are the profound disparities between the ways in which men and women were interpellated by political-economic and educational structures and practices during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the earlier period, labouring-class women often maintained the overall economic viability of the family unit by occupying domestic or supplementary economic roles, a reflection, Clark suggests, of 'the traditional northern European patriarchal family economy of earlier centuries, where the father functioned as master of a productive unit, whether farm or urban work-shop, and was assisted by his wife and children.'⁸¹ Clark writes of the simultaneously foundational and marginal position of women labourers in the period:

⁷⁶ Pam Perkins, 'Little, Janet (1759–1813)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. by H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁷⁷ Leith Davis, 'Gender and the Nation in the Work of Robert Burns and Janet Little', in *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, vol. 38, No. 4 (Autumn, 1998), 621-645 (p.632). For discussion of Burns and patronage, see Leask, *Burns and Pastoral*, pp.94-98.

⁷⁸ Davis, 'Gender and the Nation', p.633.

⁷⁹ Landry, *Muses*, p.223.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p.237.

⁸¹ Clark, *Struggle*, pp.13-14.

‘men needed the labor of their wives and children in order for their families to survive’, yet they strove to maintain skilled artisanal trades as exclusively male vocations.⁸² The growth of manufacturing in the nineteenth century heralded a significant shift in this regard, as increasing numbers of women and children were employed as unskilled and low-paid wage labourers in large factories and workshops.⁸³

The vexed economic position of labouring-class Scottish women in the eighteenth century was reflected in the education of girls. As R. D. Anderson notes, while Scotland’s parish school system was open to children of both genders, ‘it was common for girls to learn sewing rather than writing,’ as it was assumed that this would be of more economic use to their families than advanced literacy.⁸⁴ In a narrative letter to Francis Dunlop, patron to both Robert Burns and Janet Little, Gilbert Burns, the poet’s brother, recalls that: ‘there being no school near us, and our little services being useful on the farm, my father undertook to teach us arithmetic in the winter evenings, by candle-light, and in this way my two elder sisters got all the education they received’ (Currie I 62). This was in profound contrast to the attention paid to the education of the male children of the family, which, as I discuss in the following chapter, although informal and piecemeal, covered a formidable range and depth of skills and subjects, significantly informing Robert Burns’s later poetic sensibilities. A good education might furnish a male child with a potential route to economic and social advancement through efficacy in his inherited station as a tenant farmer, or admission into one of the professions, but the same was not true of his female counterpart. Perhaps reflecting a privileged education relative to other women of her class, Little, in securing a position as the supervisor of the dairy at Loudon Castle, had acceded to ‘a position of considerable responsibility and prestige,’ albeit one that remained within the category of domestic service.⁸⁵

If the nature of female education and work in eighteenth-century Scotland has resulted in scant opportunities to explore the dynamic between the division of labour and the pursuit of intellectual cultivation in the writing of labouring-class women authors, a similar pattern initially prevailed in the succeeding century. In *Scott’s Shadow*, Ian Duncan asserts that: ‘not just [Walter] Scott’s example [...] but the patronizing and

⁸² Ibid, p.13.

⁸³ Anthony Cooke, *The Rise and Fall of the Scottish Cotton Industry, 1778-1914: The Secret Spring* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p.7.

⁸⁴ R.D. Anderson, *Education and the Scottish People, 1750-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.8.

⁸⁵ Landry, *Muses*, p.221.

professionalizing ethos that framed it, the larger cultural legacy of the Scottish Enlightenment, contributed to a relative exclusion of women authors from the literary boom in Edinburgh.’⁸⁶ Early nineteenth-century Scotland did of course produce several women novelists of note, including Susan Ferrier, Mary Brunton, and Elizabeth Hamilton, whose 1808 novel *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* I discuss in Chapter 3 of this study, in relation to the regulative turn in Scottish letters after 1800. As Duncan notes, the Scottish Enlightenment was also the source of one of the more ‘influential female conduct books of the later eighteenth century’: James’s Fordyce’s 1776, *Sermons to Young Women*.⁸⁷ Arguably, the eighteenth-century construction of female intellect and manners as a realm of isolated pedagogic interest, evinced by Fordyce’s *Sermons* and similar works which sought to prescribe separate spheres of action for separate sexes, anticipated the more regulatory approach to the education of labouring-class men that became prevalent after 1800.⁸⁸

1.5 Sensibility and improvement in the long eighteenth century

As Duncan suggests, links between the eighteenth-century project of intellectual improvement and the period’s ‘professionalizing ethos’ led to a circumscription of legitimate literary activity, that partly corresponded to a masculine sphere of vocational pursuit. The notion of literature as work was both semantically and practically linked with the business of agriculture – in many ways the central focus of the improving ideology that pervaded eighteenth-century Scotland. *The Gentleman Farmer*, an instructional work of 1776 by the lawyer, moral philosopher and aesthete Henry Home, Lord Kames, neatly expresses the intermeshing of intellectual and agricultural improvement that occurred in eighteenth-century Scotland. For Kames and others, farming represented not only a set of **practices** ripe for improvement at the hands of the post-Baconian empirical method, but an activity with a unique capacity to reciprocally improve in both body and mind, the practitioner whose task it was to implement the techniques and approaches characteristic of the new agriculture. Kames attributes to farming: ‘the signal pre-eminence, of

⁸⁶ Duncan, *Scott’s Shadow*, p.43.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p.43.

⁸⁸ See Claire Grogan, *Politics and Genre in the Works of Elizabeth Hamilton, 1756-1816* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), p.19. For discussion of nineteenth-century popular education in Scotland, see J. V. Smith, ‘Manners, Morals, and Mentalities’.

combining deep philosophy with useful practise.⁸⁹ However, agricultural improvement mandated a level of intellectual rigour not solely from proprietors, as the title of Kames's *Gentleman Farmer* seems to suggest, but from tenant farmers and their hired servants in the discharge of their daily labours. Devine quotes one Ayrshire factor who commented in 1805 that, "much depends on the knowledge and ability of the tenant how far he succeeds in the improvements recommended."⁹⁰

The delivery system of this new technical knowledge was reading and writing. Kurt Heinzelman has argued that the eighteenth-century preoccupation with diverse and interlocking forms of improvement, exemplified by Kames's *Gentleman Farmer*, might be partly understood as the inflection of a particular generic root, which Heinzelman sees in turn as having survived the Enlightenment ideology of civilization through economic progress to underpin the cultural formations of the Romantic period. The *Georgics* of Virgil, translated into English by John Dryden in 1697, epitomise a tradition of representing labour in poetry that continued into the eighteenth century through works such as James Thomson's *The Seasons*, or John Dyer's 1757 *The Fleece* – an extended and overtly technical blank-verse description of the transit of sheep wool through the chain of textile production – that in Karen O'Brien's words, consolidated a 'connection between rural labour, commerce, patriotism, and empire.'⁹¹

For Heinzelman however, after a certain point in the eighteenth century that corresponds to the emergence of political economy as a specialised discourse, the genre of georgic, formerly concerned exclusively with farming, became diffused among the channels of a much broader and varied field of prose writing that extolled the value of labour. Heinzelman casts Adam Smith's 1776 *The Wealth of Nations* as the 'last georgic' for its role in dissociating labour from the individual performance of productive activity within a given field such as agriculture, and yoking it to the process of civilization as a whole: '[p]rogress in the *Wealth* is grounded neither in agricultural production nor in mercantile commerce, nor in the two together, but in this larger georgic application of

⁸⁹ Henry Home, Lord Kames, *The Gentleman Farmer, Being an attempt to improve agriculture, by subjecting I tot the test of rational principles* (Edinburgh: 1776), v.

⁹⁰ Devine, *Transformation*, p.66.

⁹¹ Karen O'Brien, 'Imperial georgic, 1660-1789', in *The Country and the City Revisited: England and the Politics of Culture, 1550-1850*, ed. by Gerald Maclean, Donna Landry, and Joseph P. Ward (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.160-179 (p.168).

labour as a societal bonding agent.⁹² Heinzelman argues that the eighteenth-century transmutation of georgic into prose writing on political economy places it in a reflexive relationship with its own medium, for: ‘Smith also shares with the Virgilian georgic poet the discharge of the labour that is his own discourse.’⁹³

As Clifford Siskin argues in his 1998 study *The Work of Writing*: ‘[t]he basic form of work which Virgil celebrates in the *Georgics* is husbandry, but he explicitly connects agricultural labour to all other forms of work so that major emphasis is on the value of working hard.’⁹⁴ Like Heinzelman, Siskin links the emergence of literature as a professional field to this broader, georgic conception of labour as a good in itself, and emphasises the ways in which the reformulation of writing as work became self-fulfilling through its ability to describe new forms of application and productive activity: ‘[t]he proliferation of writing, during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Britain, not only helped to occasion through limitation the re-forming of knowledge into disciplines – including Literature as the disciplinary home of writing itself – it also altered work, enabling and valorising newly specialised forms of intellectual labour.’⁹⁵

Heinzelman’s georgic interpretation of *The Wealth of Nations* helps to further resituate the Scottish Enlightenment as a space not only of institutionally bound intellectual debate and conversation, but of economic application and transformation. Moreover, the incorporation of literature into the project of improvement, renders even certain types of reading as labour, for: ‘(b)eing able to read economises experience and makes it more productive.’⁹⁶ Accordingly, as I argue in the following chapters, the ideology of agricultural improvement was a major factor in shaping the early reading and writing of not only Robert Burns, but also that of James Hogg; both figures were representatives of the rapidly professionalising tenant farmers and skilled labourers of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Scotland. Hogg’s commitment and championing of the values of improvement is particularly striking, given that in his later career, both he and his contemporaries would promote his association with the figure of ‘The Ettrick

⁹² Kurt Heinzelman, ‘The last georgic: *Wealth of Nations*, and the scene of writing,’ in *Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations: New interdisciplinary essays*, pp.170-94 (p.186).

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.191.

⁹⁴ Clifford Siskin, *The Work of Writing: Literature and Social Change in Britain, 1700-1830* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1998), p.119.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.104.

⁹⁶ Heinzelman, p.182.

Shepherd', the simultaneously ludic and archetypal symbol of a primitive national culture imagined to still reside in the isolated valleys of the Scottish Borders.

As I signalled earlier in my reference to Scotland's 'uneven development' over the long eighteenth century, the imperatives of improvement produced wildly unequal results when read onto Scotland's varying topographical and cultural terrain. The Highlands in particular remained resistant to improvement on both a material level – as agricultural practice – and on a discursive level – within the georgic rhetoric of commerce and civility.⁹⁷ Moreover, improvement was a multifaceted ideal, in which economic, intellectual and subjective concerns are only arbitrarily separable.

In asserting the value of his own bibliographic approach to the Scottish Enlightenment, Sher quotes the following passage 'On Sensibility' from the *Sermons* of the moderate Presbyterian minister and Professor of **Rhetoric and Belles Lettres** at Edinburgh University, Hugh Blair, stating both that 'the immense scale of circulation' that Blair's collected *Sermons* enjoyed, and the pedagogic tone of the piece, cast it as a 'self-conscious declaration of Enlightenment principles.'⁹⁸ Blair writes that:

In modern times, the chief improvement of which we have to boast is a sense of humanity [...] Hence, sensibility is become so reputable a quality, that the appearance of it is frequently assumed when the reality is wanting. Softness of manners must not be mistaken for true sensibility. Sensibility tends to produce gentleness of behaviour; and when such behaviour flows from native affection, it is valuable and amiable. But the exterior manner alone may be learned in the school of the world; and often, too often, is found to cover much unfeeling hardness of heart.⁹⁹

Blair's is one of many assertions during the period, to the effect that the diffusion of politeness and civility is the primary measure of progress or improvement. Perhaps unexpectedly, it is 'sensibility' or the capacity for a refined emotional responsiveness, which Sher glosses slightly tendentiously as 'humanity', rather than reason or knowledge,

⁹⁷ See Peter Womack, *Improvement and Romance: Constructing the Myth of the Highlands* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1988), and Matthew Wickman, *The Ruins of Experience: Scotland's "Romantick" Highlands and the Birth of the Modern Witness* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

⁹⁸ Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book*, p.33.

⁹⁹ Hugh Blair, *Sermons*, vol. 3 (London: 1790), pp.35-36.

which Blair locates as the greatest advantage of the progress of civilization; the age of georgic and agricultural rationalism was also that of sentiment.

Indeed, the nature and importance of sentiment and sympathy constituted a central area of inquiry for Scottish Enlightenment philosophers. These considerations encompassed but also went far beyond matters of private etiquette, to explore broader questions about human nature and the basis of social life. In the introduction to their 2011 collection of essays on *Character, Self, and Sociability in the Scottish Enlightenment*, Susan Manning and Thomas Ahnert argue that: '[e]thical decisions were always, for these philosophers, taken in a social context.'¹⁰⁰ The writing of Adam Smith arguably represents the Scottish Enlightenment's most significant account of the reciprocally formative dynamic between self and society. In his 1759 *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith takes up a subject that was ubiquitous in eighteenth-century philosophical discourse, and which had previously been tackled by, among others, his friend David Hume: namely the role of sympathy as a constitutive element of both social life and the moral faculties. Smith initially proposes that because, 'we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation.'¹⁰¹ Our senses, 'never did and never can carry us beyond our own persons', so that it is 'by the imagination only', and the substitution of our own experience of a given situation or feeling for those of another individual in similar conditions that we are able, in Smith's words, to 'enter as it were into his body and become in some measure him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them.' In the same way, Smith asserts, we can also form a sense of how our emotions and sentiments in a certain situation might appear to others, and subsequently modulate those emotions so that observers, through a corresponding act of imagination, will be able to share in, or sympathize with, our own feelings.

However as Smith establishes in his opening argument, sympathetic feeling is necessarily 'weaker in degree' than that which is experienced by the original subject; if we desire the 'fellow feeling' of others, we must then mellow the 'pitch' of our own emotions

¹⁰⁰ 'Introduction: Character, Self, and Sociability in the Scottish Enlightenment', in *Character, Self, and Sociability in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. by Thomas Ahnert and Susan Manning (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), pp.1-30 (p.6).

¹⁰¹ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (London, Edinburgh: 1759), p.2. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text and abbreviated to 'TMS'. Later editions are referenced through footnotes.

to match the lower level of intensity which an observer is capable of reproducing (TMS 2-3). For this reason, Smith contends that ‘[t]he propriety of every passion [...] must lye, it is evident, in a certain mediocrity’ (TMS 49). Even without the company of others, the ideal Smithian individual is able to achieve this median by maintaining an impersonal awareness of how their conduct might be received by a disinterested observer, and adjusting their disposition according to the external behavioural norm which this ‘impartial spectator’ represent (TMS 79).

Smith also deploys his theory of sympathy to explain the existence of the social hierarchy, arguing that hegemony is the product of a tendency for moral error, intrinsic to human nature. Smith writes that we have a greater capacity to sympathize with those above us on the social scale than we do with those below. We feel, Smith writes, ‘a peculiar sympathy with the satisfaction’ of the rich and powerful, and ‘favour all their inclinations and forward all their wishes [...] [e]very calamity that befalls them, every injury that is done them, excites in the breast of the spectator ten times more compassion and resentment than he would have felt, had the same things happened to other men’ (TMS 113). Smith reasons that our ‘delusive’ (TMS 112) admiration of those occupying exalted social positions leads spectators to sympathise more intensely with both their joys and adversities, explaining why ‘[i]t is the misfortunes of Kings only which afford the proper subjects for tragedy’ (TMS 113). It is this human tendency to defer more readily to ‘the passions of the rich and powerful’ than those of the humble, Smith continues, which forms the basis of ‘the distinction of ranks and the order of society’ (TMS 114). Having observed that a state of wealth and prosperity is more likely to attract the sympathetic approval of others than one of poverty, Smith conjectures that the primary motivation behind the accumulation and consumption of material wealth is the desire for this sympathetic adulation. Smith attributes ‘that great purpose of human life which we call bettering our condition’ to our vanity, which compels us to seek the ‘attention and approbation’ of those around us (TMS 109-110). In Smith’s 1776 *Wealth of Nations*, ‘(t)he uniform, constant, and interrupted effort of every man to better his condition’ becomes the *primum mobile* in the progress of civilization, responsible for continuing ‘the natural progress of things toward improvement’ (WN I 417). This casts the material and social aspirations of the individual and the broader progress of improvement as the inadvertent products of sympathy, but a form of sympathy which even Smith describes as ‘delusive’.

In the sixth and final edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* that was published in 1790, Smith appended his analysis of the psychological principle underlying the social hierarchy with the striking caveat that:

[t]his disposition to admire, and almost to worship, the rich and the powerful, and to despise, or, at least, to neglect persons of poor and mean condition, though necessary both to establish and to maintain the distinction of ranks and the order of society, is, at the same time, the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments.¹⁰²

While commercial society is sustained by the propensity of ‘the great mob of mankind’ to covet luxury, and to hold those who possess it in high esteem, it is, Smith admits ‘scarce agreeable to good morals, or even to good language, perhaps, to say, that mere wealth and greatness, abstracted from merit and virtue, deserve our respect.’¹⁰³ This pessimistic assessment of human nature does not however preclude the existence of an enlightened minority, for whom the ostentation of wealth and fortune is not sufficiently dazzling to obscure those qualities which are in fact worthy of admiration. As Smith remarks, in a statement whose tautologous structure lends it an air of pithy resignation and threatens to paint the entirety of the preceding theory as an exercise in casuistry: ‘(t)hey are the wise and virtuous chiefly, a select, though I am afraid, but a small party, who are the real and steady admirers of wisdom and virtue.’¹⁰⁴

Smith’s revisions are suggestive of the ways in which, towards the end of the eighteenth century, a principle of polite distinction began to define itself in opposition to the vulgar commerce of the economic world and its material measures of improvement. But his earlier account of sympathy also indicates that despite its dismissal of artificial manners, sentiment was deeply bound up with its own criteria of improvement, which emphasised the attainment of self-command, but also a certain politics of aspiration. In this light, the cultivation of sentiment by Smith’s readers among the lower and middling ranks, which, as I discuss in my next chapter, included Burns, may have represented a strategy of social advancement through the proper command of sympathy and sensibility, as much as a disinterested pursuit of what Hugh Blair refers to as ‘a sense of humanity’.

¹⁰² Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 6th Edition, 2 Vols. (London: 1790), i, p. 146,

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, p.148, p.149

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p.248

As Smith's appeal to reflective criticality over immediate sympathetic responsiveness suggests, the pursuit of politeness was an intellectual as much as an emotional enterprise. In the earlier excerpt from his *Sermons*, Blair also implies that a capacity for criticality or reflection is the necessary corollary of the modern valorisation of sensibility, as the 'appearance' of virtue must be distinguished from the 'reality'. Feeling alone is not sufficient to navigate commercial society; a level of intellectual acumen, honed perhaps through acts of reading such as that which Blair's address assumes, is required to consummate the improvement that the 'native affection' of the subject broaches. Accordingly, much of the sentimental literature of the late eighteenth century is concerned with refining this distinction between polite feeling and vulgar enthusiasm, often through criteria of self-command or character. The development of a regulatory account of sensibility is thus central within the unfolding of the Scottish Enlightenment's 'science of man'. Of particular importance in the following chapters are the sentimental novels and periodicals of Henry Mackenzie (1745-1831), which pursue and refine the distinction of virtuous sensibility from enslavement by the passions, and the affectations of fashion from true politeness. As Jon Mee argues, underlying the obsessive policing of the border between sensibility and enthusiasm by Mackenzie and others was a fear of: 'the mania that allowed individuals or the crowd to be swept up in a single idea.'¹⁰⁵ For Mee, in relation to the literary realms of taste and sentiment, '[d]elicacy meant a polite veiling of the body.'¹⁰⁶

As signalled by that highly influential counterpart to Blair's *Sermons*, his 1783 *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, reading was thus perceived as a crucial tool of civility that employed the widespread cultivation of taste to guarantee the continued refinement of manners and morality alongside the incipient social diffusion of economic rationality and self-interest, articulating the different fields of improvement under a unified impetus. For Sorensen, the *Lectures* of Blair and Adam Smith (the latter not published in their author's lifetime), 'deploy aesthetic discourse to locate themselves and their students within a British nation through class-based critical perception.'¹⁰⁷ This form of improvement marshals a principle of Anglicization and an emergent 'culture of professionalism' to produce a formulation of literary taste as an instrument of cultural and

¹⁰⁵ Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.52.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Janet Sorensen, *The Grammar of Empire in Eighteenth-Century British Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.23.

social distinction.¹⁰⁸ On this level it partly corresponds to what J.G.A. Pocock describes as the ‘commercial humanism’ sketched out through the oeuvres of the eighteenth-century Scottish philosophers Hume and Smith, in which the cultivation of virtue is replaced by the refinement of manners, equality of rights by security of property, and political participation by highly socialised ‘exchange relationships’.¹⁰⁹ Within Pocock’s model, virtue is ‘defined as the practice and refinement of manners’, so that *civic* virtue, formerly the preserve of a landed aristocracy, is reconfigured as the prerogative of a professional hierarchy whose members serve a long term process of civilization through the fulfilment of their various economic and vocational offices. Beyond the incipient formation of disciplines such as economics, history, science, and literature, the Enlightenment ideal of ‘useful knowledge’ continued to be institutionally and discursively based upon a heterogeneous model of leisurely cultivation that owed much to the frequently collected and anthologised essays of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele’s early eighteenth-century periodical *The Spectator*. The set of intellectual historians represented by Istvan Hont, Michael Ignatieff and Nicholas Phillipson, have emphasised the distinctive contributions of Scottish authors – primarily David Hume and Adam Smith – to a broader European tradition of writing on the dynamic between liberty, commerce and virtue. Phillipson points to the replacement by Hume and Smith in their discussions of the ethical substructure of an emerging commercial society, of ‘classic martial and political virtues’ with Addisonian politeness.¹¹⁰ For Adam Potkay this principle of politeness was: ‘an eighteenth-century ideology in formation, intended to consolidate the members of the gentry and professional orders and to differentiate this group from a “vulgar” class of laborers, servants and “cits”’.¹¹¹

As a tenant farmer during a period in which the Scottish rural economy underwent systematic and profound transformation, Robert Burns’s own position within this social order is hard to definitively triangulate, either through the lens of economic history or through that of his own shifting rhetoric. Burns not only embraced in his own reading the

¹⁰⁸ Rajit S. Dosanjh, ‘The ‘eloquence of the Bar’: Hugh Blair’s *Lectures*, professionalism and Scottish legal education’, in *The Scottish Invention of English Literature*, ed. by Robert Crawford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.55-67 (p.57).

¹⁰⁹ J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.48.

¹¹⁰ Nicholas Phillipson, ‘Adam Smith as civic moralist’, in *Wealth and Virtue, The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. by Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp.179-202, 181.

¹¹¹ Adam Potkay, *The Fate of Eloquence in the Age of Hume* (London: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp.86-87.

model of sensibility tempered with reflection that Blair espouses above, but recommended it as a model for his peers and social inferiors, complicating any straightforward account of sensibility as an inchoate form of bourgeois ideology. As John Barrell has found of English labouring and artisanal readers in the 1790s, even those associated with politically radical causes, ‘an education in sentiment, in the cultivation of sensibility, may well have been as welcome and seemed as essential to their improvement as lessons in the political theory of Locke and Paine.’¹¹² Reflecting the popularity of the clergyman Hugh Blair’s *Sermons*, the project of diffusing polite sensibility among the lower classes was for Burns perhaps inseparable from that of ‘new light’ Moderatism: sentimentalism’s valorisation of feeling was targeted to complement the piety of the heart recommended by a civil, and civic, model of Presbyterianism.

1.6 The division of labour and the problematic of improvement

As I discuss in the following chapter, Burns’s writing on intellectual improvement is at least rhetorically infused with a sense of how the particular demands of manual labour inflect and to a degree intensify the imperatives of sensibility and cultivation. While these concerns find a distinctive expression in Burns’s writing, they nonetheless reflect a tension which is fundamental to the concept of improvement, and which forms the discursive crux of the current study. In *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith famously reflects that:

The man whose whole life is spent in performing a few simple operations, of which the effects too are, perhaps, always the same, or very nearly the same, has no occasion to exert his understanding, or to exercise his invention in finding out expedients for removing difficulties which never occur. He naturally loses, therefore, the habit of such exertion, and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become. The torpor of his mind renders him not only incapable of relishing or bearing a part in any rational conversation, but of conceiving any generous, noble, or tender sentiment, and consequently of forming any just judgement concerning many even of

¹¹² John Barrell, ‘Rus in urbe’ in *Romanticism and Popular Culture in Britain and Ireland*, ed. by Phillip Connell and Nigel Leask (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp.109-127 (p.124).

the ordinary duties of private life. [...] His dexterity at his own particular trade seems in this manner to be acquired at the expence of his intellectual, social, and martial virtues. But in every improved and civilized society this is the state into which the labouring poor, that is, the great body of the people, must necessarily fall, unless government takes some pains to prevent it (WN II 366-367).

If the progress of civility is measured by the diffusion of politeness and sensibility on the one hand, another form of progress, economic improvement, is measured by the degree of the division of labour within a given society. But for Smith, the very forces of improvement and civilization, explicitly named in the above passage, bring about a state of mental ‘torpor’ that renders the labouring-class subject incapable of ‘generous, noble, or tender sentiment’. In his 2005 study, *Romanticism, Economics and the Question of ‘Culture’*, Phillip Connell places notions of literary cultivation associated with the speculative projects of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey, within the context of eighteenth-century discourses on the diffusion of knowledge, promulgated in part by the *literati* of the Scottish Enlightenment. Like Duncan and others, Connell emphasises the correlation between the political pressurisation of Scottish intellectual culture after the French Revolution, and Dugald Stewart’s crucial role as lecturer to Francis Jeffrey *et al*, in syphoning the modernising ideologies of the eighteenth century into a public sphere based on Britain’s literary markets rather than Scotland’s Kirk and universities. For Connell: ‘Smith’s account of the division of labour and popular education might [...] be taken to exemplify a latent paradox inherent in the Scottish ‘commercial humanist’ account of the mutually supportive relation between commercial progress, polite learning, and civic virtue.’¹¹³ While the division of labour makes possible the environment of leisure and sociability that fosters the cultivation of sensibility, securing the possibility of both political-economic and polite improvement, it increasingly denies the labouring classes the advantages of the latter form of progress.

Smith’s assertion in Book 5 of *The Wealth of Nations* that only a state-administered system of education would be capable of successfully intervening in and remediating the effects of the division of labour on ‘the great body of the people’ suggests a further potential avenue through which to explore the impact of popular intellectual

¹¹³ Phillip Connell, *Romanticism, Economics and the Question of ‘Culture’* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.69.

culture on Scottish writing of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Smith makes the model for government involvement in the instruction of the labouring classes explicit when he observes that: '[i]n Scotland the establishment of parish schools has taught almost the whole common people to read, and a very great proportion of them to write and account' (WN II 370). Indeed, Francis Jeffrey seems partly to reiterate this position when he contends in his 1809 review of Cromek's *Reliques*, that the existence of a highly literate lower class is 'peculiar to Scotland, and may be properly referred to our excellent institutions for parochial education.' Such claims are both a recurring trope of Scottish self-image and something of a touchstone within commentaries and critiques of social change during the Romantic period, partly anticipating the notion of the 'lad of parts' that became popular in the late nineteenth century. Robert Anderson notes that, '[t]he phrase 'lad of parts' [...] only came into use in the 1890s', but acknowledges that it expresses a key aspect of the 'democratic tradition' of Scottish education, namely: 'the 'free path for ability' and the contribution which the educational system made to social mobility.'¹¹⁴

In his 1985 study of *Scottish Literacy and the Scottish Identity* however, the historian R. A. Houston interrogates the notion that an egalitarian educational tradition in which all levels of society enjoyed high rates of literacy existed in Scotland prior to 1800 – before state educational provision extended to the lower classes in the rest of Great Britain. Houston finds that an early, institutional model of Scottish literacy, in which the rural lower classes benefited from the parish school system, may not have been as significant a factor in determining overall levels of literacy as were larger socio-economic trends whose influence was equally present in northern England. According to Houston, the advantage in literacy which southern-Lowland Scots enjoyed over their counterparts across the border was slight. Yet elsewhere, Houston finds that by 1800, the Scottish population was approaching 'nearly complete reading ability', even if levels of full literacy – the ability to both read *and* write – were somewhat lower.¹¹⁵ Houston avers that for many Lowland Scots, '[b]asic education seems to have been a matter of pride', and points to what he describes as 'the strong mass desire for education evident in the

¹¹⁴ Robert Anderson, 'In Search of the 'Lad of Parts': the Mythical History of Scottish Education', in *History Workshop Journal*, 19 (1985), 82-104 (p.84).

¹¹⁵ R. A. Houston, *Literacy in Early Modern Europe, Culture and Education, 1500-1800* (London: Longman, 1988), p.132.

eighteenth and nineteenth century'.¹¹⁶ As R. D. Anderson notes, Houston's work also draws attention to the uneven distribution of literacy in Scotland, which 'contained in the Highlands one of the least literate areas in Europe'.¹¹⁷ There, education fell largely under the jurisdiction of the Scottish Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SSPCK), an organisation that was arguably as concerned with spreading Presbyterianism to Catholic and Episcopalian enclaves and stamping out Jacobitism as it was with increasing literacy.¹¹⁸ Each of the three main writers who I examine in this study who either claimed or who were ascribed labouring-class identities (Robert Burns, James Hogg and the cotton spinner Charles Campbell), at some point attended a parish school – but briefly in each case. Their educational backgrounds, rather than reflecting different experiences of a national system, seem to evince that knowledge was often diffused in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Scotland through intimate, interpersonal networks, rather than upon a strictly institutional basis. On the other hand, the claims of those writers who do stress the significance of Scotland's parish school system, such as Burns's posthumous biographer, the physician James Currie, or the nineteenth-century evangelical reformer Thomas Chalmers, often seem to align with the desire to produce tranquil subjects or efficacious labourers, rather than the functions of popular intellectual improvement.

While the problem of the division of labour that Smith outlines above mandated the ascription by later commentators and reformers of a corrective function to popular education, it initially registered, as Connell argues, in the form of a putative challenge to the whole basis of eighteenth-century Scotland's improving turn. Donald Winch acknowledges that Smith's views here could be seen to have anticipated Marx's concept of 'alienation', but argues that: '[i]t is not only more faithful to Smith's language but to his intentions as well to retain the generic eighteenth-century term used to describe such phenomena, namely 'corruption'.¹¹⁹ While Smith's reflections begin to register the labouring mind and body as a special jurisdiction of the reformer or philanthropist, they also situate the infirmities of specialized manual labour within a much broader eighteenth-century discourse on the way in which improvement and commerce threaten the integrity

¹¹⁶R.A. Houston, *Scottish Literacy and Scottish the Identity: Illiteracy and Society in Scotland and Northern England 1600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.158.

¹¹⁷ Anderson, *Education and the Scottish People*, p.17.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, pp.9-10.

¹¹⁹ Donald Winch, *Adam Smith's Politics: An Essay in Historiographic Revision* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p.82.

of the civil society that they materially enrich. While it by no means dictates its terms then, there is at least a direct resonance between Smith's discussion of the division of labour, and contemporary debate on the dynamic between intellectual cultivation and the georgic necessity of work. One could of course argue, that the widening gulf that Smith observes between the torpid 'great body of the people' and the polite middle and upper classes is simply a not yet fully articulated justification for capitalist class distinction. But what occurs in an acute form in the context of the division of labour in manufacturing, is reflected in a less extreme malaise that rises through all levels of commercial society, afflicting even men of letters and the burgeoning professional classes. In the first volume of his *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, published in 1792, Dugald Stewart reflects on the way in which a certain degree of intellectual improvement is necessitated by the exposure of the subject to the division of labour, writing that:

[n]othing can be more evident, than the necessity of limiting the field of our exertion, if we wish to benefit society by our labours. But it is perfectly consistent with the most intense application to our favourite pursuit, to cultivate that general acquaintance with letters and with the world which may be sufficient to enlarge the mind, and to preserve it from any danger of contracting to the pedantry of a particular profession.¹²⁰

The model of intellectual cultivation recommended by Stewart inflects the georgic account of how the valorisation of literature and labour were linked during the long eighteenth century, invoking leisure, the categorical opposite of work within the logic of political economy, as the scene of improvement.

1.7 Circles of literary intelligence in eighteenth-century Scotland

The identification of 'a general acquaintance' with letters as a socially useful form of intellectual improvement casts the literary periodical as the ideal vehicle for both the reconstitution of a divided field of knowledge, and the palliation of the civic 'corruption'

¹²⁰ Dugald Stewart, *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: 1792-1827), i, p.22. Further references are given after quotations in the text and are abbreviated to '*Elements*'.

attendant upon the division of labour. Henry Mackenzie's periodicals *The Mirror* (1779-1780) and *The Lounger* (1785-1786), mark out the reformulation of virtue in the face of expanding commercial wealth, and the cultivation of proper manners amidst proliferating circuits of vulgar or artificial feeling, as the aims of literary cultivation. Jon Mee argues that:

[f]or Mackenzie and many other Scottish writers, the familiar pages of the periodical press were the cultural medium best suited to 'consult[ing] the feelings of those with whom we live'. Out of this 'common and ordinary intercourse', it was imagined, would arise a wider society free from conflict and able to carry forward the grander business of improvement.¹²¹

Whether Mackenzie and his fellow periodical writers hoped to address a socially delimited reading audience through this project is perhaps unclear, but the widespread popularity of the collected versions of *The Mirror* and *Lounger*, which I discuss in the following two chapters, indicates the broad social diffusion of the literary appetite to which their combination of sentimental anecdote and polite essay appealed.

For James Anderson (1739-1808), an improving farmer like Burns – though of a different literary mien – the expansion of the reading public and the proliferation of literary commerce represented the ideal solution to the internal frictions of improvement. Anderson's periodical *The Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer*, published between 1791 and 1794, attempted to marshal the ethos of georgic and the miscellaneous character of the Scottish Enlightenment's field of 'useful knowledge' to foster a discipline of polite reading that would counteract the narrowing effects of the division of labour. Anderson's bold aim was that of: 'diffusing knowledge very universally among those classes of men who are at present excluded from the literary circle'.¹²² As Marilyn Butler argues, eighteenth-century periodicals, 'accomplished remarkable feats of homogenization' by presenting a dizzying variety of materials within the covers of a single publication, while simultaneously being, 'so organized as to underline the compartmentalization of

¹²¹ Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community 1762 to 1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.11.

¹²² 'Prospectus' in *The Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer*, ed. by James Anderson, 1 (1790), 7-12 (p.2).

knowledge and its increasing specialization.¹²³ Derek Roper too, states that the eighteenth-century reviews approached literature ‘in its very broadest sense’, and within the expansive parameters of literary commentary, were often able to evince marginal political biases towards the Whigs or Tories, even though, ‘only a small fraction of the material published in any Review number had to do with politics.’¹²⁴

The editorial policy of *The Bee* superficially adheres to the eclecticism of earlier eighteenth-century miscellanies. The number for May 25th 1791, for example, included a ‘History of a Fortunate Idler’. Starting out as a Mackenzian essay by a leisured member of the gentry, this piece quickly evolves into a didactic reflection on the hazards of ennui, which ends with the eponymous idler rescuing himself from a state of melancholic indolence, by attending to ‘the patrimonial affairs’ of the family estate, and pledging to devote his ‘intervals of leisure’ to useful study, having recognising his ‘own unhappy situation’ in a book read to him by a servant.¹²⁵ The same number included an entry in an on-going series ‘On the History of Authors by Profession’; an article consisting of ‘Critical Remarks on some of the most eminent Historians of England’, including among others Hume and Tobias Smollett; an essay on the political constitution and future prospects of the United States of America; an outline of a ‘Plan of an Association for the Improvement of Chemical Arts in Great Britain’, and various shorter poems and aphorisms. The same volume featured a polemical poem addressed to Sir John Sinclair by ‘Albanicus’ – an alias of David Steuart Erskine, the Earl of Buchan, a radical Whig and frequent anonymous contributor to *The Bee*.¹²⁶

However, the miscellaneous character of *The Bee*’s content is inflected by the statements of editorial intent that accompany it. As Anderson writes in his 1790 ‘Prospectus’ to *The Bee*: ‘the discoveries made by literary men, too often serve rather to amuse the speculative than to awaken the ingenuity of men of business, or to stimulate the industry of the operative part of the community, who have no opportunity of ever hearing of the numerous volumes in which the scattered facts are recorded.’¹²⁷ The role of *The Bee*

¹²³ Marilyn Butler, ‘Culture’s medium: the role of the Review’, *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, ed. by Stuart Curran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp.127-152 (p.129).

¹²⁴ Derek Roper, *Reviewing before the Edinburgh* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1978), pp.36-37.

¹²⁵ ‘History of a Fortunate Idler’ in *The Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer*, ed. by James Anderson, 3 (1791), 81-87.

¹²⁶ *The Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer*, ed. by James Anderson, 3 (1791), 87-89; 96-101; 102-105; 106.

¹²⁷ ‘Prospectus’ in *The Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer*, ed. by James Anderson, 1 (1790), 7-12 (p.7).

then, will be to remediate the fragmentation of knowledge resulting from vocational specialization, and to bridge the gap between operative and philosopher through the responsive medium of the periodical press. Anderson's observation that speculative advances often fail to 'awaken' or 'stimulate' those in a position to put them into practise, and his desire to remedy this situation through the medium of print, is reflective of that which Jon Mee identifies as 'the Scottish desire to reinvent virtue in a commercial society through properly regulated networks of circulation'.¹²⁸ As the *Prospectus* continues, Anderson develops his claim that *The Bee* will provide the means to circumvent the obstacles presented to the continued diffusion of knowledge by increasing degrees of the division of labour. Anderson writes that, 'among those who are engaged in arts, agriculture, manufactures, and commerce, there are many individuals of great ingenuity and conspicuous talents, who, from experience and observation, have made important discoveries in their respective employment' who are, 'at present in a great measure excluded from the circle of literary intelligence'.¹²⁹ For Anderson, the expansion of the reading public is the key to expediting the broad social, economic and cultural processes of improvement.

In *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, Klancher cites a piece by Anderson that appeared in *The Bee*, 'On the Advantages of Periodical Performances', as evidence that 'by 1790, the public sphere had itself become an image to be consumed by readers who did not frequent it.'¹³⁰ In the article in question, Anderson writes that the virtual space of the periodical is one in which:

Men of all ranks, and of all nations, however widely disjoined from each other, may be said to be brought together here to converse at their ease, without ceremony or restraint, as at a masquerade, where, if a propriety of dress and expression be observed, nothing else is required. A man, after the fatigues of the day are over, may thus sit down in his elbow chair, and, together with his wife and family, may be introduced, as it were, into a spacious coffee-house, which is frequented by men of all

¹²⁸ Mee, *Conversable Worlds*, p.77.

¹²⁹ 'Prospectus' (p.7).

¹³⁰ Klancher, p.23.

nations, who meet together for their mutual entertainment and improvement.¹³¹

Following the precedent set by Addison's *Spectator*, and revived in Mackenzie's *Mirror* and *Lounger*, *The Bee* lays claim to recreational time as the point at which the periodical intervenes in the divided world of vocations, and articulates its compartments within a broader civic and moral purpose. However, in offering itself up as a 'portable coffeehouse', Klancher writes, *The Bee* reveals that the eighteenth-century public sphere, 'has become a representation instead of a practice and, as the 1790s will reveal, an image losing much of its force.'¹³² But what Klancher sees as the basis of the irrelevance of *The Bee* and the space of intellectual exchange that it virtualised – that it could be 'consumed by readers who did not frequent it' – is arguably to dismiss *The Bee*'s stated *raison d'être* without paying due attention to the discursive currency of its claims. For Anderson, the accessibility, portability and frequency of the periodical form is the very basis of its improving facility: 'contested discussions will thus acquire an interest and a vivacity that cannot be felt in publications that are longer delayed: nor will those even the busiest scenes of life find any difficulty in glancing over the whole at leisure hours'.¹³³ Responding to the division of labour and the temporal demarcation of leisure, *The Bee* aimed, in mobilising the particular 'Advantages of Periodical Performances', to preserve the intellectual generality that for Stewart and Smith was crucial to the maintenance of civic morality. Anderson and others perceived print as a technology with the potential to transform both the scope and rate of the diffusion of knowledge, and which had to be exploited if the project of improvement was to overcome obstacles intrinsic to its simultaneous pursuit of vocational refinement and intellectual generality.

But Anderson was also concerned that *The Bee* should be able to stand for its readers as a legitimate object of literary application as well as a repository of useful knowledge. There seems to have been some insecurity on Anderson's part regarding the aesthetic merits of *The Bee*, especially perhaps, in light of the *belle-lettristic* standard set by the periodicals of Mackenzie and Addison, which was sufficient in itself to qualify the reading of those publications as an act of improvement. In a letter of March 1792, Anderson wrote to the writer and antiquarian John Pinkerton to lament that while he had

¹³¹ 'On the Advantages of Periodical Performances', in *The Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer*, ed. by James Anderson, 1 (1790), 10-14 (p.14).

¹³² Klancher, pp.23-24.

¹³³ 'Prospectus', p.8.

acquired, ‘a good many very useful, and some very good things’ for inclusion in *The Bee* from his friends and correspondents, ‘Earl Buchan, and Lord Gardenstone [...] these men, in point of literary excellence, are far inferior to what I aim at.’¹³⁴ Similar concerns had probably motivated overtures made by Anderson towards Robert Burns in 1790; Burns’s correspondence shows that he courteously declined to contribute to *The Bee*.¹³⁵ Intellectual cultivation through the perusal of ‘literary excellence’ was a central, though perhaps ultimately unfulfilled aim of Anderson’s periodical, reflecting the extent to which reading for pleasure sat comfortably alongside the absorption of technical information on agricultural practices within the eighteenth-century field of improvement. Indeed, the refinement of taste arguably constituted one of the central pillars of the improving ideal.

Six volumes consisting of nine weekly numbers of *The Bee* were published annually, producing a considerable mass of printed material over the course of a year. The dissemination of *The Bee* seems to have taken place largely through a network of printers and booksellers, which included figures such as the bookseller Peter Hill in Edinburgh, and the master printer John Sibbald in Liverpool, and whose involvement was presumably solicited either directly by Anderson, or through the distribution of the single-sheet 1790 *Prospectus* for the work.¹³⁶ Remaining fragments of Anderson’s financial records concerning *The Bee*, show that his further contacts included agents in Edinburgh, Glasgow, London, St Petersburg, Oporto, Madras, Calcutta, Konigsberg, New York, Gothenburg and Jamaica, to some extent underwriting what Klancher describes as the ‘colonizing’ impulse disclosed by Anderson’s wish in his *Prospectus*, ‘to establish a mutual interchange of knowledge, and to effect a friendly intercourse among all nations’.¹³⁷ Among other factors, the weekly publication of *The Bee* makes direct comparison of figures for its circulation with those of contemporary periodicals such as the *Monthly* and *Analytical Reviews* problematic. In a 1978 study, Derek Roper quotes figures from C. H. Timperley’s 1842 *Encyclopaedia of Literary and Typographical Anecdote* that put sales for the year of 1797 at 5,000 for the *Monthly Review*, 3,500 for the

¹³⁴ *The Literary Correspondence of John Pinkerton*, 2 vols. ed. by Dawson Turner (London: 1830), i, p.306.

¹³⁵ *The Letters of Robert Burns*, 2 vols., i. 1780-1789; ii. 1790-1796, ed. by J. De Lancey Ferguson, 2nd edn. G. Ross Roy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), ii, pp.59-60. Further references are given after quotations in the text and are abbreviated to ‘CL’.

¹³⁶ Aberdeen University Library, MS 2787/4/4/8; Papers of James Anderson, Debts to *The Bee*; C H Timperley, *Dictionary of Printers and Printing* (London: 1839), p.750.

¹³⁷ Aberdeen University Library, MS 2787/4/4/8, Papers of James Anderson, Debts to *The Bee*; Klancher, p.25; Anderson, ‘Prospectus’ (p.9).

Critical Review and *British Critic*, and 1,500 for the *Analytical Review*.¹³⁸ Timperley's *Encyclopaedia* does not, unfortunately, contain sales figures for *The Bee*. Anderson's own records relating to *The Bee* however, which consist largely of accounts of debts owed to him by subscribers, suggest that fairly large numbers of copies were printed, if not eventually sold or paid for. Anderson's accounts with one C. Forster of London for the year of 1793, show that Forster had yet to pay Anderson for a staggering 4,581 individual copies of *The Bee*.¹³⁹ By 1793, Anderson was liable for debts of 2,379 pounds, ten shillings and three pence due to unpaid subscriptions.¹⁴⁰ Despite striking off many of *The Bee*'s reneging subscribers, by the end of 1793, the publication's debts, Anderson announced, had 'augmented many hundred pounds', prompting its discontinuation in 1794.¹⁴¹ Such figures suggest a relatively high circulation for *The Bee*, although the fact that the magazine's subscribers seem at times to have been reluctant to pay for it, suggests that supply might in this case have exceeded demand.

Nonetheless *The Bee* did make some efforts to deliver on its promise of, 'diffusing knowledge very universally among those classes of men who are at present excluded from the literary circle.' In a separately published *Prospectus* of 1790, Anderson proposed that *The Bee* would be printed on three grades of paper – coarse, common and fine – in order to cater to the varying economic means of potential subscribers. The coarse paper was to be sold at 1s 10 ½ d per volume or 2 ½ d per number, the common at 3s per volume and the fine at 4s.¹⁴² Fragmentary evidence from Anderson's accounts with one of his bookseller contacts in London, shows that in sales of full volumes, demand for the common paper could be almost twice as great as that for the fine, whilst in sales of single numbers, the fine paper printings were slightly more popular than the common.¹⁴³ But as a long term prospect, the least that a (paid) subscription to *The Bee* could have cost annually would have been around twelve shillings – a significant outlay for a Scottish peasant or mechanic.

¹³⁸ Roper, p.24.

¹³⁹ Aberdeen University Library, MS 2787/4/4/7, Papers of James Anderson, Accounts with C Forster of London, 1793.

¹⁴⁰ Aberdeen University Library, MS 2787/4/4/8, Papers of James Anderson, Debts to *The Bee*.

¹⁴¹ 'To the Readers of The Bee', in *The Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer*, ed. by James Anderson, 18 (1794), 392-394 (p.392).

¹⁴² James Anderson, *Prospectus of an Intended New Periodical Work, to be called The Bee, or Universal Literary Intelligencer* (Edinburgh: 1790).

¹⁴³ Aberdeen University Library, MS 2787/4/4/7, Papers of James Anderson, Accounts with C Forster of London, 1793.

Indeed, only anecdotal evidence suggests that *The Bee* ever delivered on its promise to diffuse knowledge ‘among those classes of men who are at present excluded from the literary circle’. The Paisley poet, former weaver and eventual political exile, Alexander Wilson, contributed a number of poems and an essay entitled ‘The Solitary Philosopher’ to *The Bee*.¹⁴⁴ Robert Tannahill, another writer hailing from Paisley’s weaving communities is purported to have had, ‘the *Bee* in his library’, although he can only have been sixteen at the time of the periodical’s establishment, making it unlikely that he was ever in a position to participate in the literary commerce which it sought to facilitate.¹⁴⁵ We might also note that Robert Burns subscribed to *The Bee* on the part of five of his fellow excise officers, an innkeeper, a surgeon, and a factor, but not on behalf of the lower-class library at which he was then responsible for the procurement of reading material (CL II 60).¹⁴⁶ Instead, Burns provided for the intellectual improvement of his labouring charges by ordering collected versions of Henry Mackenzie’s polite, essay-based periodicals, *The Mirror* and *Lounger* (CL II 19). If *The Bee* was targeted to demonstrate the efficacy of the periodical form as a site of intra-social cultivation and commerce, it also revealed the limitations of the medium prior to the readership-forming strategies of the *Edinburgh Review* and other nineteenth-century publications.¹⁴⁷

1.8 An end to enlightenment

For the farmers, agricultural servants and textile operatives I discuss in the present thesis, it was perhaps primarily through the cultivation of literary taste, rather than the acquisition of practical knowledge and expertise, that the division of labour and its undesirable effects were seen to be most effectively resisted. It’s this form of intellectual improvement which I explore in the following chapter in relation to Robert Burns. However as I discuss in subsequent chapters, the moral debility associated with the advanced division of labour was seen in the context of the lower ranks to further complicate an already fraught configuration of polite improvement as the enlargement of sensibility. Hugh Blair’s ambivalence towards sensibility in the above passage from his *Sermons*, and his assertion of the need to foster regulatory habits of reflective self-criticism, rehearses a key

¹⁴⁴ *The poetical works of Alexander Wilson: Also His Miscellaneous Prose Writings* (Belfast, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Paisley, London: 1844), xix.

¹⁴⁵ *Poems, Songs and Correspondence of Robert Tannahill*, ed. by David Semple (Paisley: 1876), p. 264n.

¹⁴⁶ See my discussion of the ‘Monkland Friendly Society’ in the following chapter.

¹⁴⁷ See Klancher, pp.50-51.

preoccupation of writers in this period. For Blair and others, sensibility and ‘native affection’ must be policed by an agile and well trained mind before they can be considered truly useful. However the mental ‘torpor’ of the specialized manual labourer, while on the one hand appearing to necessitate the remedial intercession of polite refinement, also reduces the subject to the productive functions of the labouring body, collapsing mediated sensibility into a raw enthusiasm that is, in Mee’s words, ‘a mere instinct that is mechanical in its enslavement to the combustible matter within’.¹⁴⁸

Moreover, the condition of the labourer was increasingly portrayed by commentators as inimical to the cultivation of fine feeling, and the co-presence of the imperative to labour and a capacity for sentiment and sensibility were imagined to be generative of an individually and socially destructive conflict, rather than the desired improvement. As early as 1773, Henry Mackenzie, arguably the chief theorist, promulgator and critic of the sentimental turn in late eighteenth-century Scottish letters, reflected that: ‘[t]here is a degree of sentiment, which, in the bosom of a man destined to the drudgery of the world, is the source of endless disgust’.¹⁴⁹ Remarks such as this would resurface as ubiquitous truisms of late-Enlightenment and Romantic biographies and critiques of Burns and his poetry – not least James Currie’s – and would shape the terms of the debate around labouring-class intellectual improvement. Following the political controversies of the 1790s, elite commentators became increasingly anxious about the destabilising potential of delegating the regulation of sensibility and the passions to the intellect of the labourer, compromised as it already was, by its lack of habitual and practical differentiation from the labouring body. What Blair calls ‘native affection’ in his *Sermons* now ceased to be an object of improvement in a labouring-class context, and was increasingly configured as a function of natural genius. The authority of the dispensatory approach of labouring-class education, recommended by Henry Brougham and his fellow *Edinburgh Review* Whigs and implemented in the form of the **Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge** on the one hand, and of the transcendental model of lower-class genius initially championed in *Blackwood’s* on the other, were thereby consolidated.¹⁵⁰ In Scotland in the late 1820s, the cause of ‘popular enlightenment’ was co-opted into the competing approaches of Presbyterian Evangelical pedagogues and mechanics’ institutes:

¹⁴⁸ Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, p.60.

¹⁴⁹ Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of the World*, 2 vols. (London: 1773), i, p.13. Further references are given after quotations in the text and are abbreviated to ‘MW’.

¹⁵⁰ See Benchimol, pp.121-130.

instruments and symptoms of the gradual extinction of the diffusive mode of literary cultivation from which the work of Burns, Hogg, and Campbell had partly emerged.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ See J. V. Smith, 'Manners, Morals, and Mentalities'.

2

Labour, Leisure, and Robert Burns's Sentimental 'Counterpoise'

My favourite authors are of the sentimental kind, such as *Shenstone*, particularly his *Elegies*; *Thomson*; *Man of Feeling*, a book I prize next to the Bible; *Man of the World*; *Sterne*, especially his *Sentimental Journey*; *McPherson's Ossian*, &c. these are the glorious models after which I endeavour to form my conduct, and 'tis incongruous, 'tis absurd to suppose that the man whose mind glows with sentiments lighted up at their sacred flame – the man whose heart distends with benevolence to all the human race – he “who can soar above this little scene of things” – can he descend to mind the pault concerns [sic] about which the terrae-filial race fret, and fume, and vex themselves?

Robert Burns, letter to John Murdoch, January, 1783 (CL I 17-18)

2.1 Robert Burns and Henry Mackenzie: authors 'of the sentimental kind'

In December 1786, Henry Mackenzie's Edinburgh-based periodical *The Lounger* published a review of Robert Burns's *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, printed by subscription in the town of Kilmarnock earlier that year. Prior to the establishment of *The Lounger* in 1785, Mackenzie had edited and contributed to *The Mirror*, another periodical publication featuring essays, polite anecdotes and 'moral fiction', which had run from 1779 to 1780 before achieving widespread popularity in collected duodecimo form.¹ As it turns out, *The Mirror* had constituted an important element of Burns's reading prior to the publication of his *Poems*, as had the sentimental novels on which Mackenzie had established his literary fame in the 1770s. In a letter of 1783 to his childhood tutor John Murdoch, Robert Burns writes that his 'favourite authors are of the sentimental kind'. For Burns, this genre incorporates the poetry of William Shenstone, the English 'translations'

¹ The term 'moral fiction' is used by Sher to describe the content of Mackenzie's periodicals: Richard Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book: Scottish Authors and their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland and America* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), p.93.

of ancient Gaelic verse produced by James Macpherson between 1760-63, and a number of novels, including Henry Mackenzie's 1771 *The Man of Feeling* and 1773 *The Man of the World*, the former of which Burns claims to 'prize next to the Bible'.

Burns was not unusual among late eighteenth-century readers in harbouring a taste for Mackenzie's sentimental novels. K. A. Manley notes that Mackenzie 'was probably the most popular author of the period, as far as Scottish subscription libraries were concerned.'² As Richard Sher writes in *The Enlightenment and the Book*, philosophical works accounted for only a portion of book sales attributable to Scottish authors in the late eighteenth century: the Scottish Enlightenment's 'best-selling titles conform to no obvious pattern', and '[t]he subject matter of best sellers was extraordinarily varied.'³ In contrast to the modern critical field of Romanticism, Burns's recognition of 'the sentimental kind' as a distinctive literary category, suggests a movement whose particular gamut of thematic and stylistic concerns were perhaps as identifiable to contemporary readers as they have been to modern scholars. In his 1996 study of the eighteenth-century sentimental novel, *The Politics of Sensibility*, Markman Ellis argues that 'the history of late eighteenth-century sensibility is not an enlightenment discourse, but a philosophical nightmare of muddled ideas, weak logic and bad writing.'⁴ For Ellis, '[t]he terms "sensibility" and "sentimental" denote a complex field of meanings and connotations in the late eighteenth century, overlapping and coinciding to such an extent as to offer no obvious distinction.'⁵ Sentimental reading, although a cohabitant of the diffusion of knowledge within the unfolding of the late eighteenth-century's print public sphere, tended not to be ascribed the same level or type of usefulness by contemporaries, and occasionally defined itself according to criteria opposed to the overtly rational and economic values of improvement.

Emerging alongside the 're-forming of knowledge into disciplines' that Clifford Siskin names as a key function of the professionalization of writing in the late eighteenth century, sentimental literature both resisted and reflected the georgic credo uniting intellectual and material improvement.⁶ For Ellis, in contrast to the increasing

² K. A. Manley, *Books, Borrowers, and Shareholders: Scottish Circulating and Subscription Libraries before 1825, A Survey and Listing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Bibliographical Society in Association with The National Library of Scotland, 2012), p.120.

³ Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book*, pp.92-93.

⁴ Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.7.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Clifford Siskin, *The Work of Writing: Literature and Social Change in Britain, 1700-1830* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1998), p.104

specialization of knowledge over the long eighteenth century, '[s]entimentalism discovers its power in the novel's freedom to mix genres and discourses freely.'⁷ The discursive ambiguity of sentimental novels, combined with their tendency to deal equally in matters of heart, humanity, and the apparently whimsical, may have allowed them to solicit a more socially and vocationally broad readership than that claimed by other forms of writing.

While the popularity of the sentimental novel as observed by Sher and Manley unsettles any account of the ostensible diffusion of knowledge during the Scottish Enlightenment as an entirely georgic enterprise however, it is equally the case that Mackenzian sentimentalism and eighteenth-century political economy share a certain commonality in the way that they theorize a remedial form of leisure as the necessary counterpart to the intensification of work under the division of labour. As implied by the title of Mackenzie's periodical, *The Lounger*, leisured reading was coming to be widely valued in the period as an alternative scene of improvement, characterised by a complementary, rather than a strictly repudiatory relationship to the domain of labour and commerce. On this level, sentimental cultivation anticipates, while falling slightly short of, the emergence of a notion of 'culture as an abstraction and an absolute', which for Raymond Williams would be characterised as a synthesis of 'two general responses' to political and economic change at the end of the eighteenth century: 'first, the recognition of the practical separation of certain moral and intellectual activities from the driven impetus of a new kind of society; second, the emphasis of these activities, as a court of human appeal, to be set over the processes of practical social judgement and yet to offer itself as a mitigating and rallying alternative.'⁸ What Williams describes as 'the practical separation of certain moral and intellectual activities from the driven impetus of a new kind of society' becomes of particular importance within the sentimental and political-economic theorisation of leisure as a necessary counterpart to labour, but sentimentalism does not yet denote an autonomous domain of literature that seeks to confront political economy on the basis of its own moral and aesthetic claims. My approach in this chapter is necessarily bipartite, dealing both with the importance of sentimentalism to Burns's status as an ostensible ploughman poet, and with his role in the diffusion of sentimental literature among his peers and social subordinates. Throughout, I argue that Burns's poetry, like his involvement in the popular diffusion of writing 'of a sentimental kind'

⁷ Ellis, p.8.

⁸ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958; repr. 1983), xviii.

through the libraries and literary clubs of his south-west Scottish environs, rather than evincing the sentimental claim that true politeness is a product of nature, demonstrates the unexpected versatility of a model of cultivation that rhetorically values qualities of heart, over the acquirements of property or capital.

2.2 The ‘Heaven-taught ploughman’

Mackenzie’s review of Burns’s *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, comprises the entirety of the ninety-seventh number of the *Lounger*, and closes the circuit of influence opened by the poet’s reading of *The Man of Feeling* and *Man of the World*, and later, both *The Mirror* and *The Lounger*. On the basis of his *Poems*, Mackenzie famously marks Burns out as a ‘Heaven-taught ploughman,’ who, ‘from his humble and unlettered station, has looked upon men and manners.’⁹ Understandably, modern criticism has tended to be more invested in challenging the sentimental mould that Mackenzie’s review casts for Burns and his works than it has been in consolidating it. Mackenzie’s imputation that Burns was both ‘Heaven-taught’ and ‘unlettered’, while partly foundational to the poet’s eighteenth-century celebrity, also denies the level of erudition conspicuously evident in the literary allusions of the Kilmarnock Edition. Indeed, links between intellectual and agricultural labour were pervasive within Burns’s historical and vocational milieux. As Kurt Heinzelman argues, the georgic ideal of agricultural improvement ‘acutely involves two antithetically class-specific activities: day-labour in the fields (i.e., farming) versus the employment of language (i.e., writing and reading).’¹⁰

As I argue below, Burns rarely identifies the value of reading with its potential to expedite processes of material improvement by increasing the efficiency of the labourer, tending instead to associate lower-class reading with the acquirement of a form of politeness that is valued because of its detachment from vocational or economic concerns. But through the broad definition of ‘useful knowledge’ that operated in the late eighteenth century, and by making reading a prerogative of those involved in agricultural labour, the ethos of georgic nonetheless exerted a structuring influence on Burns’s own forays into literary learning, and may have originally incorporated a form of polite cultivation that

⁹ [Henry Mackenzie et al] *The Lounger, A Periodical Paper, Published at Edinburgh in the Years 1785 and 1786* (Edinburgh: 1786), p.388. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

¹⁰ Kurt Heinzelman, ‘The last georgic: *Wealth of Nations*, and the scene of writing,’ in *Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations: New interdisciplinary essays*, pp.170-94 (p.180).

was later distinguished from the pursuit of professional knowledge, through its formal and generic association with literary periodicals and sentimental novels. Burns's early years were spent immersed in a culture of improvement in which the acquirement of not only systematic vocational knowledge, but a general familiarity with a broadly defined literary field, were understood as the prerequisites of the efficacious labourer and the useful member of society. This has a double significance I would argue, in that it reveals Burns's Kilmarnock Edition as both a precisely targeted engagement with a domain of polite letters in which its author was well versed, and a critical mediation of the enlightenment discourse surrounding the figures of improvement and labour.

Burns's education, even if it tended to be characterised by short-term and often informal periods of instruction, driven by familial initiative rather than official provision, was nonetheless strongly patterned by the georgic concatenation of agricultural with intellectual improvement through the technology of reading. However, the educational concerns of Burns's father, William Burnes, and his childhood tutor, John Murdoch – the addressee of the letter in which Burns expresses his preference for writing 'of the sentimental kind' – seem not to have been confined to the acquirement of knowledge applicable to the business of farming. In 1765, by combining his means with those of some neighbouring farmers, Burnes had been able to procure the services of Murdoch, then a young teacher in Ayr, as a private tutor for his sons (Currie I 88-98).¹¹ Such schemes were not uncommon in areas too remote to be provided for by the parochial school system – the entry in *The Statistical Account of Scotland* for the parish of Colmonel in Ayrshire records that '[i]t is very usual, therefore, for three or four farmers to join in hiring a private teacher, to instruct their children.'¹²

R. M. Towsey finds in his study of provincial reading habits during the Scottish Enlightenment, that among other high ranking estate workers, gardeners had some access to the libraries of their employers, and were occasionally lent texts such as Adam Dickson's 1762 *A Treatise of Agriculture*, which Burns counts among his early reading in his autobiographical letter of 1787 to the physician and later novelist, John Moore (CL I

¹¹ See also James A. Mackay, *A Biography of Robert Burns* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1992), pp.33-37.

¹² Sir John Sinclair, *The Statistical Account of Scotland, Drawn up from the communications of the ministers of the different parishes*, 21 vols (Edinburgh: 1791-1799),ii, p.67.

138).¹³ William Burnes may have been party to just such an arrangement while he was head-gardener to Provost William Fergusson at Doonholm: Robert's brother Gilbert recalls in a narrative letter to the poet's former patron, Francis Dunlop, that their father once 'borrowed a volume of English history from Mr Hamilton of Bourtree-hill's gardener', suggesting that men of his class and vocation may have shared in some degree of intellectual sociability, and that their reading was not necessarily limited to material directly relevant to their work (Currie I 66). While his sons may have been too young to have benefited directly from any such 'privy-lending', Burnes's occupation may have enabled him to read both a greater number and a more recently published selection of books than his economic circumstances would otherwise have allowed.¹⁴

Gilbert Burns also recalls in his letter to Dunlop that his father 'procured' certain works from 'a book society in Ayr' – likely a reference to the Ayr Library Society, a subscription library founded by a selection of the town's clergy and professional classes in 1762 (Currie I 64). In his survey of Scottish *Books, Borrowers and Shareholders*, Manley usefully differentiates between subscription libraries such as that founded in Ayr, and circulating libraries; a famous example of which was that established in Edinburgh in 1725 by the poet Allan Ramsay. Manley states that the eighteenth-century subscription library was: 'a private proprietary library where subscribers paid not only an annual subscription to borrow books but also an entrance fee (often referred to as 'entry money') to possess a share in the library; the shareholders owned the library and chose the books.'¹⁵ Such institutions required a considerable commitment of both capital and organisational effort from their members, suggesting a georgic and improving attitude towards literature and recreational reading. Even before a library member had gained access to its books, he or she would have already invested in its **culture of civility** by endorsing certain codes of practice and regulations. In the case of circulating libraries on the other hand, 'a subscription was paid to hire books from the library's owner, usually a bookseller, sometimes a stationer [who] selected and owned stock with the intention of turning a profit.'¹⁶ Access to these commercial ventures typically required a lower financial outlay than subscription based libraries, but came with the drawback that readers had no direct control over what books were available. In the long term, this distinction

¹³ R. M. Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment: Books and their Readers in Provincial Scotland, 1750-1820* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010), p.53.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Manley, p.1.

¹⁶ Ibid, p.2.

gave rise to the perception of subscription libraries as instruments of improvement, and circulating libraries as purveyors of trivial, even pernicious recreational reading.¹⁷

Minutes of the Ayr Library Society's biannual meetings remain extant from the year 1776 onward, but a retrospective list of members compiled in 1785 shows that several figures closely connected with either Robert Burns or his family had been members since the society's establishment.¹⁸ Among them were the aforementioned John Murdoch and David Tennant, English Master at Ayr Grammar School and cousin to John Tennant, who had shared in the scheme to secure Murdoch as a tutor at Alloway, and whose son James was later the addressee of a verse epistle from Burns¹⁹. Lacking a dedicated venue, the Society would meet in one of the town's taverns in order to discuss the purchase of new books. Both Murdoch and David Tennant performed administrative duties, with the former recording minutes at several meetings and the latter acting for a spell as librarian.²⁰ The Moderate or 'new licht' Presbyterian ministers William McGill and his colleague William Dalrymple, the latter of whom had baptised Robert Burns, were also founding members of the library.²¹ Later, the Society was joined by Burns's patrons John Ballantine and Robert Aitken: dedicatees of the Kilmarnock Edition poems 'The Brigs of Ayr' (K120) and 'The Cotter's Saturday Night' (K72) respectively.²² In addition to John Dalrymple of Orangefield, who introduced Burns to his patron the Laird of Glencairn, a number of other prominent local figures including John Loudon McAdam and the resolutely 'auld licht' Reverend William Peebles were also members.²³ It's also worth noting that in contrast to the explicitly homosocial nature of the literary clubs frequented by Burns, the Ayr Library Society had at least one woman member from its inception in 1762, and several by the mid-1780s.²⁴ The presence several of Burns's patrons in the membership of the Ayr Library Society, draws attention to the Kilmarnock Edition itself, as a reflection of the desire of a local social and intellectual élite to assert their cultural status during a period in which Scotland's perceptions of its own national

¹⁷ See Towsey, pp.92-120.

¹⁸ Ayr, Carnegie Library, Minute Book of the Ayr Library Society, November 1785.

¹⁹ Mackay, p.28.

²⁰ Ayr, Carnegie Library, Minute Book of the Ayr Library Society, January 1777, July 1777.

²¹ Mackay pp.27-28.

²² Robert Burns, *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. by James Kinsley, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), i. Further references to Burns's Poems and songs are given after quotations in the text and are abbreviated to 'K' followed by their numeration in Kinsley's edition.

²³ Minute Book of the Ayr Library Society, November 1785. For the background of the Peebles/McGill controversy, see Kinsley, iii, p. 1107.

²⁴ Minute Book of the Ayr Library Society, November 1785.

proress rested increasingly on the achievements of its writers. Aitken alone purchased 145 of the 600 copies of Burns's *Poems* printed in Kilmarnock in 1786.²⁵

With the leading Edinburgh Bookseller (later Burns's publisher) William Creech as their supplier, the Ayr Library Society was able to access the print productions of Scotland's urban enlightenment soon after they became available. The historian John Strawhorn points out that Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* and volume one of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* were both purchased by the Society in 1776, the year of their publication.²⁶ Adam Ferguson's 1767 *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* was purchased in the following year, along with Kames's *Gentleman Farmer* and Hugh Blair's *Sermons*. Aside from his brother's mention of the Society in his letter to Dunlop, there is some textual evidence to suggest that Burns may have had informal access to the library's collection, such as his 'Letter to James Tennant, Glenconner', in which he refers to enclosed copies of Thomas Reid's 1764 *An Inquiry in to the Human Mind, on the Principles of Common Sense* and Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*; the latter reference further complementing Burns's expression of approval for Smith's work in his first Commonplace Book in 1783 (K90).²⁷ The Library Society agreed to procure Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* in 1776 (alongside John Locke's 'Whole Works' and a copy of 'The Alcoran'), suggesting that they acquired the fourth edition of 1774; Reid's *Inquiry* was selected for purchase in 1782. Mackenzie's *Mirror* was ordered in 1785 and *The Lounger* in 1788, presumably after both had become available as bound collections.²⁸ In 1773, Burns was briefly sent to stay with John Murdoch in Ayr, during which time he would have been close to the concentration of economic and intellectual communities of the town, and to the holdings of the library in which his host was at that time closely involved.²⁹

²⁵ Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book*, p.230.

²⁶ John Strawhorn, 'Ayrshire and the Enlightenment' in *A Sense of Place: Studies in Scottish Local History*, ed. by Graeme Cruickshank (Edinburgh: Scotland's Cultural Heritage Unit, 1988), pp.188-199, 196.

²⁷ Robert Burns, *Commonplace Books, Tour Journals, and Miscellaneous Prose*, ed. by Nigel Leask, *The Oxford Edition of the Works of Robert Burns*, Gen. ed. Gerry Carruthers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) i, p.46. Further references are given after quotations in the text and are abbreviated to 'Prose'.

²⁸ Minute Book of the Ayr Library Society, January 1776; January 1782; November 1785; January 1788.

²⁹ Mackay, pp.47-48

2.3 ‘A politeness of the heart’

Perhaps because they lacked the disposable income to spend on subscription fees, no members of the Burnes family appear on the society’s extant membership lists, suggesting the institution’s status as primarily an amenity of Ayr’s teachers, clergymen, bankers, merchants, solicitors, landowners, and better off tenant farmers. However, intellectual improvement was increasingly assumed to be a necessary compartment of the new capitalist agriculture. One of the local worthies eulogised in the extended manuscript version of Burns’s Kilmarnock poem ‘The Vision’ (K62) Colonel William Fullarton, emphasises the ploughman’s centrality to the modernisation of arable farming in his 1793 *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Ayr, with Observations on the Means of its Improvement, Drawn up for the consideration of the Board of Agriculture and Internal Improvement*. Fullarton writes that, ‘[t]he art of ploughing, perhaps, requires a nicer eye, steadier hands, and more attention – than any other occupation; and yet, without fixed principles or rules of any kind, the most ignorant persons are trusted with a plough; although the difference of one man’s ploughing and another’s shall make the odds of 2 or 3 quarters produce per acre, on the same land’.³⁰

Accordingly, not only the distinct varieties of agricultural labour, but Burns’s broader vocation as a tenant farmer were increasingly dependent upon the accumulation of ‘fixed principles or rules’ that might serve to expedite the process of improvement, or to use Fullarton’s explicitly economic framing, increase productivity. In his letter to Moore, Burns, recalls a spell in Kirkoswald adding to his reservoir of technical knowledge by learning ‘Mensuration, Surveying, Dialling, &c’, as well as ‘Geometry’ and ‘Trigonometry [sic]’ (CL I 140). But Fullarton also notes the empirical nature of the improver’s task, writing that: ‘[t]he farmers in this country, are a sagacious and observing race of men; and though wisely unwilling to adopt, on light surmises, every plan that projectors may suggest, yet, there are few instances of their long refusing to imitate such modes and practises as experience teaches, are adapted to the country where they reside.’³¹ Ayrshire’s tenant farmers were compelled to be hard working and dextrous, but they were also required to undertake complex acts of planning, analysis and reasoning when

³⁰ Colonel William Fullarton of Fullarton, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Ayr, with Observations on the Means of its Improvement, Drawn up for the consideration of the Board of Agriculture and Internal Improvement* (Edinburgh: John Paterson, 1793), p.34.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp.71-72.

implementing new techniques and principles that had not been developed with the particularities of local terrain in mind.

We might then see the Ayr Library Society's collection of moral philosophy, history, literary criticism and poetry as representative of a multivalent approach to improvement, which accommodated a broad range of genres and subjects beneath its twin rubrics of the diffusion of knowledge and the refinement of arts. The overarching goal here was not solely the inculcation of vocationally specific knowledge, so much as the cultivation of a civically-minded middling rank, its members proficient within their given roles in the division of labour, but also prepared to contribute judiciously to a polite public sphere. To quote Paul Keen, this model of learning engineered no clear distinction between, 'what is recognized as "literary" and what is merely "textual"'.³² In his letter to Moore, Burns writes that even while accruing specialist agricultural knowledge through works such as Jethro Tull's *Horse-Hoeing Husbandry* (1731) and Dickson's *Treatise*, he was also reading in a broader literature of politeness that included Locke's *Essay on the Human Understanding* (first published in 1690) and Addison and Steele's *Spectator*. This approach to improvement was couched within notions of georgic, understood both as a general ethos of application that sanctioned intellectual work, and as a specific literary form. Kevis Goodman argues that Addison's critical writing on Virgil's *Georgics* in *The Spectator*, 'became the foundation for the aesthetics advanced in his famous "Pleasures of the Imagination" series of 1712, which sought to shape the taste by which descriptive writing – and indeed much of polite culture – was to be enjoyed.'³³

In his letter to Moore, Burns recalls becoming acquainted with Addison's writing at a young age through *A Collection of English Prose and Verse for The Use of Schools*, compiled by the Edinburgh teacher, Arthur Masson (CL I 135). In his 2002 study of Burns's engagement with 'Real Whig' politics, *Burns the Radical*, Liam McIlvanney analyses the contents of Masson's *Collection* – the bedrock of Burns's early reading – at some length, and argues that through its fables and histories it extolls the values of a British constitutionalist discourse that links just government with civic virtue, and opposes

³² Paul Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s: Print Culture and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.254.

³³ Kevis Goodman, *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism: Poetry and the Mediation of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.12.

it to the ‘Old Corruption’ of court and aristocracy.³⁴ McIlvanney argues that the Addisonian configuration of literary taste as a form of virtue is inflected in Burns’s writing through the philosophy of Hutcheson, which avers our capacity to distinguish between right and wrong on a sensory basis, by linking the perception of pleasure with ethical action through the agency of a ‘moral sense’. In his 1725 *Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, Hutcheson writes that, ‘[o]ur perception of pleasure is necessary, and nothing is advantageous or naturally good to us, but what is apt to raise our pleasure mediately, or immediately’.³⁵ Hutcheson’s attribution of right action to the ‘perception of pleasure’, arguably foregrounds the later eighteenth-century discourse on sensibility, and its ostensible conflation of affective response with moral judgement. These influences arguably come to the fore in ‘The Vision’, a piece that acts as a vehicle for Burns’s ambitions as both a major poet and a recipient of patronage.³⁶ In ‘The Vision’, Burns dramatizes the moment of his poetic inauguration as an intervention by his muse, ‘Coila’. Describing her appearance, Burns writes:

A ‘hare-brain’d, sentimental trace’
Was strongly marked in her face;
A wildly-witty, rustic grace
 Shone full upon her;
Her eye, ev’n turn’d on empty space,
 Beam’d keen with *Honor*. (ll.55-60)

The ‘hare-brain’d sentimental trace’ that Burns ascribes to Coila is a mark of virtue in the possessor, but also of a certain unpredictability or impulsivity of disposition, a capacity for a type of rarefied and occasionally embodied sensibility, that while perhaps inimical to the interests of the ‘terrae-filial race’ that Burns derides in his 1783 letter to Murdoch, becomes for that very reason valuable in the context of poetic production. In ‘The Vision’, Coila reciprocates the speaker’s accreditation of her ‘hare-brain’d’ sensibility by vindicating his reckless impulsivity as the basis of his poetic capacity:

‘I saw thy pulse’s maddening play,
‘Wild-send thee Pleasure’s devious way,
‘Misled by fancy’s *meteor-ray*,
 ‘By Passion driven;
‘But yet the light that led astray,

³⁴Liam McIlvanney *Burns the Radical: Poetry and Politics in Late Eighteenth Century Scotland* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2002), p.54.

³⁵ Francis Hutcheson, *An inquiry into the original of our ideas of beauty and virtue* (London: 1725), p.103.

³⁶ See Nigel Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral: Poetry and Improvement in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 98-102.

‘Was *light* from Heaven’ (ll. 235-240)

Coila’s formulation casts her addressee’s sensibility, here an innate and irresistible responsiveness manifest as a bodily deference to the exhortations of ‘Pleasure’, as a conduit of poetic inspiration. For McIlvanney, Burns’s deference to the impulses of the heart in his poetry: ‘recalls Hutcheson’s statement that our sense of moral good and evil operates without rational calculations of personal advantage, just as our aesthetic sense of beauty and harmony does not depend upon ‘any Knowledge of *Mathematicks*’’.³⁷ In ‘The Vision’, both Coila’s ‘sentimental trace’ and the ‘maddening’ pulse of her humble charge, claim the benevolent sensibility theorised by the ‘Moral Sense’ tradition as a source of poetic legitimacy. Burns’s engagement with the literary sentimentalism of the 1770s and 1780s is partly supported then, by a scaffold of philosophical and literary authorities from earlier in the century, accessed through his reading in what William St. Clair describes as an ‘old-canon’, widely diffused through cheap reprints and anthologies.³⁸

A sense of the civilizing value of literary pleasure was already inscribed within eighteenth-century georgic then, but I would argue that towards the end of the century, certain writers were beginning to refine the notion that recreational reading constituted an alternative realm of pursuit, whose value was defined by its distance from the world of economic commerce and material improvement. In an essay written for *The Lounger* in 1786, Henry Mackenzie argues that:

[l]etters require a certain sort of application, though of a kind perhaps very different from that which business would recommend. Granting that they are unprofitable in themselves, as that word is used in the language of the world; yet, as developing the powers of thought and reflection, they may be an amusement of some use [...] (*Lounger* 398)

For Mackenzie, who posits no distinctions of form or genre, a ‘love of letters’ has the potential to contribute to the ‘improvement of our faculties, as well as of our principles’. Mackenzie adds: ‘[t]he love of letters is connected with an independence and delicacy of mind, which is a great preservative against that servile homage which abject men pay to fortune’ (398). For Mackenzie, literary application both corrects the intellectual and moral

³⁷ Ibid, p.113.

³⁸ See William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.121.

infirmity that results from an excessive attention to a narrow field of study or labour, and offers to mitigate commercial society's exhortation to pursue material wealth and obey the dictates of fashion. While excessive attention to 'business' breeds a certain intellectual and moral meanness, '[a] superior education generally corrects this, by opening the mind to different motives of action, to the feelings of delicacy, the sense of honour, and a contempt of wealth, when earned by a desertion of those principles' (398). The improving potential of literary pursuits inheres in a distancing from, rather than usefulness within, the realm of political-economic activity and interest, or in the way that they require a form of 'application' that is 'very different from that which business would recommend'. For Mackenzie, '[t]o be busy, as one ought, is an easy art; but to know how to be idle, is a very superior accomplishment' (399). This model of cultivation, while it builds on the georgic configuration of recreational reading as a supplementary form of labour, is also distinct from it, in its overt privileging of leisure as a mitigating alternative to the scene of business and its imperative to do 'as one ought'.

In his *Lounger* article, Mackenzie draws on an Addisonian principle of politeness and its strong links with the medium of the essay periodical, in order to cast recreational reading as a practicable form of virtue for the professional man of middling rank: the physician, merchant or lawyer 'destined for the labours of business', and accorded a civic prominence within the national public sphere (*Lounger* 397). It is indeed arguable that Burns, as a tenant farmer, qualifies as a member of this constituency, although his broader involvement in the labouring-class intellectual culture of his time suggests that he did not regard the imperatives of literary application as applying to a distinct social category. Moreover, while Mackenzie's periodicals and sentimental novels appear to primarily address a professional as opposed to a labouring-class audience, they nonetheless participate in the broader theorisation of leisure as a key site of moral and intellectual cultivation, and one whose importance is amplified by its potential to exert a regulative counterinfluence upon the pressures of commerce and labour, even if, as I discuss below, in the context of the manual operative a burgeoning discourse of political economy tended to configure the usefulness of leisure in different terms.

Mackenzie's recommendation of a cultivated 'independence and delicacy of mind' as a preventive measure against an uncritical deference to wealth in *The Lounger*, partly codifies notions he had previously explored in his novels. However the disparity of medium between the sentimental novel and the essay periodical profoundly alters the

terms in which each approaches the necessity of maintaining a distance from ‘the world’ through the pursuit of intellectual improvement. *The Man of Feeling* presents its reader with a series of fragmentary and disordered episodes: the vestiges it is implied, of a once cohesive narrative, the surviving pages of which are retrieved in the introduction from the pocket of a curate who has been using them as wadding during shooting trips. As Ildiko Csengei suggests, the problematic structure of *The Man of Feeling* demands from its readers a refusal of conventional parameters of judgement and analysis, congratulating those who succeed as having achieved membership of ‘those select few who possess enough sensibility to be able to enjoy its ‘medley’’.³⁹ However certain elements of the novel seem to exhort its readers’ use of what Mackenzie would refer to in *The Lounger* as ‘the powers of thought and reflection’, as much as the responsiveness of an innate sensibility. Mackenzie’s characterisation of his own narrator in *The Man of Feeling* as another reader, and his inseting of multiple narratives and pseudo-authorial homilies on sentimental cultivation, draw attention to the novel’s artifice and mediality, and to the rigorous employment of the faculties that it demands from its reader in the unravelling of its various frames and strands. It’s paradoxical that despite their multiple anonymous contributors and varying subject matter, *The Mirror* and *Lounger* tend to maintain a voice that is, in Ellis’s words, ‘civic, judicious and masculine’, while *The Man of Feeling* and *Man of the World* exploit the heteroglossic potentialities of the novel, and frequently undermine or obfuscate any sense of authorial positioning. Moreover, if Mackenzie’s novels often appear to make claims for an ‘independence and delicacy of mind’ removed from the concerns of the ‘world’, these are often qualified or refuted by narrative outcomes, or the competing claims of other characters and voices.

One of the narrators of *The Man of Feeling* seems to anticipate Mackenzie’s later views in *The Lounger*, when he declaims that: ‘[t]here are certain interests which the world supposes every man to have, and which therefore are properly enough termed worldly; but the world is apt to make an erroneous estimate: ignorant of the dispositions which constitute our happiness or misery, they bring to an undistinguished scale the means of the one, as connected with power, wealth or grandeur, and of the other with their contraries.’⁴⁰ In his 1783 letter to John Murdoch, Burns configures the sentimental

³⁹ Ildiko Csengei, “I will not weep’: Reading through the Tears of Henry Mackenzie’s “Man of Feeling””, in *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 103, No.4 (Oct.,2008), pp.952-968, p.955

⁴⁰ Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling* (London: 1771), p.8. Further references are given after quotations in the text and are abbreviated to ‘MF’.

espousal of a non-economic scale of value as a mimesis of practicable virtue; the works of Mackenzie and others provide the ‘glorious models’ of Burns’s own conduct, and kindle in the sentimental reader the ‘sacred flame’ of a benevolence that elevates him or her above the ordinary round of social and economic intercourse, or: ‘the paltry concerns about which the terrae-filial race fret, and fume, and vex themselves’. In their sentimental position taking, both Burns and Mackenzie’s narrator align themselves against a subjective tendency to ascribe happiness to the possession of material wealth, and to admire those who have acquired it.

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith argues that it is precisely this involuntary ‘regard’ for the rich and powerful that drives social ‘emulation’, or, ‘that great purpose of human life which we call bettering our condition’ that is the motor of an acquisitive, commercial society: ‘the toil and bustle of this world [...] the end of avarice and ambition, of the pursuit of wealth, of power and preeminence’ (108-109). By naming inalienable qualities of heart and the exchange of benevolent feeling as more durable sources of value than those represented by the accumulation of wealth and property or of fungible quantities, Burns and the characters of Mackenzie’s novels rhetorically distance themselves from the moral-economic axis of improvement itself. But Smith’s account of social aspiration and the sentimental critique of its emulative basis are neither as absolute nor as straightforward as they might appear. Paradoxically, Smith simultaneously locates ‘the origin of ambition’ in a ‘delusive’ product of the social passions – later a ‘corruption of our moral sentiments’ – and the path to its fulfilment by ‘the man of inferior rank’ in ‘the good judgement of his undertakings, and by the severe and unrelenting application with which he pursues them’ (TMS 120-121). The commercial subject appears to possess conflicting qualities – both an impulsive deference to wealth and a capacity for ‘severe and unrelenting application’. To paraphrase Adam Potkay, Smith’s contradictory account of the emulative basis of commercial society suggests an ideology in formation, in which the economic and civic ambitions of the middling ranks are rendered legitimate because they are achieved through vocational diligence, rather than an appetitive pursuit of wealth and status: success becomes evidence of merit.⁴¹

Mackenzie profoundly alters this equation, recasting the goal of improvement as the attainment of delicacy of taste and intellect rather than the acquirement of material

⁴¹ See Adam Potkay, *The Fate of Eloquence in the Age of Hume* (London: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp.86-87.

wealth, and resistance to the emulative impulse rather than vocational efficacy as the criterion of virtue. Of course, the effect might simply be a more deft masking strategy than that proposed by Smith, in which the distinction of rank is legitimated through its alignment with intrinsic virtues such as benevolence and taste. At least on a rhetorical level however, Mackenzie's novels privilege both the act of reading and readerly response, even as they extoll the value of 'a politeness of the heart which is confined to no rank, and dependent upon no education' (MW I 69). Regardless of its strategic purpose, this ostensible separation of politeness from rank stands as a refutation of Smith's view in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, that: '[p]oliteness is so much the virtue of the great, that it will do little honour to any body but themselves' (120). For Smith, politeness appears as a corollary of social status rather than an intrinsic quality of the individual. A member of the lower ranks who **assumes to** be polite is merely a dissimulator; the acquirement 'of superior knowledge in his profession', is, for Smith, the social aspirant's most likely route to success in the pursuit of economic and social advancement (121).

The way in which Mackenzie's novels and periodicals appear to overturn this prescriptive association of cultivation and sentiment with social rank, may have rendered them attractive to a middling rank of tenant farmers and their labouring-class subordinates, who increasingly sought and practised a degree of enfranchisement in the circle of polite eighteenth-century readers. Ellis argues that, '[c]haracterised by [a] focus on youth, simplicity and "natural feeling", the sentimental novels appeared to be opposed to the rigid rules of correct and elaborate decorum typical of the learned hierarchies of early eighteenth-century literature, and as such, they were widely recognised as an innovative, even radical, event in literary history.'⁴² But, while sentimentalism equipped its readers with a reservoir of values and rhetoric ostensibly suited to the task of critiquing or resisting both the emerging capitalist order and Augustan literary conventions, it also offered a way of configuring social aspiration as the disinterested cultivation of taste. As John Barrell has suggested, the polite values of sentimental literature and its cognates may have been seen as indispensable acquirements by lower-class readers, even those of a politically radical bent, who were, 'seeking to better themselves, not only intellectually but economically and probably socially as well'.⁴³ In disavowing the emulative, materialistic path to social advancement described by Smith, sentimental self-improvers demonstrated

⁴² Ellis, p.3.

⁴³ John Barrell, 'Rus in urbe' in *Romanticism and Popular Culture in Britain and Ireland*, ed. by Phillip Connell and Nigel Leask (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp.109-127 (p.123).

both their taste and their polite self-command, rendering their adherence to an alternative scale of value a tool of social distinction.

But this mode of cultivation also disrupts the association between rank and virtue. As Paul Keen writes of the lower-class pursuit of literary learning more broadly: '[t]o be better read than someone who was materially better off was a kind of rebellion, a wilful act of insubordination which threatened the established hierarchy of class privilege by confusing different types of symbolic and financial capital.'⁴⁴ Labourers, artisans, and even members of the middling ranks who participated in sentimental reading, might be seen to have defied Smith's blunt ascription of different standards of 'propriety' to specific social ranks, and even pre-empted the more definitive notions of class distinction that would begin to acquire authority at the end of the eighteenth century. Sentimental reading potentially challenged the literary hierarchies of the late eighteenth century, along with the social ones that they corresponded to, even as it suggested alternative ways of accessing and ascending them.

2.4 Literature 'of the sentimental kind' and the Monkland Friendly Society

Concerns similar to those canvassed by Mackenzie in his above *Lounger* essay on literary 'application' seem to inform a letter which Burns contributed to *The Statistical Account of Scotland* in 1791. There, Burns, by then an officer of the excise, and his patron, the landowner Robert Riddell, describe a library scheme they had jointly set up for the use of labourers in the barony of Monkland in the parish of Dunscore. In his letter, Burns asserts that:

[t]o store the minds of the lower classes with useful knowledge, is certainly of very great consequence, both to them as individuals, and to society at large. Giving them a turn for reading and reflection, is giving them a source of innocent and laudable amusement; and besides, raises them to a more dignified degree in the scale of rationality.⁴⁵

There are perhaps echoes here of Mackenzie's assertion in *The Lounger*, that the value of recreational reading inheres in its potential to improve the faculties of 'thought and reflection'. Burns presents the diffusion of 'a turn for reading and reflection' through all

⁴⁴ Keen, pp.148-149.

⁴⁵ *Statistical Account*, iii, p.598.

ranks of society as a civic imperative, that at the same time threatens to subvert the basis of social rank by positing the ‘scale of rationality’ as an alternative form of distinction. This is arguably undercut however, by the latent politics of rank that infuses the passage, casting labouring-class readers as passive objects within the improving schemes of their social superiors, even if Burns, the farmer and poet turned excise officer, signs the letter as ‘A PEASANT.’⁴⁶

Referred to by Burns and Riddell as the Monkland Friendly Society, the library drew its members from among Riddell’s tenantry, and in exchange for an initial outlay of five shillings and a monthly subscription of six pence, allowed them shared access to reading material; books were chosen for purchase at monthly meetings by members drawn from the society’s ranks on a rotating basis. By comparison, from 1777 the Ayr Library society charged a membership fee of a guinea, in addition to a rolling subscription of six shillings.⁴⁷ After three years, the acquired Monkland Society’s stock of ‘150 volumes’ was auctioned off among its members, allowing them to recoup their financial investment over the period, either in the form of books or money.⁴⁸ To an extent this function of the Monkland Society further blurs the distinction between the disinterested pursuit of knowledge and improvement as financial self-betterment. Manley notes that the rotational system of book purchase adopted at Monkland was also practised at the Leadhills and Wanlockhead miners’ libraries, and that both of these institutions and the principles upon which they were conducted, ‘were probably well-known at Dumfries, where Burns worked.’⁴⁹ The Monkland library may also have been influenced by the ‘Bachelor’s Club of Tarbolton’ and the ‘Mauchline Conversation Club’: the literary societies which Robert and Gilbert Burns had successively founded in rural Ayrshire in the 1780s. In addition to continuing the convivial philosophical and literary debate practised at the earlier Tarbolton Club, the Mauchline Conversation Club answered the imperatives of intellectual improvement by directing fines gathered from members for infractions of its strict regulations towards the purchase of books. As Manley writes, this aspect of the society’s procedures cast it as a ‘dividing book club’ in which members purchased and shared

⁴⁶ Ibid, p.600.

⁴⁷ Ayr, Carnegie Library, Minute Book of the Ayr Library Society, 30th July 1777

⁴⁸ Sinclair, *Statistical Account*, iii, pp.597-600.

⁴⁹ Manley, p.22,.

reading material that was eventually distributed between them after a designated period of time or upon the club's dissolution.⁵⁰

In his 1791 letter to Sinclair, Burns recounts that, 'Blair's Sermons, Robertson's History of Scotland, Hume's History of the Stewarts, the Spectator, Idler, Adventurer, Mirror, Lounger, Observer, Man of Feeling, Man of the World, Chrysal, Don Quixotte, Joseph Andrews, &c,' were among the library's volumes.⁵¹ As recorded in James Currie's posthumous 'Life of Burns', where the information figures as a source of significant anxiety rather than approval, Mackenzie's *Mirror* and *Lounger* also featured prominently among the volumes acquired by Robert and Gilbert Burns's Mauchline Conversation Club (Currie I 111). Blair's *Sermons* and Robertson and Hume's *Histories* would have been equally at home among the books of the Ayr Library Society and its professional patrons. However Burns's correspondence suggests that he was probably the chief impetus behind the presence of Mackenzie's works in the Monkland library. In a letter of March 1790 to his friend Peter Hill – the Edinburgh bookseller who supplied the library – Burns orders copies of *The Mirror*, *The Lounger*, *The Man of Feeling* and *The Man of the World* on behalf of 'the Monkland Friendly Society', and requests that they be sent for his 'own sake [...] by the first carrier' (CL II 19). The justification of literary application put forward in Mackenzie's *Lounger*, which Burns would by now have been thoroughly familiar with, partly explains his eagerness to add the periodicals to the catalogue of the Monkland Library. But beyond his own fondness for them, Burns's admission of *The Man of Feeling* and *The Man of the World* into the literature of improvement that he assembled for the labourers and farmers of Dunscore is perhaps more difficult to frame. While the novels' rhetorical critique of the emulative impulse may have rendered them amenable to the purposes of dignity and 'laudable amusement' that Burns lays out as alternative criteria of improvement in his letter to Sinclair, elsewhere he expresses doubts as to whether they offer their readers any practical benefit. In a letter of 1790 to his patron Francis Dunlop, Burns confesses that: 'with all my admiration of M[a]ckenzie's writing I do not know if they are the fittest reading for a young Man who is about to set out, as the phrase is, to make his way into life' (CL II 25).

Despite Mackenzie's insistence in a private letter that *The Man of Feeling* was written in service of 'Virtue', and Burns's claims to the contrary, the seemingly unstable

⁵⁰ Ibid, p.119.

⁵¹ Sinclair, *Statistical Account*, iii, p.600.

substructure of sentimental response prevents the novel from offering any practically imitable model of behaviour.⁵² Indeed, the eponymous ‘man of feeling’ himself, Harley, is eventually killed by his own overloaded sensibility when he learns in the course of an exchange with the un-requiting object of his affections that she is engaged to marry another man (263-264). In her 1985 study of *Robert Burns and the Sentimental Era*, Carol McGuirk writes that the identifying characteristic of sentimentalism was that it ‘always created some pathology of feeling in a text [...] the response to events in the text called for by the sentimental writer always exceeds (he would say transcends) what any reasonable response to those events would be; or the text solicits intense reader reactions to dire events that probably would have been averted by protagonists committed to the normal social world of survival and compromise.’⁵³

But it’s perhaps difficult to reconcile this aspect of Mackenzie’s sentimental novels with the civic claims for recreational reading and the invocation of ‘useful knowledge’ found in Burns’s letter to *The Statistical Account* on the Monkland Friendly Society. John Mullan echoes the earlier doubts of Burns and others, asking of Mackenzie’s writing: ‘what kind of virtue might it be that could not be practised?’⁵⁴ We might begin to address this question by positing that sentimentalism, in common with the georgic literature explored by Heinzelman, is ‘a form of writing in which the issue of instruction is constantly being examined’.⁵⁵ Mackenzie dedicates a significant portion of the first volume of his 1773 novel *The Man of the World* to the depiction of a father’s education of his children, stating that the aims of this pedagogy are to: ‘repress the warmth of temerity, without extinguishing the generous principles from which it arose, and to give firmness to sensibility where it bordered on weakness, without fearing its feelings where they led to virtue’ (I 40-41). Such methods initially appear to be the stuff of a disciplined sentimental curriculum, rather than the schemes of a mind dangerously removed from the normal round of social commerce. Yet when Harriet and Billy Annesly – the recipients of this education – leave the patrimonial closed-circuit of their father’s rural retreat, they are quickly destroyed by the self-interested schemes of the commercially savvy and urbane

⁵² Henry Mackenzie, *Literature and Literati: The literary Correspondence and Notebooks of Henry Mackenzie*, ed. by W. Drescher Horst (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1989), p.48.

⁵³ Carol McGuirk, *Robert Burns and the Sentimental Era* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), xxv.

⁵⁴ John Mullan, ‘The Language of Sentiment: Hume, Smith and Henry Mackenzie’, in *The History of Scottish Literature Volume 2*, ed. by Andrew Hook (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), pp.273-90 (p.283).

⁵⁵ Heinzelman, p.192.

‘man of the world’, Sir Thomas Sindall. In much the same way that Harley’s death in *The Man of Feeling* calls the soundness of his sentimental codes into question, the misfortunes of the Annesly siblings are made to cast doubt on the validity of the refined sensibility inculcated in them by their father as the basis of a practicable model of virtue.

In *The Man of the World*, we learn that the widowed father of the Annesly household, the son of a merchant and ‘a man of that abstracted disposition, that is seldom conversant with any thing around it’, initially retreated from the metropolitan scene of business in order to pursue a life as a clergyman (I 90). In common with Harley in *The Man of Feeling*, Annesly’s character is largely defined by his aversion to the commercial bustle of the British capital: early in the novel, we are told that Annesly, ‘found himself in the middle of a crowded street in London, surrounded by the buzzing sons of industry, and shrunk back at the sense of his own insignificance’ (I 18). Annesly’s reaction to the scene of self-interested economic struggle, is redolent of Burns’s later distancing of himself from the concerns of the ‘terrae-filial race’ in his letter to Murdoch. But while the trope of sentimental retreat initially casts the metropolitan scene of accumulation and consumption as the object of moral critique, neither *The Man of Feeling* nor *The Man of the World* depict the rejection of commerce as a viable response to the emergence of capitalist modernity. Similarly, the second number of *The Mirror* depicts its anonymous author eavesdropping upon the reception of his work in ‘a coffee-house, where it is actually taken in for the use of the customers; a set of old gentlemen, at one table, throwing it aside to talk over a bargain; and a company of young one, at another, breaking off in the middle to decide a match at billiards.’ The piece also describes ‘several copies lying open on the table’ for the perusal of visitors to the shop of the periodical’s publisher, William Creech.⁵⁶ If the voice of *The Mirror* and *The Lounger* is, in Ellis’s words, frequently ‘civic, judicious and masculine’, by virtue of its supposed contradistinction from the commercial sphere, it is also the case that its moral authority can only be exercised through its consumption by those involved in the world of fashion, manners and business which it critiques.⁵⁷

By contrast, the mode of sociability which both Harley in *The Man of Feeling* and Annesly in *The Man of the World* fatally shun, is that in which they consistently find

⁵⁶ [Henry Mackenzie *et al*] *The Mirror, A Periodical Paper, Published at Edinburgh in the Years 1779 and 1780*, 3 vols (Edinburgh: 1781), i, p.9. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

⁵⁷ Ellis, p.205.

themselves in the presence of unfamiliar company: a situation associated with, but increasingly less confined to, the commercial world of the British metropolis. In a reflection of the growing prevalence of this form of social interaction, or at least of its idealisation by late eighteenth-century Scots, Smith argues in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* that ‘an assembly of strangers’ will more effectively alleviate suffering than that of friends. The company of the former Smith argues, encourages a greater degree of self-command, by forcing the subject to reduce their emotional ‘pitch’ to a level which a disinterested, or in Smith’s words ‘impartial’, spectator ‘may be expected to go along with’ (TMS 40).

As Susan Manning and Thomas Ahnert argue, writers like Smith conceived of ‘socialization’ as a key element of any educational programme that hoped to achieve the ‘inculcation of virtuous habits’ in its subjects.⁵⁸ While in *The Man of Feeling* and *The Man of The World*, Harley and Annesly espouse moral principles that are virtuous enough in themselves, their lack of socialization renders them inadequate on the level of ‘character’, when the latter is understood in terms of ‘moderation, a stoical self-control of tendency to excess.’⁵⁹ In *The Man of the World*, Thomas Sindall’s actions are eventually admonished through his own deathbed repentance, which occurs subsequent to his mortal wounding at the hand of a recently returned Billy, whose punitive transportation and financial ruin Sindall had engineered in order to isolate Harriet. Where Harley’s ungovernable capacity to feel is the root of his downfall in *The Man of Feeling*, Sindall’s is his excessive self-interest, an outcome which, through a typically Mackenzian logic, seems to cast doubt on the very basis of self-interest as a concept. On this level, Sindall’s extreme moral flaws simply appear as the inversion of Harley and Annesly’s, in that they evince the lack of self-government or unregulated ‘tendency to excess’ symptomatic of a failure of character-formation. The ‘Virtue’ which Mackenzie alludes to in his correspondence is the form of self-command that is negatively delineated by the intemperate characters of his novels.

⁵⁸ ‘Introduction’ in *Character, Self, and Sociability in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. by Susan Manning and Thomas Ahnert (New York: Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) pp.1-30 (p.2).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.2-3.

2.5 The structure of sentimental response

If Mackenzie's novels assert the necessity of a socialized form of character that avoids lapsing into the emulative or the fashionable, or into a solipsistic rejection of the world, they also suggest the complexities inherent in maintaining self-command through social and sympathetic commerce. As Ellis writes, both eighteenth-century critics and acolytes of sentimentalism, and of the associated pleasures of sensibility, often registered significant misgivings towards what they recognized as the 'enigmatic ambiguity of experience' that sentimental commerce entailed.⁶⁰ Anticipating Blair's 1790 sermon 'On Sensibility', Mackenzie's novels emphasise the need to critically mediate sentimental response and to regulate sensibility, in order to maintain the crucial but shifting distinction between polite delicacy and a volatile responsiveness to either the bodily or the social passions. On this level the framing narratives and obfuscatory descriptions of sentimental response in Mackenzie's novels perhaps evoke the indirect nature of sympathy as theorized by Smith, according to whom, our inability to go 'beyond our own persons' restricts fellow-feeling to the experience of secondary representations of the sentiments of others, produced by our own imaginations.

For Smith, the individuality of bodies, or our inability to go 'beyond our own persons', necessitates a commerce of sentiment in place of the transmission of direct experience. Because, Smith argues, 'we have no immediate experience of what other men feel', sympathy is necessarily predicated upon the partial homogenisation of feelings, or their transformation into exchangeable simulacra. Even in the opening analysis of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, the reader is confronted with a concentrated heterogeneity of terms – 'sentiment', 'passions', 'sensations', 'sensibility', 'experience', 'impressions', 'imagination' – which, if they follow an implicit sequence of progression, are never explicitly fixed to fully elaborated concepts and yet occupy apparently key roles in the unfolding theory (TMS 1-2). As empirical observers who receive the feelings of others in the form of sentiment, we are perhaps never fully able to reliably differentiate between species of emotional causality. Both *The Man of Feeling* and its 1773 counterpart *The Man of the World* are replete with scenes that seem to parse the Smithian logic of sympathetic exchange to the point of absurdity, as if to exacerbate the innate ambiguity of the sentimental subjectivity that they portray. *The Man of Feeling* is a book famously

⁶⁰Ellis, p.6.

associated with the spectacle of tears, whether those of its protagonists or of its readers, but the processes through which they are elicited are strikingly opaque. At one point, while addressing a weeping character, deceived and abandoned by an unscrupulous lover, Harley declares that: ‘there is virtue in these tears; let the fruit of them be virtue’ (100). Harley’s formulation is doubly reflexive. The tears contain and will yield virtue, but the substance of that virtue is not apparent beyond its ability to reproduce itself. Meanwhile the midsentence elision obscures the grammatical relationship between the two clauses and along with it the supposed transformation, resulting in a chiasmus that evokes the parallel but only obscurely connected surfaces of sentiment and embodied feeling, or sympathiser and object of sympathy. Rather than materialising intrinsic feelings, tears become a symbol of the way in which sentiment is alienated and circulated within an economy of semblance or equivalence, which retains no discernible ligatures with the natural, or with the bodily passions.

Like its predecessor, *The Man of the World* is presented through the device of a framing narrator, who in the novel’s introduction returns to the village of his childhood, where he learns of the death of a former friend. When the narrator of *The Man of the World* meets a fellow acquaintance of the deceased, he tells us: ‘(t)he tender solemnity of her look answered the very movement which the remembrance had awaked in my soul, and I made no other reply than by a tear’ (I 9). The sense of mediation here is almost overpowering. The narrator’s tears are not produced by a direct correspondence between his own emotions and those of another subject, but by his perception of a resemblance between that other’s facial expression at a particular point in time, and his experience of a feeling activated by a memory. The narrator’s tears are a reply to a reply to a remembrance; no originary gesture seems to set this chain of reciprocations into motion: it is an effect without a cause. In both narrative form and in their complex descriptions of sentimental exchange, Mackenzie’s novels mimic both the ambiguity of sympathy as theorized by Smith, according to whom our inability to go ‘beyond our own persons’ restricts fellow-feeling to the experience of secondary representations of the sentiments of others produced in our own imaginations. On the level of its fundamental distance from the embodied feelings of others, sentiment thereby encodes as the precondition of its own existence, the absence of, or an irreversible break with, the natural.

While they implicitly acknowledge that no reliable sense of, or immediate access to, the innate is possible, Mackenzie’s novels nonetheless mandate a distinctive form of

cultivation that is presented as a ‘politeness of the heart’ rather than improvement. This casts taste and reflection in a mediatory role within social and moral life, but their lack of an epistemological guarantor confines their function to negotiation and consensus, rather than arbitration. Mackenzie’s sentimental delicacy, reflecting Smith’s formulation of sympathy, thus achieves its politeness through a suppression of the body, but in doing so exposes itself to the risk of lapsing into a solipsistic enthusiasm de-anchored from the normalising commerce of the world. But in the way that it delegated this regulative work, if only cautiously, to the faculties of the cultivated mind, sentimental literature may have appeared to Burns as a powerful alternative to the devotional reading still prevalent among the lower classes of Lowland Scotland.

In his letter to Sinclair on the Monkland Friendly Society, Burns complains of the peasant reader’s propensity for a category of reading that he names as ‘trash’.⁶¹ Burns’s language here already suggests the deployment of an aesthetic standard, and casts his own intercession in the reading habits of the library’s members as an attempt to secure the prevalence of polite taste. Correspondence between Burns and the bookseller Peter Hill reveals the contents of the category that the former derides as ‘trash’ in his later report to *The Statistical Account*. In a letter of 1791, Burns tells Hill that the Monkland Society, ‘will insist on having the following damned trash,’ before enumerating several works of Presbyterian theology, including *The Westminster Confession of Faith* and Thomas Boston’s 1720 *Human Nature in its Four-Fold State*, a work which proverbially enjoyed an unrivalled level of popularity among Scotland’s literate lower classes in the eighteenth century (CL II 66).⁶² Boston’s *Four-Fold State* elaborates at length upon the status of the Biblical Word as the sole source of Grace in a fallen world – a doctrine that is stylistically manifest in the text’s ceaseless recourse to Scriptural quotation to support its arguments. Boston avers that:

The Heart is deceitful above all Things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? Jer. xviii.9. However, we may quickly perceive as much of it, as may be the Matter of deepest Humiliation, and may discover to us the absolute Necessity of Regeneration. Man in his natural State is altogether corrupt. Both Soul and Body are polluted, as the Apostle proves at large, Rom. iii. 10,-18. As for the Soul, this natural Corruption has spread itself through all the Faculties thereof; and is to be found in

⁶¹ *Statistical Account*, iii, p.600.

⁶² Kinsley iii, p.1172.

the *Understanding*, the *Will*, the *Affections*, the *Conscience* and the *Memory*.⁶³

It's difficult to imagine a position more at odds with Burns's affirmation in the Kilmarnock Edition's 'Epistle to Davie, a Brother Poet', that: '[t]he heart ay's the part ay,/ tha makes us right or wrang' (K51 ll.69-70). But in the context of Burns's role as 'censor' for a labouring-class book-club, if not in that of poet, the privileging of the heart does not denote absolute deference to unmediated sensibility.⁶⁴ Boston's dismissal of the faculties as innately corrupt partly reflects what Ellis classes as the 'enigmatic ambiguity of experience' observed by sentimental authors and readers. But if for Boston, this corrupt morass of flesh, senses and passions can only be remediated by Divine Grace, and governed by continuous recourse to Biblical truth, sentimental writers like Mackenzie – partly informed by a sense of the empirical unknowability of mind and nature asserted by Smith and Hume – recommend an intellectual and moral self-reflexivity, tempered by mild religious faith, as the basis of character. The sentimental novel thereby offered an introduction to a sceptically constructed 'politeness of the heart' that Burns saw as a potential corrective for the Monkland readership's entrenched Calvinism. Burns's role here is that of implementing the Moderate or 'new licht' formulation of improvement, which aspires to the displacement of the religious bigotry of the preceding age with eighteenth-century values of civil religion. Burns's policing of the Monkland readers' proclivity for devotional trash thus evinces the role of popular intellectual improvement as a vehicle primarily conceived for the diffusion of politeness as opposed to knowledge *per se*.

In undertaking to improve the lower ranks in terms of the spread of Presbyterian civility, Burns was partly extending concerns that had previously been canvassed in a *Manual of Religious Belief* written by his father, with the assistance of Burns's childhood tutor, John Murdoch. Presented as a catechism between father and son, the *Manual* avers that: 'setting the rational part above the animal, though it promote a war in the human frame, every conflict and victory affords us grateful reflection, and tends to compose the mind more and more, not to the utter destruction of the animal part, but to the real and true

⁶³ Thomas Boston, *Human Nature in its Fourfold State of Primitive Integrity, Entire Depravation, Begun Recovery, and Consummate Happiness or Misery* (Edinburgh: 1744), p.41.

⁶⁴ *Statistical Account*, iii, p.598

enjoyment of them'.⁶⁵ Burnes and Murdoch's configuration of a dialectical tension between body and intellect as the source of a salutary form of 'reflection', pre-empting the mediatory form of character explored in Mackenzie's novels and periodicals. But Burnes and Murdoch's description of the relationship between our 'animal' and 'rational' components as one with the potential to secure the happiness of the subject rather than necessarily consolidate the corruption of both body and intellect, as Thomas Boston would have argued, is also redolent of Hutcheson's 'moral sense' philosophy.

As I suggested above, the role of sentimentalism here is ambivalent, both because its scepticism towards the contents of sympathetic commerce seems to aver Boston's statement that the faculties are corrupt, and because the highly performative sentimentalism associated with the characters of Mackenzie's novels and Burns's poetry, comes close to resembling a state of religious enthusiasm itself. Burns's deference to the 'heart' in his 'Epistle to Davie' arguably anticipates Adam Smith's late retreat in the final edition of his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, from the opinions of others to his own moral sensibility in search of a reliable guarantor of virtuous conduct. Even in earlier versions of Smith's *Theory*, the practice of self-command as mandated by the imagined spectatorship of others appears to be erased when its author recommends that we turn to 'consult the judge within [...] this inmate of the breast, this abstract man, the representative of mankind and substitute of the Deity'.⁶⁶ Smith's apparent internalisation of the natural in the form of innate affection, demonstrates the constant slippage between a disciplined self-command arising from an empirically maintained standard of 'propriety', and submission to the vicissitudes of sensibility. For McGuirk, this tendency in Burns's writing can be characterised as 'Sentimental Election' or 'election through sensibility': an ethos that holds that our capacity for grace is predetermined by our possession, or otherwise, of a particular quality of heart which can be obtained neither through good works nor through economically quantifiable labour. In this parody of Calvinist orthodoxy, '[t]he "heart" or "breast" replaces the soul as the faculty through which grace is expressed, and nothing people do determines their merit, which is set by nature, not nurture.'⁶⁷

In the context of Burns's configuration of a direct antipathy between the literature of sentiment and the Calvinist reading favoured by the 'auld licht' devout of Ayrshire and

⁶⁵ William Burnes and John Murdoch, 'A Manual of Religious Belief', in *Commonplace Books, Tour Journals, and Miscellaneous Prose*, ed. by Nigel Leask, pp.14-18 (p.17).

⁶⁶ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Edinburgh, London: 1767), p.208.

⁶⁷ McGuirk, pp.27-28.

Dumfriesshire, the notion of ‘Sentimental Election’ becomes problematic. Yet it also effectively captures the sense of anxiety which even major proponents of sentimental discourse felt towards the ungovernable propensities of sentiment itself. As Jon Mee asserts, sentimentalism, and the correlative discourse of sensibility ‘courted many of the dangers associated with religious enthusiasm’.⁶⁸ Writing in *The Lounger*, Mackenzie himself warned that:

In the enthusiasm of sentiment there is much the same danger as in the enthusiasm of religion, of substituting certain impulses and feelings of what may be called a visionary kind, in the place of real practical duties, which in morals, as in theology, we might not improperly denominate good works. (*Lounger* 79)

Mackenzie’s fear that in the warmth of even sentimental enthusiasm we might forget the necessity of ‘good works’, seems deliberately evocative of the predestinarian theology which, in the course of civilized progress, the moral sentiment of the eighteenth century was supposed to displace. ‘Sentimental Election’ may be something that Mackenzie and other writers sought to avoid rather than proclaim, but it is a potentiality that nonetheless seems to stalk a discourse in which virtue is configured as a form of distinction attributed to the possession of delicacy.

Ultimately, even Smith, the arch-proponent of social and moral ‘propriety’ seems ultimately unable to avoid formulae more closely associated with the controversial divines of rural Scotland, in his rhetorical ascription of moral rectitude to ‘a small party, who are the real and steady admirers of wisdom and virtue.’ This formulation, arrived at in the sixth edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, is redolent of David Hume’s fixing of ‘the true standard of taste and beauty’ to ‘the joint verdict’ of critics possessed of sufficient knowledge and character to define it. As Hume admits, such men might themselves only be identifiable by their very ability to satisfactorily describe the sought-for standard, a reflexivity that threatens, ‘to throw us back into the same uncertainty, from which [...] we have endeavoured to extricate ourselves.’⁶⁹ In their retreat from vulgar opinion both Smith and Hume appeal to an empirical standard of taste, even when their arguments seem to rub-up against the epistemological parameters within which such a standard could be expected to operate. Thus, in Mackenzie’s novels and in Burns’s poetry,

⁶⁸ Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.52.

⁶⁹ David Hume, ‘Of the Standard of Taste’, in *The Scottish Enlightenment: An Anthology*, ed. by Alexander Broadie (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1997), pp.243-263 (p.257).

the desire for a sentimental capacity that might allow the subject to transcend what Smith calls ‘the judgements of the world’, is always inscribed with a sense of its unattainability. In Burns’s poems, most notably the Kilmarnock Edition’s ‘To A Louse, On Seeing one on a Lady’s Bonnet at Church’, the capacity for a perfectly reflective social self-knowledge, free from the distortive tendencies of ‘emulation’, is only imagined conditionally, and in an unexpected return to Bostonian Calvinism, as a form of Grace: ‘O wad some Pow’r the giftie gie us/ *To see oursel’s as other see us!*’ (K83 ll.43-44)

The sentimental maintenance of character thus involves walking a narrow line, between a solipsistic rejection of the world that renders the subject vulnerable to the opaque operations of his or her own feelings on the one hand, and the inverse form of dissolution on the other, in which the pursuit of extrinsic interests becomes a deferral of moral capacity to the indifferent mechanisms of commerce and the economic. In the case of the Monkland Friendly Society’s readership of agricultural labourers and tenant farmers, the exigency that sentimental character formation is called upon to resist becomes the lapse of the subject into the instrumentalized functions of the labouring body. In this light, the form of cultivation entailed by sentimental reading becomes valuable not only for its content, but as a form of activity which, in the words of the above essay from Mackenzie’s *Lounger*, requires ‘a certain sort of application, though of a kind perhaps very different from that which business would recommend.’ If for Mackenzie’s projected *Lounger* readership, ‘business’ entails involvement in the professions or the world of commerce, for the members of the Monkland library, it suggested something very different. In his letter to *The Statistical Account*, Burns asserts that: ‘[a] peasant who can read, and enjoy such books, is certainly a much superior being to his neighbour, who, perhaps, stalks beside his team, very little removed, except in shape, from the brutes he drives.’⁷⁰ William Burnes and John Murdoch’s configuration of mental composure – or self-command – as the proper government of the human frame’s animal tendencies in their ‘Manual of Religious Belief’, further resonates with Burns’s advocacy of labouring-class intellectual improvement as a distancing from the economic instrumentality of the labouring body. Polite literary taste offers to differentiate the labourer’s intellect and moral faculties from the body’s mechanical role in political-economic production, just as a restrained delicacy of sentiment protects the Mackenzian subject from the murky operations of both ungoverned feeling and worldly commerce.

⁷⁰ Sinclair, *Statistical Account*, iii, p.600.

2.6 The Kilmarnock Edition's 'counterpoise to the world'

As might be expected, these concerns play out slightly differently in Burns's poetry, but they remain linked to the dual necessities of negotiating a salutary distance from the world of labour and commerce on the one hand, and avoiding a fanatical state of involution on the other. As seen in 'The Vision' above, Burns is however more willing in his poetry to court the perils of 'sentimental election' in exchange for the affirmation of his artistic legitimacy by 'fancy's *meteor-ray*', at times rendering his authorial persona closer to a character from one of Mackenzie's novels than a sentimental reader. In his preface to the Kilmarnock Edition, Burns sets out the generic affinities of the volume at hand, claiming that 'his motives for courting the Muses,' were: 'to transcribe the various feelings, the loves, the griefs, the hopes, the fears, in his own breast; to find some kind of counterpoise to the struggles of a world, always an alien scene, a task uncouth to the poetical mind'.⁷¹ Against a backdrop of agricultural improvement, the following pieces navigate a tension between the 'world' of labour, economic struggle and objective social relations, often verbally manifest as in the form of 'fate' or 'fortune', and the world's antithesis in the 'breast': the domain of sentiment, feeling and what Burns repeatedly refers to in the poems as 'Nature'. Nigel Leask reads Burns's Kilmarnock preface as a declaration that 'the values of pastoral *otium* [...] rather than georgic *negotium*, represent the dominant spirit of his poetry and song', but also notes the increasing currency which pastoral poetry was coming to acquire in the late eighteenth century as a vehicle for political critique and social commentary as well as the depiction of rural idyll and erotic love.⁷²

In late eighteenth-century Scotland, the georgic imperatives of agricultural improvement exerted particular economic pressure upon tenant farmers like Burns and his family, whose lessee status was often exploited by landowners in order to force them to adhere to the principles of the new agronomy. Christopher Whatley identifies the 1760s and 1770s, the years of Burns's childhood and adolescence, as a period of intensive social and economic change in lowland Scotland, with an increase in the rate of enclosure accompanying the introduction of 'lengthy, detailed and prescriptive' improving leases,

⁷¹ Robert Burns, *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (Kilmarnock: 1786), iv.

⁷² Leask, *Burns and Pastoral*, p.54.

such as that signed by the poet's father.⁷³ Such measures gradually secured the transition of lowland rural society from the paternal, customary, and non-monetary model of relations that E.P Thompson called the 'moral economy', to one in which agricultural production was treated as another branch of commerce.⁷⁴ McIlvanney argues that Burns's political consciousness is best understood as a product of: 'his early experience of unremitting labour, grinding poverty, judicial violence and the threat of dispossession.'⁷⁵ For Leask, 'pastoral's internal dialectic' between realism and literary idyll, well established in the genre's classical and late eighteenth-century sources, but innovatively exploited by Burns's use of an Ayrshire Scots idiom, enabled the farmer poet to voice the discontents of the georgic order of agricultural improvement and its distanced celebration of the need to labour, relaying his experience of rural life in the late eighteenth century as a scene of material hardship and struggle.⁷⁶

But I would also argue that Burns's notion of 'counterpoise' is heavily informed by the sentimental imperative of maintaining a salutary distance from the 'world' through the cultivation of literary taste. Anticipating Mackenzie's *Lounger* article, and reflecting its antithetical relationship to labour, the site of Burns's 'counterpoise', like that of sentimental cultivation, corresponds to that of leisure within political economy. William Fullarton's account of the skilled nature of agricultural labour renders Mackenzie's 'Heaven-taught ploughman' something of an oxymoron by revealing the work of ploughing itself as one of the complex manual proficiencies central to improvement, and one in which efficacy was directly linked to the extent and quality of the individual operative's education. But while inaccurate insofar as he was at the time a tenant farmer who counted ploughing as one of the several manual offices he was required to fill in the course of his vocation, Mackenzie's description of Burns as a 'Heaven-taught ploughman', alludes to a tension between the georgic values of agricultural improvement and the pastoral affinities of poetic production that forms the discursive crux of his poetry. Moreover, Mackenzie's image of an 'unlettered' Burns, rather than a disavowal of his subject's literary acumen, is partly a prosaic inflection of the poet's own exhortation in the *Kilmarnock Edition's* first 'Epistle to J. Lapraik': 'Gie me ae spark o' Nature's fire,/'

⁷³ Christopher A. Whatley, *Scottish Society 1707-1830: Beyond Jacobitism, Towards Industrialisation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2000), pp.70-71.

⁷⁴ See E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (London: The Merlin Press, 1991).

⁷⁵ McIlvanney, p.39.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

That's a' the learning I desire' (K57 ll.73-74). Burns's appeal is immediately followed by a return to the realities of agricultural labour:

Then tho' I drudge thro' dub an' mire
 At pleugh or cart,
 My Muse, tho' hamely in attire,
 May touch the heart. (ll.75-8)

Burns's repeated use here of the conjunctive 'tho'', particularly in the first instance, where it falls on a stressed syllable, hints at the intractability of the political-economic 'world', manifest in the necessity of labour and compensated by the 'spark o' Nature's fire' – a concept that recalls the 'sacred flame' of sentimental literature that Burns had described in his letter to Murdoch a few years earlier. This tension between poetic inspiration and agricultural drudgery is intensified through Burns's construction and exploration of a ploughman persona in his poems, and its polite validation in Mackenzie's *Lounger* review. Indeed, Fullarton's remarks in his *General View* also underline the status of the ploughman as an instrument of agricultural modernisation, or in sentimental terms, a site of potential tension between the practicalities of the economic 'world', and a subjective attachment to what Mackenzie in his review of Burns's *Poems* dubs 'Nature'.⁷⁷ Burns and Mackenzie, the former in his *Kilmarnock Poems* and the latter in his review of them, equally exploit the ploughman's paradoxical symbolism as an archetype of both economic progress and rustic simplicity. In contrast to the self-identification of earlier eighteenth-century labouring poets through a 'plebeian use of a poetic discourse on work', Burns's adoption of a ploughman persona reflects the georgic ties between literary learning and agricultural improvement, both glossing his more ambiguous socio-economic position as a tenant farmer, and invoking an elite discourse on the relationship between civil society and the necessity of labour.⁷⁸

2.7 'To a Mountain Daisy'

In his review of the *Kilmarnock Edition*, Mackenzie quotes the entirety of Burns's poem, 'To a Mountain Daisy, On turning one down, with the Plough, in April – 1786'. (K92) 'To a Mountain Daisy' is one of several pieces which fall under the category that Carol

⁷⁷ *The Lounger*, ed. by Henry Mackenzie, 97(1786), 385-388 (p.388).

⁷⁸ William J. Christmas, *The Lab'ring Muses: Work, Writing, and the Social Order in English Plebeian Poetry, 1730-1830* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2001), p.160.

McGuirk, writing in her 1985 study of *Robert Burns and the Sentimental Era*, describes as the Kilmarnock Edition's 'poems of direct address'.⁷⁹ The poem is illustrative of sentimentalism's potential to reconfigure the social, political and economic fallout of agricultural improvement as a tasteful aesthetic spectacle. It's perhaps for this very reason that 'To a Mountain Daisy' has since lost out in terms of critical attention to Burns's more innovative and resolutely vernacular poetic addresses to vermin: the Kilmarnock Edition's 'To A Mouse, On turning her up in her Nest, with the Plough, November, 1785' (K69) and 'To A Louse, On Seeing one on a Lady's Bonnet at Church' (K83). Like 'To a Mouse', 'To a Mountain Daisy' finds Burns in his role as a labouring tenant farmer, in this case contemplating the fate of the 'modest, crimson-tipped flow'r' that he has discovered growing in the path of his plough (l.1). The poem is partly a pastoral eulogy on the 'humble' beauty of nature, that draws comparison between the 'flaunting *flow'rs* our Gardens yield,' and the rustic appeal of the daisy, with its 'snawie bosom' and unassuming head' (ll.26-27). The ploughman's exaltation of the humble daisy, at odds with both his vocational duty and the economic compulsions of agricultural improvement, offers an instructive example of the 'intense responsiveness' that McGuirk identifies as a key characteristic of the sentimental protagonist.⁸⁰ The ploughman's aesthetic reflections are undercut mid-poem by a stanzaic pattern of adulation and remorse, in which the speaker's contemplation of the flower gives way to an acknowledgement of his hand in its impending destruction, and the object of address is 'laid/ low i' the dust' (ll.35-36). The poem's final stanza moves from a mixed English and Scots diction to a more wrought poetic register, in which it prophesies:

Ev'n thou who mourn'st the *Daisy's* fate,
That fate is thine – no distant date;
 Stern Ruin's *plough-share* drives, elate,
 Full on thy bloom,
 Till crush'd beneath the *furrow's* weight,
 Shall be thy doom! (ll.49-54)

The lines press home a double analogy between both the ploughman and the daisy, and the imperatives of agricultural improvement and the forces of 'fate'. The plough, an instrument of fecundity and production, instead becomes a metaphor for the ploughman's impending ruin. This reflexivity, telescoping the ploughman's own plight and that of his object of sympathy into the figure of the former's instrument of labour, might be read as

⁷⁹ McGuirk, p.7.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, xxv.

an expression of Burns's vexed role as both subject and object within the regime of agricultural improvement. In his 1771 *Observations Concerning the Distinctions of Ranks in Society*, the historian and philosopher John Millar charts the progress of the unpropertied lower classes from the indentured feudal peasantry of the middle ages to the contractual tenantry of the eighteenth century. For Millar, the modern tenant farmer has: 'entered into a sort of copartnership with their master; and always having a prospect of gain, according to the vigour or talents which they exerted, they were enabled to earn a more comfortable subsistence, and were even gradually raised to affluence.'⁸¹ For Millar, the eighteenth-century tenant farmer is no dumb servant of the landowning classes, but, like his social superior, is bated into the pursuit of agricultural improvement by economic self-interest. As Leask reminds us in his study of *Robert Burns and Pastoral*, the 'prospect of gain' which Millar supposed would incentivise hard work and acquiescence to the improving regime on the part of the tenant, often proved to be illusory, and the impending threat of 'Stern Ruin's *plough-share*' very real. But in protesting the terms of this 'ruinous bargain', the farmer continues to register the capitalist values of the new agriculture from below, rather than invoking what Williams describes as an autonomous 'court of human appeal' (CL I 136).

The apparent sentimental configuration of a tension between the extrinsic economic 'world' and the intrinsic domain of sensibility and the heart, alluded to in Burns's notion of 'counterpoise', seems on a certain level to anticipate the formulation which McGann attributes to a later 'Romantic Ideology': 'that only a poet and his works can transcend the corrupting appropriation by "the world" of politics and money.'⁸² But conversely, we might say that one of the defining characteristics of sentimentalism is that it never completely stabilises its distinction between the political-economic 'world' and the realm of feeling that it posits as its alternative. Burns's Kilmarnock preface demonstrates the vexed position of sentimentalism as an idiom in which feeling is only valorised by its distinction from a co-present field of labour and struggle, the poet's sentimental currency of 'loves', 'griefs', 'hopes' and 'fears' appearing as the concomitant of, rather than alternative to, 'an alien scene' of labour and material exigency. As successive critics of eighteenth-century sentimentalism and sensibility have shown, the reversal of this process of valorisation, in which sentimental capital is converted into

⁸¹ John Millar, *Observations Concerning the Distinction of Ranks in Society* (London: 1771), p.218.

⁸² Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p.13.

economic capital through the elicitation or bestowal of charity, is the constant prerogative of the sentimental subject. Ellis remarks on ‘the interpenetration of the sentimental and the commercial spheres’, while for Gillian Skinner, ‘the sentimental and the economic are not as widely divided as they are usually represented as being.’⁸³

Thus for Leask: ‘Burnsean sentimentalism [...] is both a symptom of improvement at the level of the subject and a refusal of the goal of material prosperity that is one of its leading aspirations [...] however, sentimentalism offers a *surplus* response to people, things, and events in the world whose form mirrors, just as its content critiques, the laws of the new capitalist economy.’⁸⁴ The sentimental response to improvement that Burns offers in his poetry tends not to realise the antipathy between the speaker-subject and the economic role which he is allotted as a refusal of the imperative to labour. In ‘To a Mountain Daisy’, the sentimental friction between nature and fate does not translate into conflict. The ploughman can only lament what he cannot resist – as he tells the daisy in the opening stanza, its fate is already sealed: ‘To spare thee now is past my pow’r’ (l.5). Rather than positing a substantive critique of improvement, ‘To a Mountain Daisy’ instead deploys, in McGuirk’s words, a ‘sentimental structure of benevolent condescension’ adapted from the sentimental novel, ‘to set the speaker apart from the mainstream of normal sociability.’⁸⁵ This moves the focus of the poem away from its titular subject – the ‘Mountain Daisy’ – and towards an exhibition of the speaker’s ‘sentimental surplus’, a resource which, as Leask argues and Mackenzie’s public championing of ‘To a Mountain Daisy’ powerfully demonstrates, represented a valuable form of symbolic capital.⁸⁶

The formula of ‘benevolent condescension’ is complicated in the final stanza of ‘To a Mountain Daisy’, in which the ploughman and flower are brought onto a level, and the speaker adopts both an admonitory voice and a third, distanced perspective, external to the projection of sympathy from labourer to daisy. This extricates the speaker from the collapse of the poem’s structuring antagonism into the focal emblem of the plough, but it also undermines the implicit analogy of social rank that the poem builds between ploughman and daisy. While the privileged inhabitants of ornamental gardens – both proprietors and flora – are protected by ‘High-shelt’ring woods and wa’s’, the daisy and

⁸³ Ellis, p.152; Gillian Skinner, *Sensibility and Economics in the Novel, 1740-1800: The Price of a Tear* (London: Macmillan Press, 1999), p.70.

⁸⁴ Leask, *Burns and Pastoral*, pp.82-83.

⁸⁵ McGuirk, p.7

⁸⁶ Leask, *Burns and Pastoral*, p.83. See Harley and Ben Siltan’s exchange from *The Man of Feeling* below.

the ploughman share a ‘humble birth’ and the harsh locus of the wind-blown ‘*stibble-field*,/ Unseen, alane’ (ll.19-24). This sense of commonality hints at the radical possibility of a shared resentment towards the proprietorial class, but it also renders literal a trope from Thomas Gray’s ‘Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard’ – the reflection, partly pathetic and partly consolatory, that: ‘Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,/ And waste its sweetness on the desert air.’⁸⁷ Gray’s poem, and its ambivalent reflections upon a virtuous and ‘mute’ rural poor are a continuous presence in the Kilmarnock Edition, throwing into relief Burns’s distinctive voice as a literarily self-conscious ‘simple Bard’. At this point of course, the daisy becomes a figure for the obscure and rustic poet, rather than the ploughman forced to alienate the labour of his body under the georgic hegemony of agricultural improvement. This unremarked slippage between Burns’s labouring and literary personae is absent from ‘To a Mouse’, where the ploughman’s demotic voice is maintained, and it’s arguably this distinction that renders ‘To a Mountain Daisy’ the weaker poem. But in making explicit its reification of sentimental response as poetic expression, and short-circuiting the generic and political tensions between georgic and pastoral in the process, ‘To a Mountain Daisy’ both foregrounds Mackenzie’s ascription of a dual identity to its author, and reflects the schematic way in which literary activity figures as a practicable form of moral ‘counterpoise’ in the sentimental novel.

The characters of Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling*, tend to ascribe the reading and writing of poetry a special function as a form of salutary repose or ‘counterpoise’, and a mitigating influence upon economic self-interest. During a coach-ride, Harley encounters Ben Silton, a character who the narrator has previously introduced as the possessor of a heart, ‘uncontaminated’ by ‘the world’ and ‘its ways’ (MF 8). In the expanded version of Harley and Silton’s exchange that appears in the 1773 edition of *The Man of Feeling*, the latter reflects that:

‘There is at least [...] one advantage in the poetical inclination, that it is an incentive to philanthropy. There is a certain poetic ground, on which a man cannot tread without feelings that enlarge the heart’.⁸⁸

Despite its self-distancing from the ‘world’ the value of sentiment is measured in economic terms here, as a propensity for charity. The reference to an enlargement of the heart closely mirrors the form of virtuous benevolence which Burns attributes to

⁸⁷ *British Literature, 1640-1789: An Anthology*, ed. by Robert DeMaria Jr., 2nd Edn. (Malden, Oxford, Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 1996, 2001, 2006), p.751 (ll.55-56).

⁸⁸ Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling*, 2nd edn. (London: 1773), p.164.

sentimental reading in his letter to Murdoch. In *The Man of Feeling*, Harley and Silton agree, that while a poetic disposition may be associated with ‘unfitness for the world’, both characteristics are the marks of a sensibility that distances its possessors from the selfish realm of economic aspiration and the blind worship of the rich and powerful.

Harley and Silton’s exchange in *The Man of Feeling* is initiated when the former describes his hobby of transcribing, “quotations from those humble poets, who trust their fame to the brittle tenure of windows and drinking-glasses” (161). In considering how Harley’s formulation of the poetic temperament might have influenced Burns’s self-fashioning as a ‘humble’ poet, we might note that he famously committed his own verse to glass using a diamond stylus presented to him by his patron the Earl of Glencairn; a series of gestures that underlines sentimentalism’s potential as a medium of obfuscation, which masks the economic condescension of patron to poet beneath the exchange of benevolent feeling.⁸⁹ Indeed, Leask suggests that Burns’s exhibition of a ‘sentimental surplus’ in his poetry and correspondence with patrons might have functioned as a form of symbolic capital, circulating within what the cultural theorist Pierre Bourdieu describes as: ‘a systematic inversion of the fundamental principles of all ordinary economies.’⁹⁰ Bourdieu’s formulation renders Burns’s rejection of the worldly and valorisation of feeling as a claim to poetic legitimacy and a bid for social advancement. Leask argues that the way in which the logic of sentiment simultaneously casts the economically ineffectual poet as an object of benevolence and a dispenser of sentimental capital, facilitated Burns’s appeals for upper-class patronage, but crucially, did so in a way that avoided reifying the distinction of ranks in a manner that might have fatally compromised the poet’s vaunted ‘independence’, or his position within a sentimental fraternity of rustic equals.⁹¹

2.8 The ploughman and the labour theory of value

It’s perhaps just such a strategy of sentimental reification that ‘To a Mountain Daisy’ moves to consummate in its final stanza, serving up the desolate ploughman as an object of sympathy for the polite reader. But in addition to the poet’s eagerness to solicit the

⁸⁹ Robert Crawford, *The Bard: Robert Burns, a Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2009), p.272.

⁹⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, ‘The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed’, in *Contemporary Sociological Theory*, ed. By Craig Calhoun, Joseph Gerteis, James Moody, Steven Pfaff and Indermohan Virk (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp.290-306 (p.294).

⁹¹ Leask, *Burns and Pastoral*, p.83.

approval of an urban audience in an age of Anglicization, the intercession of this detached voice at the end of the poem suggests a movement away from the unmediated expression of sensibility, and towards an impersonal display of reserve, or what Adam Smith might have called ‘propriety’. Paradoxically, it’s perhaps precisely because of this polite self-consciousness and its move into a more conventional poetic register at its aphoristic conclusion, that Mackenzie selects ‘To a Mountain Daisy’ as an exemplary instance in which the poet: ‘delineates Nature with the precision of intimacy, yet with the delicate colouring of beauty and of taste’ (*Lounger* 388). In alluding to the delicacy of taste that mediates Burns’s depictions of ‘Nature’, and to the act of poetic valorisation that it effects, Mackenzie all but acknowledges the fictive quality of the ‘Heaven-taught ploughman’ motif that the succeeding extract from his *Poems* seems calculated to secure. As I suggested above in relation to the dubious nature of sympathetic exchange as theorised by Smith, this reflexive dynamic between artifice and nature is one of Mackenzian sentimentalism’s defining contradictions; equally, it is a feature of Burns’s Kilmarnock persona, and a point of contact between ‘the sentimental kind’ of writing and political economy.

The topos of ‘To a Mountain Daisy’ reflects that of an episode from Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling* in which Harley passes the ruin of his former school, causing him to exclaim:

‘tis but a twelvemonth since I saw it standing, and its benches filled with cherubims: that opposite side of the road was the green on which they sported; see it now ploughed up! I would have given fifty times its value to have saved it from the sacrilege of that plough [...] I shall never see the sward covered with its daisies, nor pressed by the dance of the dear innocents [...]’ (195)

Both Harley and Burns’s speaker in ‘To a Mountain Daisy’ register their distress at the destruction of an aesthetic spectacle in the course of agricultural labour. The double role of the ploughman in ‘To a Mountain Daisy’ configures the disparity of rank between Burns and Harley as a motif of embodiment, in which the former’s own hand brings about the carnage that he observes. The portent of the poem’s final lines annuls the ploughman’s sympathetic co-identification with the daisy by rendering their situations identical rather than analogous. Harley on the other hand, does not directly equate his own predicament with that of the school, its ‘cherubims’ and their green, swept aside by the need to make

land productive, or even directly address them, so much as luxuriate in the affecting spectacle of their disappearance.

The destruction of nature beneath the plough is presented as a *fait accompli* in both *The Man of Feeling* and Burns's 'To a Mountain Daisy', revealing something fundamental about the condition of sentimentalism, the significance of its appeals to nature as a characteristic of writing, and its relationship to the contemporary figure of improvement. In his *Discourse upon the Origin and Foundation of the Inequality among Mankind*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau asserts that: 'it is Iron and Corn, which have civilized Men, and ruined Mankind.' For Rousseau, the invention of the plough is the precondition of both civil society and of inequality, because it allows the individual to produce in excess of their own subsistence: 'from the Moment it appeared an Advantage for one Man to possess the Quantity of Provisions requisite for two, all Equality vanished; Property started up; Labour became necessary; and boundless Forests became smiling Fields'.⁹² Rousseau's formulation casts the plough as the archetypal emblem of improvement, qualifying both the inability of the ploughman in 'To a Mountain Daisy' to resist the impetus of his own vocational role, and Mackenzie's notion of a 'Heaven-taught ploughman' with a privileged apprehension of nature. Harley's lament for the ploughed green then, is not simply a surplus sentimental response to a thing, but an expression of his fundamental condition as a member of a civilized, economic society. Indeed, Harley exclaims of the green that he: 'would have given fifty times its value to have saved it from the sacrilege of that plough' betraying, as if in an unpremeditated outburst of sentimental indignation, his perfect cognizance of conventional standards of economic value. Harley's utterance discloses the way in which the constant anteriority of labour, property and social inequality deprives us of any form of feeling that is undistorted by the economic 'world'. As Burns writes in the companion piece to 'To a Mountain Daisy', the Kilmarnock Edition's 'To a Mouse': 'Man's dominion/ Has broken Nature's social union' (ll.7-8).

If, for Harley in *The Man of Feeling*, the cost of nature's absence is an involuntary appeal to the values of the ordinary economy, for Burns's ploughman in 'To a Mountain Daisy' it is the necessity of labour. In *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith locates the origin of economic value and the corollary of labour in the loss of a state of primitive idleness, writing that:

⁹²Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *A Discourse upon the origin and foundation of the inequality among mankind* (London, 1761), pp.119-120.

[e]qual quantities of labour must at all times and places be of equal value to the labourer. He must always lay down the same portion of his ease, his liberty, and his happiness. (WN I 38)

In fixing an economic value to the already vanished green, Harley anticipates Smith's powerful notion that it is the privation of a natural state of ease that originates value, although Harley is not subject to the corresponding imposition of labour that gives it meaning. The shifting voice and reflexive analogy of Burns's 'To a Mountain Daisy', suggest a superimposition of the polite, sentimental response to the disclosure of economic compulsion in a rural vista as expressed by Harley, onto its manifestation as the need to labour as experienced by the ploughman. While Mackenzie's 'Heaven-taught ploughman' configures the material dichotomy between polite delicacy and the necessity of manual work as the condition of Burns's singularity, the poet himself seems to cast the incongruity of delicacy in a labouring context as an exponent of its value. The distinction is a subtle one, but it marks an important point of difference between Mackenzie's sentimental interpellation of Burns's ploughman persona, and the poet's conviction that the necessity of labour, rather than being the precondition of an untutored power of affection, inflects the meaning of sentimentalism's appeals to the heart and to nature. For Burns, sentimentalism's recourse to nature registers not only as the valorisation of simplicity or lack of artifice within a standard of taste that the 'Heaven-taught' labourer is better positioned to fulfil than those belonging to more privileged social or professional strata, but as a topos of economic alterity that both mitigates and articulates the privation of the labourer's ease and liberty by the division of labour and the march of improvement.

As Matthew Wickman argues, the labour theory of value 'was one of Smith's true innovations', and a subject of controversy almost from the moment of its conception.⁹³ Wickman notes that both the eighteenth-century Scottish improver and editor of *The Bee* James Anderson, and later Karl Marx, both took issue with Smith's formulation, the latter believing it to be a sleight of hand that obscured the real source of surplus value in the exploitation of labour by capital; fundamentally for Marx, labour represented 'man's normal life-activity' and could not therefore derive its value from the sacrifice of a mythical state of pre-economic ease.⁹⁴ In Anderson's case, Wickman argues that Smith's theory appeared regressive, because it detached the notion of value from the mediating

⁹³ Matthew Wickman, *The Ruins of Experience: Scotland's "Romantick" Highlands and the Birth of the Modern Witness* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), p.82.

⁹⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. by Ben Fowkes, 3 vols. (London: Penguin, 1990), i, pp.137-8n.

equivalencies of circulation, exchange and money; Smith seemed to have placed the value of labour outside commerce, evoking ‘a stage of barbarism that civilization has surpassed.’⁹⁵ Perhaps wilfully, both Anderson and Marx miss the oddly pastoral intonation of Smith’s labour theory of value, which casts the necessity of work as a type of fall, the end of a golden age, or the loss of a paradisaical state of ease and freedom. For Anderson, Smith’s labour theory of value annuls the rational ‘diachrony’ of improvement, lodging a Rousseauvian appeal to a savage state of nature.

There is some commonality between Smith’s labour theory of value and ‘The Four-Stage Theory of Development’ that he had proposed as a conjectural model of human history in his lectures on jurisprudence in the 1760s, which imagines the productive basis of human society to have transitioned in series from hunting, to herding, to agriculture and eventually to commerce.⁹⁶ Within the tableau of late eighteenth-century Scotland’s ‘uneven development’, this conjectural schema locates Burns, the ‘Heaven-taught ploughman’ in an age of agricultural improvement, somewhere between the loss of pastoral ease and the commoditized labour market of Britain’s looming economic modernity. But it should be emphasised that despite its interpretation by Anderson as an appeal to a primitive stage of history, Smith’s concept of natural ease is conjectural, and always configured as a civilized abstraction, rather than as the autonomous other of social existence. Knud Haakonssen argues that for Smith, the ‘distinction between nature and artifice was spurious’, and that as a result, ‘it was impossible to conceive of a “natural” person, a person in a pure state of nature such as that imagined by Rousseau.’⁹⁷ As Harley’s immediate urge to put a financial price on the loss of his *locus amoenus* reveals, the synthetic values of civilization inform every level of subjective experience, including that of feeling; no natural standard of value is possible. This places Smith’s identification of a natural state of ‘ease’, ‘liberty’, and ‘happiness’ as that which lends value to labour through its absence in *The Wealth of Nations*, back into an ‘epistemology of equivalence’ rather than one of causative negations.⁹⁸ On this level, the affinity between ‘Nature’ and ploughman that Mackenzie proposes in his *Lounger* review, might be read less as a denial

⁹⁵ Wickman, *Ruins*, p.84.

⁹⁶ See Murray Pittock, ‘Historiography’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. by Alexander Broadie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp.258-279 (p.262).

⁹⁷ Knud Haakonssen, ‘Natural Jurisprudence and the Theory of Justice’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. by Alexander Broadie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp.205-221 (p.212).

⁹⁸ Wickman, p.85.

of the poet's learning, and more as a comment on the inherent inaccessibility of the natural in a context of civility, and the attendant necessity of 'counterpoise', or literary recreation as a salutary and restorative alternative to the sphere of labour and struggle.

As a result of its dependence upon equivalence, the formula of Smith's labour theory of value remains coherent when reversed, so that ease might be valorised by the constant necessity of labour, as opposed to labour by the negation of ease, resulting in an argument for the necessity of leisure. In *The Wealth of Nations*, leisure is ontologically bound to capitalised forms of labour, and its necessity increases in degrees of intensity according to the extent of the division of labour in a given trade. Smith argues that:

[g]reat labour, either of mind or body, continued for several days together, is in most men naturally followed by a great desire of relaxation, which if not restrained by force or by some strong necessity, is almost irresistible. It is the call of nature, which requires to be relieved by some indulgence, sometimes of ease only, but sometimes too of dissipation and diversion. If it is not complied with, the consequences are often dangerous, and sometimes fatal, and such as almost always, sooner or later, bring on the peculiar infirmity of the trade. If masters would always listen to the dictates of reason and humanity, they would frequently have occasion rather to moderate than to animate the application of many of their workmen. It will be found, I believe, in every sort of trade, that the man who works so moderately, as to be able to work constantly, not only preserves his health the longest, but, in the course of the year, executes the greatest quantity of work. (WN I 101)

For Smith, the desire for rest can be described as natural, revealing sustained labour as an artificial state of existence particular to advanced civil societies. But by the same token, this supposedly natural impulse only becomes visible against the regimentation of mental and bodily activity beneath the division of labour. The role of 'nature' here is strangely ambivalent then, acting as a boundary to productivity, but one that if observed, guides the deployment of labour towards better efficiency, and leads to 'the greatest quantity of work.' In relation to *The Wealth of Nations*, Richard Adelman writes that, 'Smith's text is scattered both with hints of the constant nature of work under the division of labour, and with reminders that it is the tranquillity of rest, or of not labouring at least, that the individual desires.'⁹⁹ Adelman points out a paradox in Smith's account of artisanal innovation in agriculture and manufacturing: that improvement appears to be driven not by

⁹⁹ Richard Adelman, *Idleness, Contemplation and the Aesthetic, 1750-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.17.

the georgic application of hard work to the refinement of arts, but by a desire for play and rest, or what Smith refers to above as ‘the call of nature’.

In keeping with the model of empirical scepticism that Smith inherits from David Hume however, the flow of causation is indeterminate here: it might equally be argued that bodily economy, the desire for leisure and ease, is regulated and appropriated as a means to an end by the workings of political economy, or, that economic rhythms are systematised by the labouring body’s need for rest. The uncertain role of the natural in the structuring of a dialectic between labour and leisure in *The Wealth of Nations*, mirrors Smith’s earlier account of sentimental exchange, in which nature – in the form of embodiment – simultaneously necessitates sympathy by denying us any ‘immediate experience of what other men feel’, while receding from the grasp of empirical knowledge by the same mechanism. We might see here how the parallel relationships between body and the division of labour in the context of political economy, and passion and reflection in the context of sentimentalism, would be recalibrated under different epistemic conditions, so that work would become a regulating influence on bodily rhythms, and so that self-command, rather than steering a course between the extremes of social dissolution and brute passion, would become a way of avoiding one and disciplining the other.

While it is not known if Burns had read *The Wealth of Nations* before 1789, when he famously mused in a letter that he ‘would covet much to have [Smith’s] ideas respecting the present state of some quarters of the world that are or have been the scenes of considerable revolutions since his book was written’, he may have encountered the book or its ideas through his connections with the Ayr Library Society, whose members, as I note above, purchased it in 1776 (CL I 410). Burns’s exploration of the dynamic between the division of labour and the necessity of leisure in his writing on labouring-class recreational reading, certainly reflects many of the features of Smith’s discussion of the same subject matter in that work. In his 1782 introduction to the ‘History of the rise, proceedings, and regulations of the Bachelor’s Club’ – the debating society which he cofounded in the village of Tarbolton – Burns writes:

[a]s the great end of human society is to become wiser and better, this ought therefore to be the principal view of every man in every station of life. But as experience has taught us, that such studies as inform the head and mend the heart, when long continued, are apt to exhaust the faculties

of the mind; it has been found proper to relieve and unbend the mind, by some employment or another, that may be agreeable enough to keep its powers in exercise, but at the same time not so serious as to exhaust them. But superadded to this, by far the greater part of mankind are under the necessity of *earning the sustenance of human life by the labour of their bodies*, whereby, not only the faculties of the mind, but the nerves and sinews of the body, are so fatigued, that it is absolutely necessary to have recourse to some amusement or diversion, to relieve the wearied man, worn down with the necessary labours of life.¹⁰⁰

Burns evokes literary cultivation as an alternative to the imperatives of social emulation: while for Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, improvement can be construed as ‘that great purpose of human life which we call bettering our condition’, Burns posits that, ‘the great end of human society is to become wiser and better’. Emphasised by Burns’s repeated invocation of ‘necessity’, is the demand for a ‘recourse to some amusement or diversion’ that is generated by the rigours of manual labour – the natural desire for rest. Like Smith, Burns asserts that spells of labour necessitate corresponding ones of repose, but he also argues that while intellectual pursuits are valuable sources of pleasure and edification, the georgic configuration of reading and writing as work, has an effect upon the mind that is analogous to that of manual labour upon the body, rendering it inimical to rest and recovery. Like that of Smith, Burns’s theory of leisure partially bifurcates into the discrete categories of ‘ease only’ and ‘diversion’; the latter potentially an alternative domain of human pursuit, simultaneously demanded and circumscribed by the need to work. It’s here that the form of leisured improvement mandated by Mackenzie’s periodicals is sited. In the context of manual labour, the reflective task of mediating the ‘animal part’ of the human frame, mandated in Burnes and Murdoch’s ‘Manual of Religious Belief’, might offer some security against the collapse of the intellect into the productive functions of the labouring body, by rendering the ploughman distinct ‘from the brute he drives’, just as in Mackenzie’s *Lounger*, a distance from the concerns of business is named as the chief benefit of literary recreation.

Echoing the concerns of his ‘History’ of the Tarbolton Bachelor’s Club, Burns’s poem ‘The Vision’ meditates upon the relationship between labour and leisure, and the latter’s significance as a site of sentimental enrichment. Fulfilling Burns’s statement of admiration for Macpherson in his 1783 letter to John Murdoch, the poem is presented in numbered cantos that are labelled ‘Duans’; a footnote in the Kilmarnock Edition explains

¹⁰⁰ Robert Burns, ‘History of the Rise, Proceedings, and Regulations of the Bachelor’s Club’, in *Commonplace Books, Tour Journals, and Miscellaneous Prose*, ed. by Nigel Leask, pp.24-26 (p.24).

that this ‘is a term of Ossian’s for the different divisions of a digressive Poem.’¹⁰¹ This move not only signals that the generic frame of reference for ‘The Vision’ is partly that of what Burns had privately denominated the ‘sentimental kind’ of literature, but establishes a tension between the ostensibly primitive origins of the work to which the poem alludes, and the markedly economised conditions of its agricultural speaker. In obeisance to the four-stage model of historical development discussed above, arable farming is absent from the sublime wastes inhabited by Ossian. The rhetorician and Presbyterian minister Hugh Blair observes in his influential 1763 *Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian*, that:

[t]hroughout Ossian’s poems, we plainly find ourselves in the first of these periods of society; during which, hunting was the chief employment of men, and the principal method of procuring their subsistence. Pasturage was not indeed wholly unknown [...] of agriculture, we find no traces.¹⁰²

For John Millar, this pre-economic condition was reflected in the greater moral quality of its inhabitants, whom, he writes, possessed: ‘a degree of tenderness and delicacy of sentiments which can hardly be equalled in the most refined production of the civilized age.’¹⁰³ Sensibility appears here as the inverse corollary of civil society’s exhortation to labour, highlighting the inherent playfulness of Burns and Mackenzie’s sentimental synthesis of a natural ploughman. In direct contrast to the sublime, semi-pastoral society depicted by Macpherson, the speaker of ‘The Vision’ inhabits an environment that is predominantly and intensely georgic and arable in character. On this level, the significance of Mackenzian sentimentalism is perhaps the way that it performs the displacement of pastoral ease as a site of poetic production, into an economically circumscribed realm of leisured cultivation. As Harley reflects during his conversation with Ben Silton in *The Man of Feeling*: ‘inspiration of old was an article of religious faith; in modern times it may be translated a propensity to compose; and I believe it is not always most readily found where the poets have fixed it residence, amidst groves and plains, and the scenes of pastoral retirement’ (163-164).

In the second stanza of ‘The Vision’, the speaker tells us that: ‘The Thresher’s weary *flingin-tree*,/ the lee-lang day had tir’d me’. In threshing, the task of loosening the

¹⁰¹ Burns, *Poems* (1786), p.87.

¹⁰² Hugh Blair, *A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian, the Son of Fingal* (London: 1763), p.17.

¹⁰³ Millar, p.43.

edible grains of cereal crops from their stalks, Burns selects a form of labour that was notorious for the sustained periods of violent physical exertion that it demanded, and which his own brother Gilbert later described as ‘an insupportable drudgery’ (*Prose* 34). Burns foregrounds the imaginative flights of ‘The Vision’, including the appearance of his muse Coila, with an allusion to the exhausting physical realities of manual labour, and in doing so establishes temporary rest, rather than pastoral repose or the act of work as the scene of poetic production. In contradistinction to the labours of material production and accumulation, the speaker of ‘The Vision’ reflects on his ‘wasted time’:

How I had spent my *youthfu’ prime*,
 An’ done nae-thing,
 But stringing blethers up in rhyme
 For fools to sing. (ll.21-24)

When set against the intensive and bodily labour of threshing, poetic production appears, antithetically, as a form of play, or at least an activity that qualifies on an economic basis as ‘wasted time’. The appearance of Coila and her ‘sentimental trace’ in a later stanza, marks the valorisation of repose through literary recreation, turning ‘wasted time’ into leisured cultivation.

‘The Vision’ further marks out Burns’s notion of ‘counterpoise’ as a salutary form of remedial leisure, capable of mitigating against the instrumentalisation of the labouring poor by the division of labour, and the moral and intellectual torpor that Adam Smith names as one of its effects in *The Wealth of Nations*. The nascent capitalist construction of leisure names the necessity of rest as the corollary of industry and improvement, and appeals in doing so to a figurative concept of natural ease that it places outside its co-construction of productivity and idleness. Similarly, for Burns, ‘nature’ becomes a standard of aesthetic aspiration as opposed to an intrinsic quality of the subject, and denotes a form of refinement valorised by its distinction from labour and material forms of improvement, rather than by the absence of cultivation. The condition of the ‘Heaven-taught ploughman’ as a figure of modern agricultural labour, is on this level analogous to that of sentimentalism, as a discourse that is reflexively situated in relation to political-economic concerns, and that emphasises the importance of correct cultivation – namely the refinement of taste through reading – even as it places an inordinate value upon an ostensible ‘politeness of the heart’.

But in selecting the pursuit of literary pleasure as a form of moral improvement, the acolyte of even a philosophic sentimentalism courted the danger of following the ambiguous 'call of nature' into an unmediated enthusiasm. Mackenzie's novels and periodicals warn against this possibility, but they also make it alluring by painting it as a possible escape from political-economic and class-bound measures of value, into a realm of moral and intellectual independence. Moreover, even the rigorous proponent of sentimental self-command is never more than a few degrees away from wholly submitting to the opaque social passions on the one hand, or an unworldly aloofness on the other. For later labouring-class readers and writers, Burns would represent a powerful symbol of the value of literary application detached from the business of social emulation. But Burns's 'sentimental trace' would also be seen to resemble the volatile imagination of a natural genius, whose accomplishments bore no relation to his intellectual or social milieu. For Burns's first and arguably most influential biographer, the physician James Currie, the reflective 'counterpoise' to the demands of labour offered by sentimental reading appeared disruptive, a threat to the tranquillity of society and the subject that could be averted by the recommendation of literary activity calculated to retrench the labourer's circumscribed position within an economic whole, rather than militate against it.

3

‘To restrain rather than to impel’: James Currie, Gilbert Burns, and the Discipline of Intellectual Improvement

That the bent of every man’s mind should be followed in his education and in his destination in life, is a maxim which has been often repeated, but which cannot be admitted without many restrictions. [...] In minds of a higher order, the object of instruction and of discipline is very often to restrain rather than to impel; to curb the impulses of imagination, so that the passions also may be kept under controul.

James Currie, *Life of Burns* (Currie I 239)

I wish therefore the education of the lower classes to be promoted and directed to their improvement as men, as the means of increasing their virtue and opening to them new and dignified source of pleasure and happiness.

Gilbert Burns, Letter to James Currie, 24th October, 1800 (*Prose* 30-36)

3.1 Contesting the legacy of Burns in the Romantic period

Following his death in 1796, one of the earliest of many nineteenth-century sequels to Robert Burns’s life and works was an exchange between his younger brother Gilbert and his posthumous biographer and editor, the physician James Currie. First published in 1800, Currie’s edition of the *Works of Robert Burns* helped to consolidate the poet’s posthumous stature in a rapidly expanding literary marketplace. However, the ‘Prefatory Remarks on the Character and Condition of the Scottish Peasantry’ and ‘Life of Burns’ that comprised the first volume of Currie’s edition, also established the poet’s legacy as a site of ideological conflict for the first three decades of the ensuing century, during which the work of literary criticism would be yoked to the powerful political polarities

represented by the Whig *Edinburgh Review* and Tory *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*.¹ In my introductory chapter, I suggested that Currie's decision to construct Burns as a beneficiary of Scotland's parochial school system, an advantage which, Currie asserts, he might be seen to have shared with the majority of Scotland's 'common people', played an important role in making the poet's memory amenable to an Edinburgh Whig narrative of political-economic progress in the pre-Waterloo years (Currie I 4). But Currie's treatment of Burns in his 'Life' of the poet would simultaneously attract the opprobrium of William Wordsworth, who in his 1816 *Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns* attacked what he saw as the reductively forensic and morally obtuse character of Currie's biographical style, which 'laid open' the poet's personal flaws in a manner irrelevant to the 'intrinsic efficacy of his poetry'.² As Nigel Leask points out, Wordsworth's authority here is somewhat undermined by his use of the *Letter* to mount a 'savage retaliatory attack on Jeffrey' for his notorious 1814 review of his poem *The Excursion*.³ But his argument proved influential: in his study of *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine*, David Higgins notes that Thomas Carlyle would later echo Wordsworth's argument that 'biography fails if it deals merely with the external.'⁴ Carlyle's 1828 *Edinburgh Review* piece on John Gibson Lockhart's recently published *Life of Burns* marks, for Higgins, one of the final exchanges in the twenty-year wrangle between the Whigs and Tories of the Edinburgh periodicals over Burns's political symbolism. But despite its participants' varying levels of disdain for Currie's 1800 'Life of Burns', this series of ideologically charged exchanges never fully escaped the terms laid out in that originary work: on the contrary, they often remained heavily dependent upon its arguments and materials.⁵

Currie's 'Life' interprets the course of Burns's later years as a fatal descent into alcoholism and dissipation, during which: 'he fled from himself into society, often of the lowest kind.' In a reflection perhaps of its author's medical background, a substantial closing section of Currie's biography takes the form of a post-mortem of its subject, which details Burns's destructive attachment to 'the pains and pleasures of intoxication' as a

¹ See Nigel Leask, 'Robert Burns and Common Sense Philosophy', in *Romantic Empiricism: Poetics and the Philosophy of Common Sense, 1780-1830*, ed. by Gavin Budge (Lewisburg, Bucknell University Press, 2007), pp.64-87 (p.81).

² William Wordsworth, *Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns*, p.21.

³ [Francis Jeffrey] 'The Excursion, being a portion of the Recluse, a Poem', in *The Edinburgh Review*, 47 (November 1814), pp.1-30.

⁴ David Higgins, *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine: Biography, Celebrity and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p.48.

⁵ See for example James Hogg [alias The Ettrick Shepherd] and William Motherwell, Esq (eds.), *The Works of Robert Burns*, 5 vols. (Edinburgh: 1851).

relief from his constitutional melancholy (I 249-51). For Currie, Burns's 'virtues and his failings had their origin in the extraordinary sensibility of his mind, and equally partook of the chills and glows of sentiment' (I 235). Where Burns's appetite for sensation could not be filled by sentiment, fancy, and conviviality, he supplied it through intoxication.⁶ Wordsworth's *Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns* was ostensibly occasioned by his reading of Alexander Peterkin's critical 1814 *Review of the Life of Robert Burns*, and by the impending republication of Currie's edition under the auspices of Gilbert Burns, Currie himself having died in 1805. For Wordsworth, this was an opportunity for Gilbert to mount 'the defence of his brother's injured reputation.'⁷ Yet an earlier disagreement between Currie and Gilbert Burns – perhaps less well known because it preceded without foreshadowing the acrimonious heights of Romantic-era periodical based criticism – centred not on the representation of the poet's character or writing, but on Currie's views on the subject of labouring-class reading. In his 'Life of Burns' and his equally important 'Prefatory Remarks on the Character and Condition of the Scottish Peasantry', Currie casts the poet as a negative exemplar in an argument for the advantages of a regulatory approach to popular education. For Currie, to increase the subject's capacity for taste or refinement of intellect through the perusal of polite literature are ends as ill-fitted to the material situation and needs of the labourer as they are to the sensitivities of an errant genius, such as Burns. Currie suggests that the cultivation of the mind for its own sake bears with it the potential to jeopardise the tranquillity of the subject and exacerbate innate constitutional weaknesses, without offering any opportunity for the practice of the self-control that might mitigate both external and internal threats to moral and mental integrity.

In his 'Life of Burns' Currie avers that 'the object of instruction and of discipline is very often to restrain rather than to impel'. This imperative denotes both a novel disciplinary paradigm of intellectual improvement, and an anxiety to contain that is redolent of contemporary **fears of** plebeian Jacobinism. Having read his 'Prefatory Remarks' and 'Life of Burns', Gilbert Burns wrote to Currie in 1800 not to defend his brother's character, but a form of recreational reading that privileged the cultivation of aesthetic taste as a valid mode of labouring-class intellectual improvement. Alternately latent and mobilised within both Currie's edition and Gilbert Burns's letter, are a reconfiguring of the dynamic between literary genre and class, conflicting associational

⁶ See Nigel Leask, 'Robert Burns and the Stimulant Regime', in Johnny Rodger and Gerard Carruthers (eds.), *The Fickle Man: Robert Burns in the Twenty-First Century* (Dingwall: Sandstone, 2009), pp.135-62.

⁷ Wordsworth, *Letter to a Friend*, p.1.

and volitional models of mind, and the lingering political controversies and tensions of the 1790s. Currie's *Works of Robert Burns* would see twenty successive editions by 1820, with a version of Gilbert's letter on labouring-class education appearing as an appendix from the second edition of 1801 onwards.⁸ Their published exchange discloses not only the impact of the changing political climate of turn-of-the-nineteenth-century Britain on the diffusive intellectual practices of the eighteenth, but that of a nascent instrumentalisation of class categories as manufacturing became increasingly important to the mainland British economy. As Bruce Lenman writes: '[t]he decisive process of industrialisation which occurred in Great Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, seems, at least in its crucial earlier phases, to have needed a large pool of reasonably docile and relatively cheap labour.'⁹ More than ever, the task of labouring-class education was to forestall revolt and instil obedience, rather than to stimulate the intellect or fancy.

The subject of this chapter is partly the 'retrenchment' attempted by progressive intellectuals like Currie, who were trapped between the apparent political necessities of shoring-up the social order and avoiding characterisation as advocates of radical principles, and their desire, as Anand Chitnis writes, to begin 'implementing the social theory of the **Scottish enlightenment**'.¹⁰ In contrast, Gilbert Burns's aim in these shifting political and economic conditions was to defend, but also to partly reformulate a notion of intellectual 'improvement' which prioritised the enjoyment of 'new and dignified sources of pleasure and happiness', over the inculcation of qualities thought amenable to the tranquillity of the labouring poor.

3.2 The Scottish parish school and the historical scope of Currie's 'Life of Burns'

In November 1802, the agriculturist, political economist and former editor of *The Bee*, James Anderson, wrote to Currie to thank him for 'the pleasure I derived, a long while

⁸ See James A. Mackay, *A Biography of Robert Burns* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1992), p.661 and Currie, i, pp.371-389.

⁹ Bruce Lenman, *An Economic History of Modern Scotland, 1660-1976* (London: Batsford, 1977), pp.165-166.

¹⁰ Anand Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment: A Social History* (London; Croom Helm, 1976), p.88. For discussion of 'retrenchment' in relation to Romantic cultural practices *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community 1762 to 1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp.26-33.

ago, from the perusal of your life of Burns, and the writings that accompany it.’¹¹ A farmer who had contributed prolifically to the eighteenth-century Scottish literature of improvement before attempting to promote the diffusion of knowledge through the editorship of his periodicals *The Bee* (1791-1794) and *Recreations in Agriculture* (1799-1802), Anderson’s approval of Currie’s ‘Life of Burns’ and ‘the writings that accompany it’ – a reference to his ‘Prefatory Remarks on the Character and Condition of the Scottish Peasantry’ – reflects their combined status as a project that looks back to the collative documentation of evidence practised in Sir John Sinclair’s *Statistical Account of Scotland*, as much as forward to the literary biographies of the nineteenth century.¹² Although he was a Liverpool-based physician at the time of his editorship of Burns’s *Works*, Currie was born in Dumfries in 1756 and studied at Edinburgh University, later maintaining strong links with the intellectual culture of late-enlightenment Scotland through his acquaintance with the Edinburgh University chair of moral philosophy, Dugald Stewart.¹³

Like Sinclair’s 1791 *Statistical Account*, Currie’s ‘Prefatory Remarks’ constitute an example of the links between geography and Scottish enlightenment ‘stadial history’ which, Penny Fielding argues, allowed knowledge of place to function as a perceived ‘means to economic improvement’, as well as ‘the way for Scotland to be understood not only in terms of its own history but also as a model for history itself.’¹⁴ In his ‘Prefatory Remarks’, Currie configures the distinctive moral character of the Scottish peasantry as a historical function of geographical determinism, arguing that one effect of the mountainous nature of the Scottish landscape is that ‘the necessities of life often require a closer union of the inhabitants [who] instead of being scattered equally over the whole, are usually divided into small communities on the sides of their separate vallies, and on the banks of their respective streams; situations well calculated to call forth and to concentrate the social affections’ (I 29).

For Currie, Scotland’s *geographical* character partly explains what he sees as its distinct *cultural* character, particularly as evident in the manners of its lower-class inhabitants and their strong sense of national attachment. But despite its appeal to the power of locality, Currie’s Helvetian account of Scottish peasant virtue is strangely

¹¹ Correspondence of James Currie, Mitchell Library, Glasgow MS 1/1, 6pp, Envelope 18, No.13.

¹² On literary biography in the Romantic Period see Higgins, pp.1-11.

¹³ *Memoir of the Life, Writings, and Correspondence of James Currie, M.D. F.R.S.*, ed. by William Wallace Currie, 2 vols. (London: 1831), i. pp.1-60.

¹⁴ Penny Fielding, *Scotland and the Fictions of Geography: North Britain, 1760-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p.2.

homogenising in the way that it dissolves linguistic and topographical divides, most noticeably that between the Highlands and Lowlands, to present a uniform landscape of hermetic communities set in unspecified river valleys. Currie's incorporation of Scotland into an easily representable whole is partly explained by his opening statement that his observations on Burns's social origins have been written, 'not with the view of their being read by Scotchmen only, but also by natives of England, and of other countries where the English language is spoken or understood' (I 2). The 'Prefatory Remarks' promote Scotland within Great Britain and the Empire as a historical case study in the development of civil society, and its implications for a lower class whose virtues and mores Currie sees as having been shaped by material factors whose future influence is uncertain. Moreover, in discharging his role as Burns's posthumous biographer, Currie suggests that he is, to an extent, simultaneously providing the same function for Scotland: 'an ancient and once independent nation', whose virtues may now be pressed into the service of the Union and the imperial project (I 31).

In his 'Life of Burns', Currie maintains the evidential tone established in his 'Prefatory Remarks'. The biography itself is predominantly structured around lengthy, unedited passages of writing by the poet's former acquaintances, an approach which Currie justifies by arguing that: '[t]hough the information they convey might have been presented within a shorter compass, by reducing the whole into one unbroken narrative, it is scarcely to be doubted, that the intelligent reader will be far more gratified by a sight of these original documents themselves' (I 99). Currie draws attention to the force behind his own arguments and conclusions as that of factual testimony rather than his own rhetorical competence. At the same time, what Leask describes as the 'documentary approach' of Currie's biography allows his remarks and interjections to issue within a broader discursive context than that of Burns's individual character and untimely demise.¹⁵ Central to Currie's expanded field of discussion is the question of what role education might play in rendering improvement both systematic on a social level, and predictable in its political consequences. In both Currie's 'Prefatory Remarks' and 'Life of Burns', the issue of instruction figures both with regard to the inculcation of moral character, and to the articulation of social and economic progress. On this level however, Currie's 'Prefatory Remarks' and 'Life of Burns' also attest to a profound shift away from the

¹⁵ Nigel Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral: Poetry and Improvement in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p.282.

Scottish Enlightenment's generalized understanding of widespread intellectual improvement as the diffusion of knowledge among a 'middling rank' drawn from 'somewhere between the feudal nobility and a dependent peasantry': a social range from which Robert Burns would have had little reason to discount himself and many of his 'rustic compeers'.¹⁶

In his 'Prefatory Remarks', Currie asserts that the establishment of Scotland's parish school system by an act of Parliament in 1646, in combination with the effects of the 1707 Parliamentary Union with England, led to: 'an extraordinary change in favour of industry and good morals [in] the character of the common people of Scotland' (I 4). Currie states that the Union has allowed lower-class Scots to 'stream' into England 'and, more especially, over the colonies which she had settled in the east and in the west', with the result that: 'the richer country is constantly invigorated by the accession of an informed and hardy race of men, educated in poverty, and prepared for hardship and danger, patient of labour, and prodigal of life' (I 7). Currie casts the 'spirit of emigration and adventure' that he attributes to the Scottish peasant as a product of the parochial school system, a derivation it conveniently shares with the literacy and numeracy required of efficacious colonial administrators, and the habitual obedience desirable of a manual workforce. Currie is at pains here to depict both labouring-class education and Scottish immigration into England as simultaneously benign and powerful forces, reflecting the status of his 'Remarks' as a cautious intervention in the delicate post-French Revolution politics of the Union.

3.3 'The fittest pursuit for a peasant': Gilbert Burns's defence of labouring-class intellectual improvement

Currie's 'Prefatory Remarks' and 'Life of Burns' arguably form part of an ongoing reassessment of the nature and implications of civilized progress at the beginning of the nineteenth century, which entailed in a new alertness to the complex social potentialities of the diffusion of intellectual improvement. By the end of the 1790s, those on all sides of the political debate had registered with perhaps greater force than ever before, the potential of lower-class reading and writing to act as a tool for the measured

¹⁶ Donald Winch, *Adam Smith's Politics: An Essay in Historiographic Revision* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p.99; Robert Burns, *Poems*, .iii.

implementation of broad-ranging social improvement, as well as a threat to the security of the established order. As Paul Keen shows, such perceptions were galvanized by the efforts of the radical London Corresponding Society to promote the diffusion of knowledge among the lower classes.¹⁷ As I discuss below, the fruits of this process are partly evident in a gradual retraction of support for the unregulated diffusion of knowledge on the part of elite commentators and intellectuals, and the emergence of a new emphasis on the inculcation of morals and ‘habits of industry’. But alongside a more circumspect approach to the diffusion of knowledge, James Currie also advocated a certain caution towards the effects of intellectual cultivation among the lower classes in general, especially where it took the form of the refinement of taste.

In his letter of 1800, Gilbert Burns appears to have taken particular issue with a section of Currie’s ‘Life’ in which he questions the suitability of the reading material selected by the members of the Mauchline Conversation Club. A reading and debating society cofounded by Robert and Gilbert Burns in the early 1780s, Currie writes that the members of the Mauchline Club ‘were originally all young men from the country, and chiefly sons of farmers; a description of persons in the opinion of our poet, more agreeable in their manners, more virtuous in their conduct, and more susceptible of improvement, than the self-sufficient mechanic of country towns’ (Currie I 111). Currie provides no source for his reference to Burns’s ‘opinion’ here, which is suggestive given its affinity with Currie’s opening ‘Remarks’ on the virtuous character of the ‘Scottish Peasantry’, a category which excludes the nation’s urban labourers and mechanics. While Currie endorses the labouring-class pursuit of ‘improvement’ in principle, he also expresses misgivings with regard to certain aspects of the form and content of that practised by the members of the Mauchline Conversation Club, namely their purchase and reading of Henry Mackenzie’s periodicals *The Mirror* and *The Lounger*. Currie suggests that: ‘[w]ith deference to the Conversation-society of Mauchline, it may be doubted whether the books which they purchased, were of a kind best adapted to promote the interest and happiness of persons in this situation of life’ (I 111).

Written by and frequently addressing an urban middling and professional social strata, individual numbers of *The Mirror* and *The Lounger* tended to consist of what Sher describes as ‘moral fiction’, anecdotal accounts of social mores and manners, or essays on

¹⁷ See Paul Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s: Print Culture and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.163.

points of aesthetic judgement.¹⁸ One number of *The Mirror* for example, considers ‘[w]hether; in the imitative arts, a person exercised in the practice of the art, or in the frequent contemplation of its productions, be better qualified to judge of these, than a person who only feels the direct and immediate effects of it?’ (*Mirror* II 100) Here in the form of a short periodical essay, the writer broaches the tension between ‘artifice’ and ‘nature’, and the validity of emotional response as a mode of moral and aesthetic judgement, so central to Mackenzie’s earlier sentimental novels. The periodicals’ orientation within the dialectic of art and nature is summarised by a *Lounger* contributor who writes that: ‘[g]enuine excellence [...] springs from nature, and is to be cultivated only, not created, by artificial instruction’ (*Lounger* 7). Elsewhere, the voices of different contributors espouse mildly critical stances towards the world of fashion and business, consolidating through the frame of their relaxed social empiricism, a distinction between a polite middling rank of tasteful and simple-mannered readers, and a vulgar realm of overt social aspiration, conspicuous wealth, and moral affectation. On this level, *The Mirror* and *The Lounger* might be seen to have explored terrain similar to that mapped out in the more extensive aesthetic and philosophical treatises of the period. In the second number of *The Lounger*, the writer reflects that: ‘[a] periodical paper, though it may sometimes lift its voice against a neglect of the greater moralities, yet has for its peculiar province the correction and reform of any breach of the lesser [...] it is the privilege of such a work, as well as one of its chief uses, to attack the entrenchments of Fashion, whenever she is at war with Modesty or Virtue’ (*Lounger* 7). On a certain level, *The Mirror* and *The Lounger* thus position themselves to articulate not only the experience of an urban elite, but that of a society in a state of cultural and economic transition, as the forces of commerce and emulation diffuse themselves through its fabric. As Mackenzie writes in *The Lounger*: ‘[t]he code of morality must necessarily be enlarged in proportion to that state of manners to which cultivated eras give birth’ (*Lounger* 78). At the same time, the publications’ short, varied articles and frequent recourse to narrative fiction and anecdote, may have supplied a widespread appetite among readers of sentimental prose who were endowed with limited economic means and leisure time, such as the members of the Mauchline Conversation Club. The short lifespan of *The Mirror* as a periodical, in which form it lasted between 1779 and 1780, was not reflected in the popularity it enjoyed as a book edition from 1781 onwards; the same is true of *The Lounger*, which originally ran from

¹⁸ Richard Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book: Scottish Authors and their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland and America* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), p.93.

1785 to 1786. Sher counts the collected version of *The Mirror* among the best-selling books of the Scottish Enlightenment, having gone through at least ten British editions by 1810, and that of *The Lounger* as a ‘good seller’, having gone through four to six.¹⁹ Anecdotally, Currie suggests in his ‘Life of Burns’ that works such as *The Mirror* and *Lounger* were ubiquitous fixtures ‘of book-societies among the poorer classes in Scotland’ (I 114n.).

For Currie, the popularity of *The Mirror* and *Lounger* among readers of all social classes was problematic, because, ‘though works of great merit, [they] may be said, on a general view of their contents, to be less calculated to increase the knowledge, than to refine the taste of those who read them; and to this last object their morality itself, which is however always perfectly pure, may be considered as subordinate’ (I 111-12). The privileging of the refinement of taste over moral correction within *The Mirror* and *Lounger*, rendered them unsuitable fodder for the labouring reader, and of limited amenability to Currie’s educational model. Not only did their aesthetic focus run contrary to Currie’s prioritisation of ‘industry and good morals’ as the object of instruction, it courted the additional danger of rendering the peasant reader’s intellectual character inimical to the material realities of lower-class existence. Currie warns that ‘delicacy of taste, though the source of many pleasures, is not without some disadvantages, and to render it desirable, the possessor should perhaps in all cases be raised above the necessity of bodily labour’ (I 112). Currie’s views here partly channel those expressed by Mackenzie in a famous *Lounger* article on the merits of sentimental literature, where he warns that a ‘sickly sort of refinement creates imaginary evils and distresses, and imaginary blessings and enjoyments, which embitter the common disappointment, and depreciate the common attainments of life’ (*Lounger* 79-80). The essay represents an important critical counterpoint to, if not a potential retraction of, certain ambiguous aspects of Mackenzie’s still highly popular sentimental novels of the 1770s: *The Man of Feeling* and *The Man of the World*. In Currie’s argument, Mackenzie’s views are inflected through the perceived necessity of a social stratification of reading, in which the material consumed corresponds to the particular requirements and circumstances of the reader. Moreover, Currie transfers Mackenzie’s suspicion of sentiment onto a hitherto largely unscrutinised notion of ‘delicacy of taste’. Currie writes that:

¹⁹ See Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book*, pp.88-93.

to the thousands who share the original condition of Burns, and who are doomed to pass their lives in the station in which they were born, delicacy of taste, were it even of easy attainment, would, if not a positive evil, be at least a doubtful blessing. Delicacy of taste may make many necessary labours irksome or disgusting, and should it render the cultivator of the soil unhappy in his situation, it presents no means by which that situation may be improved [...] The penmanship of Butterworth, and the arithmetic of Cocker, may be studied by men in the humblest walks of life, and they will assist the peasant more in the pursuit of independence, than the study of Homer or of Shakespeare. (I 113-114)²⁰

Currie's prescriptive approach to labouring-class study bifurcates, on the one hand, towards the inculcation of good morals, and on the other, towards the pursuit 'of superior knowledge in his profession' that Adam Smith names as a route to material self-betterment in his discussion of 'emulation' in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

In the letter of 1800 in which he responds to Currie's position, Gilbert laments that '[t]he education of the lower classes is seldom considered in any other point of view than as the means of raising them from that station to which they were born, and of making a fortune' (*Prose* 31). This is partly a sentimental disavowal of economic self-interest, but it also has a practical rationale behind it, for as Gilbert argues, 'the votaries of wealth may be considered as a great number of candidates striving for a few prizes, and whatever addition the successful may make to their pleasure or happiness the disappointed will always have more to suffer, I am afraid, than those who abide contented in the station to which they were born.' For Gilbert, the promise of worldly advancement will never offer a sound basis for a model of labouring-class learning, particularly when compared to the labourer's pursuit of 'competence in his station' (*Prose* 32). By the same token, this precludes the subordination of intellectual improvement to the goals of economic self-betterment. Gilbert states that he wishes: 'therefore the education of the lower classes to be promoted and directed to their improvement as men, as the means of increasing their virtue and opening to them new and dignified source of pleasure and happiness' (*Prose*

²⁰ Currie is referring to Edmund Butterworth, *The Universal Penman, or the Beauties of Writing Delineated in All the various Hands Now Practiced: Designed for the Improvement of Youth or Amusement of the Curious* (Edinburgh, 1784) and Edward Cocker's textbook, *Arithmetic* (1678). See Burns, *Prose*, p.27n.

32). For Liam McIlvanney, this approach to lower-class intellectual improvement, which Gilbert largely shared with Robert Burns, might be described as ‘a civic theory of popular learning’, with roots in the Radical Whig humanism of the eighteenth century.²¹ Gilbert’s defence of polite reading among labourers falls back on a synthesis of Alexander Pope’s assertion that ‘[t]he proper study of mankind is man’ with the ‘Moral Sense’ philosophy of Francis Hutcheson, and casts literary delicacy of taste as a form of polite virtue.²² Gilbert writes that:

[t]here seems to be considerable latitude in the use of the word taste. I understand it to be the perception and relish of beauty, order, or any thing, the contemplation of which give pleasure and delight to the mind.
(*Prose 32*)

Taste here is partly understood as a moral sense, following Hutcheson’s argument that: ‘nothing is advantageous or naturally good to us, but what is apt to raise our pleasure mediately, or immediately’.²³

Gilbert’s opening comments on education largely accord with McIlvanney’s assessment of Robert’s Burns’s belief that: ‘the knowledge acquired by the lower classes should above all be “useful”, though this criterion need not be interpreted narrowly [...] Burns emphasises the social impact of education, its value not simply to individuals, but to the community as a whole’.²⁴ For Gilbert, education should equip its recipients with the knowledge required to meet the demands of their position within the division of labour, but it should not narrow morals and intellect to match the scope of a particular trade in doing so. Gilbert characterises vocational competence as a ‘duty’ incumbent on a ‘member of society’, locating it within a framework of virtue that introduces its own moral and intellectual criteria, which in turn might only be satisfied by a broader culture of mind (*Prose 31*). For Gilbert, Currie’s suggestion that Mackenzie’s periodicals *The Mirror* and *Lounger* are geared towards a mode of cultivation inimical to the needs of the labouring-class reader is flawed, precisely because they furnish their readers with the means of pursuing this form of polite improvement. Gilbert writes:

²¹ Liam McIlvanney *Burns the Radical: Poetry and Politics in Late Eighteenth Century Scotland* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2002), p.40.

²² Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man*, Epistle II, l. 2, in *Pope: Poetical Works*, ed. Herbert Davis and intro. by Pat Rogers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

²³ Francis Hutcheson, *An inquiry into the original of our ideas of beauty and virtue* (London: 1725), p.103.

²⁴ McIlvanney, p.40.

I do not mean to controvert your criticism of my favourite books, the *Mirror* and *Lounger*, although I understand there are people who think themselves judges, who do not agree with you. The acquisition of knowledge, except what is connected with human life and conduct, or the particular business of his employment, does not appear to me to be the fittest pursuit of a peasant. (*Prose* 32)

Gilbert's category of 'what is connected with human life and conduct' is conspicuously broad, but suggests a model of improvement rooted in a combination of Addisonian politeness – for Jon Mee a form of 'self-regulation' through taste – with a later eighteenth-century discourse of sensibility that Hugh Blair had connected with 'a sense of humanity'.²⁵

In his defence of *The Mirror*, Gilbert cites: 'the beautiful story of La Roche, where beside the pleasure one derives from a beautiful, simple story in McKenzie' [sic] happiest manner, the mind is led to taste, with heart-felt rapture, the consolation to be derived in deep affliction from habitual devotion and trust in Almighty God' (*Prose* 33). The story Gilbert refers to is spread between numbers 42 to 44 of *The Mirror*, and follows the travels, accompanied by his daughter, of the Swiss Protestant clergymen La Roche, who we are told, 'had lately buried his wife' (*Mirror* II 46). The series carefully enumerates La Roche's various social and moral virtues; Mackenzie writes that his 'religion was that of sentiment, not theory,' and that '[o]f all men [...] his ordinary conversation was the least tinctured with pedantry' (II 54-56). La Roche is eventually further tested by the death of his daughter; his forbearance in this situation validates his religion of sentiment and the piece is thereby rendered an illustration of the mutual amenability of feeling and piety. Mee writes that, 'Mackenzie steers a course here between overheated enthusiasm and cold philosophy that was the heart's desire of the eighteenth-century idea of sensibility', adding that crucially: '[s]ensibility for Mackenzie was about refinement and discernment.'²⁶

While Gilbert invokes the story of La Roche in order to refute Currie's claim that *The Mirror* and *Lounger* subordinate morality to the refinement of taste, the piece itself, and Gilbert's praise of it, might equally suggest the ambiguities of interpretation involved in translating 'moral fiction' into the production of moral subjects through the agency of

²⁵ Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.80. See Blair, *Sermons*, vol. 3, pp.35-36.

²⁶ Mee, *Enthusiasm*, p.52.

readerly response. Gilbert describes the effectiveness of Mackenzie's La Roche narrative in terms of 'heart-felt rapture' – a reference to his brother's poem 'The Cotter's Saturday Night' (K72) as well as a suggestion of the involuntary, even mechanistic nature of the form of responsiveness through which the sentimental text exerts its moral power. As Mackenzie writes in *The Lounger*, polite improvement locates its own prerequisite in a quality that 'springs from nature, and is to be cultivated only, not created, by artificial instruction' (*Lounger* 7). This formula for improvement obfuscates the starting-point of any systematic pedagogy, and defers a good deal of its work to faculties with uncertain moral and intellectual affinities, whose operations are largely obscured by a vague figure of 'nature'. Gilbert's defence of taste thereby runs the risk of equating it with sensibility, a more sophisticated medium of response than is sometimes acknowledged, as Mee notes, but a nonetheless autonomous, enigmatic and volatile quality, capable of producing error and infirmity with as much frequency as rectitude and regularity. By the same token, Gilbert's appeal in his letter to the moral authority of 'pleasure' is somewhat undermined by his own brother's reference to its 'devious' tendency in his poem 'The Vision' (K 62 1.236). For Gilbert, Mackenzie's periodicals improve the reader 'by exalting duty into sentiment', but indeterminate in nature and manifold in their social and subjective affinities, sentiment and sensibility might be ineffective vehicles for the inculcation of moral habits (*Prose* 33).

By 1800, the model of cultivation that Gilbert was defending had lost much of its authority, perhaps especially among the progressively inclined like Currie, and was beginning to be seen as particularly ill-suited to a lower class whose conditions of existence were increasingly defined by the division of labour, and had begun to register as a potential source of political disruption demanding containment rather than 'self-regulated' improvement. In this context, there is little neutrality to Gilbert and Currie's invocation of 'happiness' as the object of labouring-class cultivation. In his letter of 1800 to Currie, Gilbert perceptively summarises the various ways in which labouring-class intellectual improvement was thought to threaten both the existing economic and political order, and the designs of those who sought its gradual amelioration:

I have heard some people object to the education of the lower classes of men, as rendering them less useful by abstracting them from their proper business: by others, as tending to make them fancy to their superiors impatient of their condition, and turbulent subjects: while you, with

more humanity, have your fears alarmed least the delicacy of mind induced by that sort of education and reading it recommend, should render the evils of their situation insupportable to them. (*Prose* 32)

Gilbert interprets Currie's concern towards the cultivation of taste and 'delicacy of mind' by the lower classes as a function of his benevolence. But it is perhaps Gilbert's reference to the production of 'turbulent subjects' that most effectively encapsulates the fear that both progressive and conservative figures felt towards the improvement of the labouring intellect. At stake here for Currie is the question of to what degree the unsupervised cultivation of taste by the lower classes might produce an unhappiness that would correspond to the more dangerous figure of political discontent, or exacerbate the 'mental mutilation' which Adam Smith had already named as a symptom of the division of labour that deserved: 'the most serious attention of government [...] in the same manner as it would deserve its most serious attention to prevent a leprosy or any other loathsome and offensive disease' (WN II 373). As I argue below, Currie pursues this question partly through a moral and medical analysis of Robert Burns's constitution, which draws on an epistemic and philosophical model quite distinct from that which Gilbert Burns brings to bear in his refutation of Currie's views. On this level, their exchange might be read, as Alan Richardson partly reads the Romantic preoccupation with pedagogy and the formation of mind, as a moment of simultaneous resistance and consolidation in the gradual ceding of cultural hegemony by a diffusive, socially unordered paradigm of intellectual improvement, to one of granular moral and cultural regulation, that both responded to and at times reinforced differences of social rank.²⁷

3.4 'The Public Passions of Men': the politics of improvement in the 1790s

Currie's reassessment of the benefits and dangers of the refinement of taste is a symptom, I would argue, of the shifting terms of social and cultural debate at the end of the eighteenth century. But these concerns issued within a broader movement towards a more dispensatory, regulatory approach to the diffusion of knowledge and public debate in general, which had major implications for the intellectual practices of the Scottish Enlightenment. Philip Connell has written that the intellectual life of eighteenth-century

²⁷ See Alan Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994), pp.30-31.

Scotland was ‘centred around the values of rational enquiry and cultural refinement as the historical correlates of economic progress’.²⁸ For J. G. A. Pocock, this dynamic constituted a ‘commercial humanism’, which understood improvement as an indefinite process of refinement under whose rubric the diffusion of knowledge, economic self-interest, manners, and taste were mutually supportive. Connell however, argues that Smith’s misgivings regarding the effects of the division of labour on the moral character of civil society, indicate the extent to which this theory of improvement was never formally consolidated, and remained a ‘compromised ideological synthesis of learning, virtue, and commercial civilization.’²⁹ For Connell, the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 and the political controversy that it provoked in British public life, dealt a heavy blow to an ideal of progress that was inherently fragile. During the 1790s, the potential linkages between improvement and political rupture attracted new and hostile scrutiny, particularly where they could be located within the burgeoning field of political economy. The violence of the French Revolution was attributed to the erosion of the emotional foundations of the social hierarchy, and their replacement with abstract philosophical systems theorized by conspiring public intellectuals; Pocock avers that after 1789, ‘we begin to hear denunciations of commerce as founded upon soullessly rational calculation and the cold, mechanical philosophy of Bacon, Hobbes, Locke and Newton.’³⁰ The most prominent of these denunciative voices was that of Edmund Burke, who alleged in his 1790 *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, that ‘a cabal, calling itself philosophic, receives the glory of many of the late proceedings; and that their opinions and systems are the true actuating spirit of the whole of them.’³¹

In 1793, Currie published a pseudonymous letter entreating Prime Minister William Pitt to avoid total war with Revolutionary France, in which he cited Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* to argue that full-scale conflict would be needlessly destructive of Britain’s financial credit and manufacturing economy, and condemned the executive’s

²⁸ Phillip Connell, *Romanticism, Economics and the Question of ‘Culture’* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.68.

²⁹ Ibid, p.70.

³⁰ J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.50.

³¹ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolutions in France, and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relevant to that Event. In a letter intended to have been sent to a gentleman in Paris* (London: 1790), p.5.

acquiescence to ‘the peculiar phrenzy’ whipped-up by Burke’s *Reflections*.³² Currie’s identification of Burke as the source of a ‘madness [that] became more contagious than the plague’, reverses the valence of the latter’s enthusiastic accounts of French mob-violence, and casts his own *Letter to Pitt* as a potentially risky polemic against the tenor and basis of the domestic counterrevolution.³³ Equally, his appeals to the writing of both Smith and Hume reveals his continuing ideological allegiance to the however fissured ‘commercial humanism’ of the Scottish Enlightenment.

A perceived correlation between the diffusion of speculative economic theory and political radicalism had particularly severe consequences for intellectual culture in Scotland, where the continued predominance of patronage as a mode of public appointment allowed the Tory hegemony of Henry Dundas to efficiently quash any dissent, and secure what Biancamaria Fontana describes as ‘the virtual paralysis of political and intellectual life in Edinburgh’ during the 1790s.³⁴ The new intolerance of any intellectual activity likely to give rise to political debate or dissent was also felt in the institutions of Scotland’s provincial Enlightenment. In 1793, the committee of the Ayr Library Society, whose existence had partly shaped Robert Burns’s early intellectual milieu, met to destroy their copy of Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man*, in accordance with the recent Royal proclamation against ‘seditious writings’.³⁵

At the eye of the political storm was the Edinburgh University chair in moral philosophy, Dugald Stewart, who also happened to occupy a mediatory position in relation to Burns and his posthumous biographer, James Currie. Following Burns’s death in 1796, his trustees had initially sought Stewart to produce a biography to accompany the poet’s collected works.³⁶ On one level, the philosopher would have been well qualified for the task: Burns had dined with Stewart at his ancestral seat at Catrine in Ayrshire in 1786, and later counted Stewart among his patrons and ‘learned friends’ in Edinburgh, writing of his, ‘sterling independence of mind’, and his ability to observe ‘unseduced by splendour and undisgusted by wretchedness [...] the merits of the various actors in the great drama of life, merely as they perform their parts’ (CL II 40). Also present at Stewart and Burns’s

³² James Currie [alias Jasper Wilson], *A Letter, Commercial and Political, Addressed to the R. H. William Pitt* (London: 1793), p.6, p.42.

³³ *Ibid*, p.43.

³⁴ Biancamaria Fontana, *Rethinking the Politics of Commercial Society: The Edinburgh Review 1802-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.11.

³⁵ Minutes of the Ayr Library Society, 30th January, 6th February, 1793.

³⁶ See Leask, *Burns and Pastoral*, p.280.

1786 meeting in Ayrshire was one Lord Daer, a future member of the Scottish Friends of the People who had recently returned from pre-revolutionary France having met with Nicolas de Condorcet and other prominent *philosophes*. These radical associations would have serious personal and professional consequences for both Burns and Stewart.³⁷ Leask notes that they were also the chief factor in Stewart's refusal to act as Burns's biographer, although he collaborated at arm's length in the production of the 1800 edition and provided a substantial account of his own acquaintance with the poet to appear in Currie's 'Life of Burns' (Currie I 137-152).

As his correspondence makes clear, Currie regarded Stewart as the preeminent philosopher of the age. In a letter of 1792, he describes Stewart's treatment of 'the application of first principles to politics' in his *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* as being of 'distinguished excellence.'³⁸ In 1794, Currie wrote to Stewart directly, in order to profess that he was 'altogether a pupil of the school of philosophy in which you take such a lead' and encourage him to maintain his presence in the public sphere despite 'the dark and clouded horizon' of Scotland's reactionary counter-revolutionary climate.³⁹ As Donald Winch argues, Stewart was a perfectibilist who believed that progress in the study of mind would serve to underpin a measured unfolding of social, economic and political improvement.⁴⁰ But if the ongoing progress of civil society would necessarily be both gradual and contingent upon the maintenance of political stability, then it was equally the case that eruptions like the French Revolution could only be avoided if government and legislation were to continuously adapt to reflect their given society's state of advancement. Stewart argues in the *Elements* that: '[t]he stability and the influence of established authority, must depend on the coincidence between its measures and the tide of public opinion; and that, in modern Europe, in consequence of the invention of printing, and the liberty of the press, public opinion has acquired an ascendant in human affairs, which it never possessed in those states of antiquity from which most of our political examples are drawn' (I 245).

In Stewart's totalising account of the progress of civil society, the conduct of government must accurately reflect the wants of the governed, which in turn are a

³⁷ See Burns's correspondence with his patron, Robert Graham of Fintry, CL, II, pp.172-175.

³⁸ *Memoir of James Currie*, ii. p.150.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p.320.

⁴⁰ See Donald Winch, 'The system of the North: Dugald Stewart and his pupils,' in *That Noble Science of Politics: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Intellectual History*, ed. by Stefan Collini, John Burrow, and Donald Winch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp.23-61.

manifestation of the current extent of improvement, or ‘the present state of society’. In a tilt at Burke, Stewart makes it clear that ‘public opinion’ is not reducible to vulgar prejudice; ‘the invention of printing’ and the accelerated ‘diffusion of knowledge’ which it has brought about, increasingly render ‘the genius of the time’ an apt judge with regard to political and legislative measures. For Stewart, the diffusion of knowledge is therefore the potentially volatile lynch-pin within a broader scheme of civilized progress. The corollary of Stewart’s deference to aggregate knowledge and judgement is his conviction that future improvement will be directed ‘not with the power of a single mind’, but by that of many. In terms of Currie’s account of Burns, this notion of individual talent becoming less significant in proportion to the general level of (particularly intellectual) improvement, configures the prominence of the poet’s individual genius as a symptom of Scotland’s imperfect state of civility, or ‘uneven development’. Stewart argues that a ‘rapid circulation of knowledge’ both maintains the state of political tranquillity that is its own prerequisite, and contributes to the increasing acuity of public opinion, driving progress towards a better degree of ‘human happiness’ and gradually rendering political reform both necessary and without risk (*Elements* I 247). For Stewart, ‘the perfection of political wisdom does not consist in an indiscriminate zeal against reforms, but in a gradual and prudent accommodation of established institutions to the varying opinions, manners, and circumstances of mankind’ (I 247). As established by an attack on those who advocate ‘rash innovations’ in government, Stewart’s position is anti-revolutionary, but equally critical of arbitrary attachment to incumbent political and legislative forms (I 245).

While his views on the wisdom of immediate political change are relatively measured however, Stewart appears more radical when he speculates on the longer term trajectory of intellectual improvement and its effects, speculating that: ‘[w]hat, indeed, will be the particular effects in the first instance, of that general diffusion of knowledge, which the art of printing must sooner or later produce; and of that spirit of reformation with which it cannot fail to be accompanied, it is beyond the reach of human sagacity to conjecture’ (*Elements* I 37). Stewart asserts not only that political change is inevitable, but that ‘the general diffusion of knowledge’ is the force that will bring it about. A review of Stewart’s *Elements* by David Erskine, Earl of Buchan (writing under his patriotic pseudonym ‘Albanicus’), appeared in James Anderson’s weekly periodical *The Bee* in August 1792. The piece constitutes a particularly enthusiastic interpretation of Stewart’s suggestions regarding the potential of print technology to articulate and accelerate the

advance of liberty in all spheres of civil society. Erskine writes that, '[b]efore the printing press, that palladium of the human race, was employed to diffuse knowledge universally among all degrees of people, the progress of philosophy, or *the reason of things*, was so slow and equable, that the life of no individual could include any remarkable range of intellectual melioration in society'.⁴¹ For Erskine, Stewart's *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* stands not only as evidence in itself that intellectual enquiry is gradually approaching a state of perfection due to the influence of print technology, but as a work whose arguments articulate his own faith in the ameliorative power of the press.

From Erskine's point of view as a major contributor to a periodical which styled itself as '*A Work calculated to disseminate useful Knowledge among all ranks of people at a small expence*', the particular significance of Stewart's paean to the radical potential of print is easily grasped. For Stewart:

the press bestows upon the sciences, an advantage somewhat analogous to that which the mechanical arts derive from the division of labour. As in these arts, the exertions of an uninformed multitude, are united by the comprehensive skill of the artist, in the accomplishment of effects astonishing by their magnitude, and by the complicated ingenuity they display; so in the sciences, the observations and conjectures of obscure individuals on those subjects which are level to their capacities, and which fall under their own immediate notice, accumulate for a course of years; till at last, some philosopher arise, who combines the scattered materials, and exhibits, in his system, not merely the force of a single mind, but the intellectual power of the age in which he lives. (*Elements I* 267-268)

Stewart argues that the ability of print to preserve and circulate the intellectual labours produced within many distinct fields of knowledge, makes possible their later consolidation by the professional philosopher, that figure, in John Barrell's words, 'able to grasp from the perspective of one determinate occupation, the relations between all

⁴¹ David Erskine [alias Albanicus], 'On Stuart's [sic] Elements', *The Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer*, 10, August 2, 1792, pp.140-146 (p.140).

others.⁴² The above passage appears as part of a lengthy extract that comprises the bulk of Erskine's review of Stewart's *Elements* for *The Bee*. For Erskine, Stewart's identification of print technology as the means of articulating the 'intellectual power of the age' may have appeared as nothing less than a radical mandate for the modern literary periodical.

Erskine however, was perhaps willing to push the political implications of Stewart's views further than most. With the *Elements* as his support, Erskine argues that, 'none but the enemies of the human race, and of the happiness arising from a peaceable and good administration of public affairs, will ever object to the general diffusion of moral and political, as well as other useful knowledge among the lower ranks of society'.⁴³ Particularly striking here is the way in which Erskine not only admits, but actively singles out 'moral and political' information under the broader category of 'useful knowledge', as an appropriate object of study for the lower ranks. For Erskine, debate encompassing all levels of society on the subject of imminent political reform seems to have fallen well within the broader scope of improvement as it appeared to him in the early 1790s. Arguably, this position accords with that which Adam Smith had expressed when he wrote in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* that:

political disquisitions, if just, and reasonable, and practicable, are of all the works of speculation the most useful. Even the worst of them are not altogether without their utility. They serve at least to animate the public passions of men, and rouse them to seek out the means of promoting the happiness of the society. (TMS 355)

By the mid-1790s however, 'to animate the public passions of men' had become a dictum almost precisely opposed to the affinities of the Pitt regime and its subservient Tory junta in Edinburgh. Indeed, the Whig lawyer and *Edinburgh Review* contributor Henry Cockburn would famously recall of Scottish civil society in the period after 1795, that: '[a]s a body to be deferred to, no public existed.'⁴⁴

⁴² John Barrell, *English Literature in History, 1730-80: An Equal, Wide Survey* (London: Hutchinson, 1983), p.49.

⁴³ *Ibid*, pp.141-42.

⁴⁴ Henry Cockburn, *Memorials of His Time* (Edinburgh: 1856), p.89.

3.5 From ‘the diffusion of knowledge’ to ‘habits of industry’

The period from 1793 onwards saw both an intensification of counterrevolutionary efforts on the part of the Scottish authorities, and the beginning of a concerted campaign to stifle and pre-empt popular political debate wherever it might arise. Ironically given Erskine’s bold predictions for the future of the print public sphere, *The Bee* soon found itself at the centre of a controversy over seditious writings. The accusations related to a series of letters ‘On the Political Progress of Britain’ authored by the former clerk, James Thomson Callender, but printed in *The Bee* during 1792 under the pseudonym of ‘Timothy Thunderproof.’ The letters constitute an extended polemic against the British government, the Hanoverian accession, Scotland’s place within the Union, British warmongering, colonial greed, and administrative profligacy, which concludes that, ‘the political system of Britain may be justly compared with the adventures of a street bully, spending four days of the week on a boxing stage, and the rest of it in an excise court or a correction house.’⁴⁵

While Callender’s views are clearly radical in a broad sense, Michael Durey has emphasised that they drew from a body of thought distinct from that which had produced Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man*: ‘[h]is position was premised on an ethical conception of justice and of truth and on a Calvinist-inspired picture of man’s depraved nature [...] underpinning Paine’s natural rights theory was an optimistic understanding that through the use of reason human nature could be improved and eventually perfected.’⁴⁶ As Durey argues, Callender’s polemic represented the synthesis of an Augustan pessimism towards commercial society, with a distinctly Scottish mode of Whig history that was derived from the sixteenth-century writing of George Buchanan, and based around the concept of *De Iure Regni*: ‘a theory of monarchy and the rights of subjects to resist tyranny based both on natural law and the prescriptive validity of [Scotland’s mythical] constitution of 330 BC.’⁴⁷ This rendered Callender’s ‘Progress’ not only hostile to the Hanoverian settlement, but, unusually among radical tracts of the 1790s, critical of the Union itself. To the final instalment of Callender’s indictment of the established order in *The Bee*, Anderson added his own response, in which he maintained that:

⁴⁵ James Thomson Callender, [alias Timothy Thunderproof], ‘On the Political Progress of Britain’, *The Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer*, 8, April 4 (1792), pp.161-170 (p.140), p.167.

⁴⁶ Michael Durey, *With the Hammer of Truth: James Thomson Callender and America’s Early National Heroes* (Charlottesville; London: University Press of Virginia, 1990), p.35.

⁴⁷ Kidd, p.20.

[t]he time was when any attempt to expose errors in government was considered as treason; but these days are gone. Government is only of use in as far as it tends to prevent the abuses that strength and power would naturally produce in society: but as strength and power are, for wise purposes, entrusted with administration in a more eminent degree than to any individual, it follows, that more care is required to guard against abuses there than any where else.⁴⁸

This turned out to be a somewhat optimistic assessment of the political climate of Scotland in the 1790s, in the degree to which it underestimated the authorities' hostility towards public debate and criticism of government. In 1793, Anderson, Callender, and Callender's patron Lord Gardenstone, were individually interrogated by the Depute Sherriff of Edinburgh, John Pringle, in an attempt to discover the author of 'The Political Progress' and raise charges of sedition.⁴⁹ While Callender denied authorship and Anderson refused to incriminate him, he was identified as the wanted writer both by Gardenstone and by a printer who had been involved in the production of a pamphlet version of 'The Political Progress'. Callender fled to America to evade prosecution and *The Bee*, as I noted in Chapter 1, folded due to massive financial losses a year later in 1794: a reflection perhaps of the reluctance of its onetime subscribers to associate themselves with such a politically tarnished publication.

While *The Bee* provided a platform for Callender's maverick radicalism however, it would be a mistake to regard 'The Political Progress of Britain' as representative of the periodical's aims as a whole, or of the nature of the political and literary debate that was stifled by the authorities of 1790s Scotland. In his defence of Callender's 'Political Progress' in *The Bee*, Anderson expressed his belief that political critique and the comparison of political alternatives were laudable in themselves, for: '[n]o person who has not been accustomed to view objects in different lights, can ever be said to know them.'⁵⁰ The nearly contemporary trial of Thomas Muir is perhaps instructive in terms of the ways in which the severity of the punishments exacted upon Scottish dissenters during the 1790s, has contributed to an inaccurate perception of the exact nature of their radicalism by posterity. Muir was a prominent member of the Scottish Association of the Friends of

⁴⁸ [James Anderson], 'Remarks on the Political Progress', *The Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer*, 8, April 4 (1792), pp.170-172 (p.172).

⁴⁹ Durey, pp.44-47.

⁵⁰ 'Remarks on the Political Progress', p.172.

the People. Far from being an organ of plebeian radicalism, the Friends of the People had the interests of the progressive middling ranks firmly in mind, and had evolved from a grouping formed in response to the House of Commons' rejection of Richard Brinsley Sheridan's burgh reform motion in April 1792. As John Brims argues: '[t]he spectre of popular Paineite radicalism alarmed conservatives and reformist Whigs alike.' The aim of the Friends of the People was thus: 'to defeat the Paineite threat by providing the discontented with leadership and by channelling their discontent in a constitutionalist direction.'⁵¹ Anderson's justification for the publication of Callender's letters in *The Bee*, anticipate the words spoken by Muir at his trial in 1793, where he defended himself against accusations of sedition, on account of having distributed copies of Paine's *Rights of Man* amongst weavers in the vicinity of Kirkintilloch, north of Glasgow. Explaining his actions, Muir claimed:

I advised the people, to read different publications on both sides, which this great national question had excited, and I am not ashamed to assign my motives. [...] KNOWLEDGE must always precede REFORMATION, and who shall DARE to say that the PEOPLE should be debarred from INFORMATION, where it concerns them so materially.⁵²

Here, in the form of forensic rhetoric, are sentiments similar to those expressed in Stewart's *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* and Erskine's review of it in *The Bee*, when their writers speculate upon the long term transformative effects of the diffusion of knowledge upon the structure of society. Moreover, just as Muir encouraged his followers 'to read different publications on both sides', *The Bee* had presented its readers with the most emotive passages 'On the Queen of France, &c.' from Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, long before offering a platform for Callender's 'Political Progress'.⁵³ This was an attempt to extend the comparative reading practises of the Scottish Enlightenment's subscription libraries and debating clubs to a broader social constituency. But as Paul Keen writes of rational dissenters within the British reading public in his study *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s*, the reformists'

⁵¹ John Brims, "From Reformers to Jacobins": The Scottish Association of the Friends of the People', in *Conflict and Stability in Scottish Society, 1780-1850*, ed. by T. M. Devine (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1990), pp.31-50 (p.33).

⁵² *An Account of the Trial of Thomas Muir* (Edinburgh:1793), pp28-29.

⁵³ Dec 22, 1790

‘appropriation of the Enlightenment’ emphasis on literature as a guarantee of rational liberty coincided with broader concerns about the sustained viability of precisely this equation’.⁵⁴ In their attempts to lever a formerly hegemonic ideal of polite intellectual improvement to defend their intentional provocation of political debate, Muir and Anderson found themselves confronting a growing scepticism and suspicion towards the intellectual practises of the Enlightenment public sphere.

An artefact of this newfound caution towards popular debate appears in Currie’s ‘Life of Burns’. If Currie is dubious towards the literary material selected as a means of improvement by the Mauchline Conversation Club, he is more approving of the activities of Robert and Gilbert Burns’s earlier Tarbolton Bachelor’s Club. As shown by the appendix to the first volume of Currie’s edition which reproduces its prescriptive ‘Rules and Regulations’, the Tarbolton Club provided its members with a platform for highly formalised intellectual debate (Currie I 365-369). Currie acknowledges that such societies, when employed as ‘a method of abbreviating instruction, may, under proper regulations, be highly useful’ (Currie I 118). He further observes that: ‘[t]hough some attention has been paid to the eloquence of the senate and the bar, which in this, as in all other free governments, is productive of so much influence to the few who excel in it, yet little regard has been paid to the humbler exercise of speech in private conversation, an art that is of consequence to every description of persons under every form of government, and on which eloquence of every kind ought perhaps to be founded’ (I 117). The cultivation of forensic eloquence, Currie suggests, should not be pursued by those whose vocational sphere is that of the ploughman, labourer or mechanic. But in precluding labouring-class debaters from the ‘eloquence of the senate and the bar’, Currie might also be seen to be issuing a tacit warning against plebeian political speculation. In a further reflection of contemporary anxieties towards plebeian gatherings, Currie also recommends that the membership of such societies should not exceed the figure of ‘seven to twelve persons’ which constituted the Tarbolton Club, and that the ‘powers of private conversation are to be employed, not those of public debate’, thereby partly limiting the effects of participation to the improvement of elocution (I 116-117).

In a 2011 study, Jon Mee explores the position within eighteenth-century letters of a ‘conversational paradigm’ of intellectual and social life that took as its model the mixed

⁵⁴ Keen, p.8.

company and free commerce of ideas epitomised by the de-hierarchized environment of the contemporary coffee house.⁵⁵ Collision, circulation, mediation and sociability were operators valued within the ubiquitous eighteenth-century discourse of politeness for their supposed ability to ‘polish’ or ‘smooth’ public life, facilitating the uninterrupted flow of ‘improvement’ and enlightened knowledge across its surface.⁵⁶ But as Mee also notes, this ideal of conversability was subject to contestation by those who equated it with the potential of commercial society more broadly, to undermine its own values of polite sociability should its mechanisms of ‘collision’, ‘proliferation’ and ‘inundation’ be allowed to operate too freely.⁵⁷ Mee observes that even proponents of conversation worried that excessive collision, ‘would impede the smooth flow of improvement, creating blockages in the system, overflowing the banks of properly regulated currents of exchange, and inundating the land with forms of false knowledge’.⁵⁸ Currie argues that institutions like the Tarbolton Bachelor’s Club have the potential to: ‘improve the powers of utterance, and by the collision of opinion, excite the faculties of reason and reflection’ (Currie I 118). But for Currie, the efficacy of conversation as a mechanism of improvement is in direct proportion to its degree of regulation. Without the imposition of ‘limitation’, conversation ‘so often diverges into separate and collateral branches, in which it is dissipated and lost,’ whereas under the influence of suitable rules, it ‘flows along in one full stream, and becomes smoother, and clearer, and deeper, as it flows’ (I 116-17). Like his caution towards a literature of taste as an instrument of labouring-class improvement, Currie’s recommendation of a strenuously regulatory model of conversation, reflects an increasingly programmatic approach towards the training and exercise of the popular intellect.

While Ian Duncan and Biancamaria Fontana argue that the political backlash in 1790s Scotland was more or less fatal to the institutionally based model of Enlightenment which had functioned in Edinburgh in the second half of the eighteenth century, the same forces seem also to have impacted upon a more socially and geographically broad culture of intellectual ‘collision’, to use Mee’s term once more, within Scotland and Britain. One of the symptoms of this change was a new reluctance on the part of reformists to court the authority of ‘public opinion’, and an emphasis instead on the mediatory role to be played

⁵⁵ Mee, *Conversable Words*, p.26.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p.9.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.37.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p.26.

by highly qualified public intellectuals in marshalling emergent middle-class ‘reading audiences’.⁵⁹ This of course marked a significant departure from the deference to an autonomous ‘genius of the time’ expressed in the first volume of Stewart’s *Elements* in 1792. Indeed, the reception of that precise chapter of Stewart’s work on ‘the application of first principles to politics’ is illustrative of the forces connected with this move towards regulation. Stewart had taken what later proved to be a grave risk by basing his argument for a liberal accommodation of the ‘diffusion of knowledge’ and political change on an ‘æconomical system’ that he associated not only with Adam Smith, but with his French contemporaries, including Condorcet (*Elements* I 256). Correspondence from 1794 between Stewart and William Craig, a Lord of Session, demonstrates the political scrutiny to which Scottish intellectuals had become subject under the counterrevolutionary backlash. Craig reported to Stewart that upon reading the *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, his fellow Lord of Session, Lord Abercromby, had been appalled by Stewart’s approval of the *économistes* whose influence was now thought to have been the ideological impetus behind the September Massacres in Paris. According to Craig, Abercromby had made a private declaration to the effect that:

the *triumphs of philosophy and reason*, daily exhibited in France, ought to have satisfied every thinking and every virtuous man of the danger of unhinging established institutions, even though such institutions should appear, when considered abstractedly in the closet, to be less perfect than the theories of speculative and ingenious men. Having read the chapter alluded to, *after* the massacre of Paris, he flattered himself, from the high opinion he entertained of your character, that you would embrace the earliest opportunity of retracting in an open and manly manner, every sentiment you had ever entertained, and every word you had ever uttered, in favour of doctrines which had led to so giant a mischief [...]⁶⁰

It might be noted here that both Craig and Abercromby had been part of Mackenzie’s ‘Mirror Club’ in the 1770s, select members of which had contributed to the eponymous

⁵⁹ See Jon P. Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790-1832* (London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987).

⁶⁰ Dugald Stewart, *The Collected Works of Dugald Stewart*, ed. by Sir William Hamilton, 10 vols. (Edinburgh: 1854-60), x, lxxi.

periodical later defended by Gilbert Burns.⁶¹ While it was ostensibly Stewart's references to Condorcet that ignited the controversy surrounding the *Elements*, Abercromby's reported anxiety over the 'unhinging of established institutions' at the behest of the speculations of cloistered intellectuals, is representative of a reactionary Scottish establishment which would have been equally unlikely to countenance Stewart's suppositions concerning the long term political consequences of the 'general diffusion of knowledge'. That Stewart's chastisement was contemporary with the Muir trial and the transportation of his fellow 'Political Martyrs', appears to suggest that Scottish intellectual culture arrived at a definitive watershed between 1793 and 1794. By contrast, the radical movement in England experienced something of a reprieve at this time, in the form of the acquittal of the London Corresponding Society radicals, John Thelwall, Horne Tooke, and Thomas Hardy in the treason trials of 1794.⁶²

But Stewart's own writing, in keeping with Connell's thesis that Scottish 'commercial humanism' was an always already 'compromised' formation, suggests that there may have been no isolable moment of retrenchment in terms of the philosophical approach to the diffusion of knowledge. Perhaps sensing the changing political winds, Stewart had already courted a more circumspect stance in the 'Account of the life and Writings of Adam Smith' that he delivered to the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1793. There, Stewart had insisted of works such as Smith's own *Wealth of Nations* that:

Such speculations, while they are more essentially and more extensively useful than any others, have no tendency to unhinge established institutions, or influence the passions of the multitude. The improvements they recommend are to be effected by means too gradual and slow in their operation, to warm the imaginations of any but of the speculative few; and in proportion as they are adopted, they consolidate the political fabric and enlarge the basis upon which it rests.⁶³

⁶¹ See D.D. McElroy, 'The Literary Clubs and Societies of Eighteenth Century Scotland, and their influence on the literary production of the period from 1700 to 1800' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1952), p.247.

⁶² See John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide 1793-1796* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.369-78.

⁶³ Adam Smith, *The Works of Adam Smith, LL.D., With and Account of His Life and Writings by Dugald Stewart*, ed. by Dugald Stewart, 5 vols. (London: 1811), v., p.483.

This position represents a striking *volte-face* with regards to the ‘public passions of men’, when compared to that which Smith himself had occupied in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. There is also a remarkable consonance between Abercromby’s reported reference to the ‘unhinging of established institutions’ in the 1794 letter from Lord Craig, and Stewart’s assurance that speculative works ‘have no tendency to unhinge established institutions’, perhaps reflecting the extent to which Stewart’s 1793 account of Smith’s work was designed to deflect suspicions of radicalism away from the economic theory of *The Wealth of Nations* and its author.

Following the retrenchment precipitated by the politics of the 1790s, Stewart’s Edinburgh University Lectures on political economy between 1800 and 1801 marked a new approach to both the content and social form of intellectual inquiry in Scotland. Stewart’s lectures effectively acted as a pedagogic conduit between Scottish Enlightenment thought and Romantic intellectual culture through the attendance of Henry Brougham and Francis Jeffrey: future founders of the *Edinburgh Review*. Indeed, Fontana argues that the beliefs expounded in Stewart’s Edinburgh lectures between 1799 and 1801 formed the core of the *Review*’s socio-economic ideology.⁶⁴ Alex Benchimol writes that:

[t]he reviewers functioned as Stewart’s moral and ideological disciples, translating the intelligence necessary for a smoothly operating and socially limited democracy to a bourgeois readership intently keeping watch on the cultural dangers created by the emerging industrial order; not least the alienation caused by the division of labour and its potential for inspiring social unrest in the ‘lower orders’. These concerns led to the development of a two-pronged strategy for national cultural reform, consisting of the cultural regulation of the lower orders and the middle-classes – the former via mass educational initiatives like the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (SDUK), and the latter through a discourse of cultural criticism aimed at addressing the moral concerns

⁶⁴ Fontana, p.4.

and social anxieties of its elite middle-class readership in an industrial age.⁶⁵

Benchimol argues that Stewart's pedagogic relationship to Jeffrey and his contemporaries fostered a new principle of 'cultural leadership' which sought to guide and consolidate a liberally minded middle-class reading audience in a time of political and social change, while diffusing the lower-class discontent that might otherwise threaten the cause of reform.

As Marilyn Butler notes, the 'disciplined Whiggism' of the *Edinburgh Review* made a virtue of its discriminating selectivity, and distanced itself from the miscellaneous approach of eighteenth-century periodicals like Anderson's *Bee*.⁶⁶ In this sense, what Winch describes as a movement towards, 'a narrower version of the scope of political economy, as well as to a judicious separation of questions of 'science' from those involved in the 'art' of legislation', consolidated the very disciplinary distinctions which allowed Jeffrey and Brougham to usher in a new era of British periodical culture in the 1800s.⁶⁷ Of course, in both content and form, the *Review* was even more radically distinct from periodicals like Mackenzie's *Mirror* and *Lounger*. But the contrast between *The Bee* and the *Edinburgh Review* is further illustrative of the way in which Stewart's reassessment of the cultural role of political economy also entailed a profound rethinking of the politics of the diffusion of knowledge. If political and economic freedom were now configured as ontologically discrete, rather than interlocking functions of improvement, the same was true to an extent of economic and intellectual commerce. This was a modification of Stewart's enthusiastic deference to the autonomous agency of print in the *Elements*, but it also drew partly on views on labouring-class education that he had canvassed in the same volume. Early on in the *Elements*, Stewart writes that in the case of the lower ranks, the task of education is to evenly develop the various faculties of the mind, so that they may, 'preserve amongst themselves that balance which is favourable to the tranquillity of their minds, and to a prudent and steady conduct in the limited sphere which is assigned to them' (*Elements* I 30). It is precisely towards the maintenance of 'tranquillity' as opposed to stirring 'the public passions of men' that James Currie's views

⁶⁵ Alex Benchimol, *Intellectual Politics and Cultural Conflict in the Romantic Period: Scottish Whigs, English Radicals and the Making of the British Public Sphere* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), p.105

⁶⁶ Butler, p.131.

⁶⁷ Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996), p.170.

on the instruction of the labourer in his 1800 ‘Prefatory Remarks on the Character and Condition of the Scottish Peasantry’ and ‘Life of Burns’ seem to be directed.

When his son Wallace attended Stewart’s lectures as a student of Edinburgh University, Currie wrote approvingly that: ‘[t]here is nothing like them, certainly, to be found anywhere; and they are alone worthy of a winter’s residence in Edinburgh.’⁶⁸ Indeed, Currie’s repeated emphasis in his ‘Prefatory Remarks’ on ‘industry and morals’ as the object of popular education, resonates strongly with Stewart’s designation in his lectures, of the purpose of lower-class instruction as the ‘means of encouraging among the body of the people habits of industry, and of regularity of morals’ (Currie I 6).⁶⁹ In the context of Stewart’s role in the gradual institution of a model of cultural pedagogy whose aim was to manage ‘the public passions’, Currie’s imperative to ‘restrain rather than impel’ concretises an implicit analogy between the tranquillity of the individual subject’s mind (in this case that of Burns) and the tranquillity of the polity at large.

3.6 ‘A partial and injudicious education’: James Currie, Gilbert Burns, and the refinement of taste

Currie’s suggestion that in many cases the goal of instruction might be ‘to curb the impulses of imagination, so that the passions also may be kept under controul’, evokes the previous decade’s anxieties towards the disruptive ‘public passions’ of an improperly regulated popular politics. Currie’s ‘Life of Burns’ explores the reflexive dynamic between the ‘genius of the times’ and the tranquillity of individual minds, through a compelling narration of Burns’s constitutional infirmity. I suggested earlier that James Anderson’s approval of Currie’s ‘Prefatory Remarks’ is partly reflective of its strong roots in an eighteenth-century literature of improvement. But it is perhaps significant that Currie’s ‘Life of Burns’ seems to have struck Anderson, who had previously written with an often polemical zeal on matters of rural improvement and industry, as being of equal interest to the ‘Remarks on the Scottish Peasantry’ that precede it. ‘Poor fellow!’ Anderson writes of Burns in his letter to Currie: ‘[h]e was born to experience pleasure and pains greatly beyond the common boundaries of human nature.’⁷⁰ Anderson seems

⁶⁸ *Memoir of James Currie*, ii, p.241, pp.319-20.

⁶⁹ Stewart, *The Collected Works*, viii, p.49.

⁷⁰ Correspondence of James Currie, Mitchell Library, Glasgow MS 1/1, 6pp, Envelope 18, No.13.

convinced by Currie's account of the poet's genius, which co-locates the seeds of both his creative talent and early death in what Currie describes as his 'inordinate sensibility'. This account of Burns's exceptional responsiveness to external emotional and sensory stimuli seems to accept without qualification, the poet's own statement of deference in 'The Vision' to 'fancy's *meteor-ray*,' while Currie's reference to Burns's 'inordinate sensibility' locates the sentimental regard for 'intense responsiveness' as a contributing factor to the poet's mental infirmity (K62 1.237).

Currie's focus on the issue of individual character in his 'Life of Burns' materialises the correlation between the moral constitution of the individual and the political integrity of society that was partly framed by the philosophical and political debates of the 1790s and earlier. In the *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, Stewart argues that the societal usefulness and happiness of an individual are best served by attending to the internal order of the mind. This object, he surmises, is best pursued by the even development of the various mental faculties, for: '[i]n consequence of an *exclusive* attention to the culture of the imagination, the taste, the reasoning faculty, or any of the active principles, it is possible that the pleasure of human life may be diminished, or its pains increased; but the inconveniences which are experienced in such cases, are not to be ascribed to education, but to a partial and injudicious education' (*Elements* I 28). Stewart proposes that the mind's various constituents – imagination, reason, taste – can be preserved in a state of peaceful coexistence by exercising them equally. In the case of the professional or legislator this implies recourse to a civic notion of learning, in which attainment in one vocation or science must be subordinated to the maintenance of one's participation in public affairs more generally. The education of society's professionals and upper classes should be designed to avoid the acquirement of particular 'habits' at the expense of others. To ensure the happiness of the lower ranks, all that is required is the maintenance of a fundamental equilibrium between the various elements of mind, which 'the benevolent appointment of Providence' often brings about unaided, because the poor lack the means and occasion to refine one faculty to the point where it might become dominant over the others (*Elements* I 29).

For Currie, this is precisely what Burns failed to achieve in the course of his own intellectual self-improvement and acquirement of habits. But the disorder which this produced in Burns might be taken as an indicator of the wider political disorder that could result from 'a partial and injudicious education' of the labouring classes more broadly.

Indeed, Currie seems to have partly subscribed to an analogical understanding of the relationship between individual pedagogy and the government of state. In a letter of 1791, he writes: ‘my notion of education in its earlier parts is like my idea of a national government: that it should be chiefly negative or preventive, so to speak, extending to as small an abridgement of liberty as possible, but absolute on the points on which it interferes; and that the faults attending it in general are, like the faults in governments in general, an interference where no interference is required, on a number of foolish points, to the injury of the human faculties, and to the neglect of those points which are essential.’⁷¹ Currie’s privileging of human nature has a dual role as the justification of his ‘preventive’ approach to both education and government. Towards the end of this lengthy sentence, the distinction between analogy and causality seems to blur, so that ‘the injury of the human faculties’ becomes the common error of both poor pedagogy and poor statesmanship. In relation to the earlier moral philosophy of John Locke, Kevis Goodman writes of the way in which a ‘materialist terminology of organs, nerves, and brains’ bleeds over from discussion of the subject’s intellectual and sensory constitution into that of the body politic.⁷² Although, as I discuss below, it inhabits a different epistemological environment, Currie’s ‘Life of Burns’ preserves this mutual overdetermination of moral and political language with its loaded vocabulary of ‘constitution’ ‘order’ and ‘tranquillity’. The shift from a metaphorical register of discrete bodily elements to one of structure and state, might be interpreted as a symptom of the movement from a ‘mechanistic’ to a ‘vitalist’ understanding of mind discussed below.⁷³ If part of Currie’s methodological strategy is to place his discussion of Burns’s life within the context of the wider social and material conditions of his origins, his analysis of Burns’s character also draws attention to the status of the Scottish peasantry as a constituency of individuated subjects and minds, as well as a statistically knowable social body, distancing his project from that of Sinclair’s *Statistical Account*.

Currie suggests that the events of the French Revolution may have contributed directly to Burns’s loss of internal tranquillity, arguing that ‘Burns foresaw not the might ruin that was to be the immediate consequence of an enterprize, which, on its

⁷¹ *Memoir of James Currie*, i, p.77.

⁷² Kevis Goodman, *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism: Poetry and the Mediation of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.53.

⁷³ Gavin Budge, ‘Introduction; Empiricism, Romanticism, and the Politics of Common Sense’, in *Romantic Empiricism; Poetics and the Philosophy of Common Sense, 1780-1830*, ed. by Gavin Budge (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007), pp.11-39 (p.30).

commencement, promised so much happiness to the human race' (I 214). For Currie, the collapse of Burns's political hopes and his chastisement for harbouring them by his employers at the board of excise 'aggravated those excesses which were soon to conduct him to an untimely grave' (I 217). Currie argues that Burns's constitutional infirmities were rendered doubly fatal because of the links between literary capacity and a volatile sensibility, and because literary activity itself does not entail the constancy of habit that might otherwise impose order on a turbulent mind. As Currie writes: '[t]he occupations of a poet are not calculated to strengthen the governing powers of the mind, or to weaken that sensibility which requires perpetual control, since it gives birth to the vehemence of passions as well as to the higher powers of imagination' (I 237). Moreover, Currie argues that Burns's other vocation during his later years, as an officer of the excise, was equally ill-suited to the task of normalising his excessive sensibility, as in the discharge of that duty: 'this high-minded poet was pursuing the defaulters of the revenue, among the hills and vales of Nithsdale, his roving eye wandering over the charms of nature, and *muttering his wayward fancies* as he moved along' (I 200).

Currie's conviction that a paralysing unbalancing of faculties is the constant danger presented by obeisance to an 'inordinate sensibility' might be read partly as an inflection of earlier eighteenth-century views on the constitution of self and mind. At the end of the first volume of his 1739 *Treatise of Human Nature*, David Hume famously arrives at an intellectual impasse occasioned by his relentless analysis of his own sensory and rational capacities. 'Where am I, or what?' Hume asks himself, 'I am confounded with all these questions, and begin to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable, environ'd with the deepest darkness, and utterly depriv'd of the use of every member and faculty.' Continuing however, Hume finds that:

since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium. Either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras.⁷⁴

For Hume, the self-annihilating conclusions of empirical scepticism are mitigated not by further speculation, but by the involuntary compulsions of human nature, under whose

⁷⁴ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 3 vols. (London: 1739-1740), i, p.467.

power he finds himself ‘necessarily determin’d to live, and talk, and act like other people in the common affairs of life.’ For Hume, it is the immanence of sociability – dining, playing backgammon and conversing with friends – that most effectively dispels his ‘philosophical melancholy’. As James A. Harris writes, ‘there is some reason to think that for Hume the sense of self is a thoroughly social artefact, the product entirely of sympathetic responses to the opinions and sentiments of others.’⁷⁵ This of course is the position which Adam Smith picks up in his 1759 *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, and is arguably that explored in the sentimental novels of Henry Mackenzie, where the selves of protagonists often appear as fleeting phenomena within opaque interpersonal encounters.

For Currie however, Burns’s demise stands as evidence of the potential imprudence of deferring the work of regulating one’s ‘morbid sensibility’ to the external vicissitudes of social interaction and sympathy – or to the regulatory power of a refined taste. Currie’s notion of character and of self-command is less dependent upon the influence of conversation, company and cultivation than those of Hume and Smith, and is instead heavily invested in the possibility of an innate self, and in the powers of the individual’s own faculties: especially the will. Of Burns, Currie concludes that: ‘[t]he fatal defect in his character lay in the comparative weakness of his volition, that superior faculty of the mind, which governing the conduct according to the dictates of the understanding, alone entitles it to be denominated rational’ (Currie I 236-237). As Leask has argued, the authority behind Currie’s diagnosis here is Adam Smith’s successor to the chair of moral philosophy at Glasgow University, Thomas Reid, whose 1764 *Inquiry in to the Human Mind, on the Principles of Common Sense* comprises a complete refutation of the associative ‘ideal system’ elaborated by Hume and John Locke.

Reid argues that: ‘no solid proof has ever been advanced of the existence of ideas ; that they are a mere fiction and hypothesis, contrived to solve the phaenomena of the human understanding; that they do not at all answer this end; and that this hypothesis of ideas or images of things in the mind, or in the sensorium, is the parent of those many paradoxes so shocking to common sense, and of that scepticism, which disgrace our philosophy of the mind, and have brought upon it the ridicule and contempt of sensible

⁷⁵ James A. Harris, ‘Reid and Hume on the Possibility of Character’, in *Character, Self, and Sociability in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. by Susan Manning and Thomas Ahnert (New York; Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp.67-85 (p.41).

men.’⁷⁶ In the *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, Stewart avers that Reid’s views ‘on this part of our constitution, undoubtedly form the most important accession which the philosophy of the human mind has received since the time of Mr. Locke’ (*Elements* I 88). For Reid, the force of ‘nature’ which Hume had experienced as a summoning back from the abyss of total scepticism is not the effect of society, but explicitly, the force of common sense manifest as the innately active and independent power of the mind. In a direct swipe at the above passage from Hume’s *Treatise*, Reid jibes that when sceptical empiricists: ‘condescend to mingle again with the human race, and to converse with a friend, a companion, or a fellow citizen, the ideal system vanishes; common sense, like an irresistible torrent, carries them along; and, in spite of all their reasoning and philosophy, they believe their own existence, and the existence of other things.’⁷⁷

Complex and rigorously analytical in its method, Reid’s project nonetheless sets out to demonstrate the limits of philosophical reasoning, particularly with regard to theological debate, and to show how these limits correspond to those of language, and reflect ‘the semiotic nature of perception’.⁷⁸ Reid’s work furnishes a model of mind that takes general principles of conception and moral reasoning for granted; an attractive starting point for a project like Stewart’s, in which the efficacy of social and political forms is determined by their adaptation to the nature of the human intellect, rather than *vice-versa*. In a 1788 essay for Thomas Christie’s *Analytical Review: or, History of Literature*, Currie too had commended Reid’s recently published *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, especially its critique of: ‘the sentiments of Dr. Smith, who in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, has attributed, as our author thinks, too much to the desire of esteem, in resolving our sentiments, respecting the virtues of self-government, into a regard to the opinion of men, and thus placing the shadow of virtue for the substance.’⁷⁹ For Currie, Smith’s apparent identification of our desire for the approval of others as the stimulus of our moral sense represented a turn of argument too casuistic to form the basis of a sound moral philosophy. Currie’s attempt here to replace Smith’s sympathy-based *Theory Moral*

⁷⁶ Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind, on the Principles of Common Sense* (Edinburgh; London: 1764), p.46.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p.65.

⁷⁸ Gavin Budge, ‘Introduction; Empiricism, Romanticism, and the Politics of Common Sense’, in *Romantic Empiricism; Poetics and the Philosophy of Common Sense, 1780-1830*, ed. by Gavin Budge (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007), pp.11-39 (p.30).

⁷⁹ [James Currie] ‘Art. 1. Reid on the Active Powers of Man,’ *Analytical Review*, 1 (August, 1788), pp.521-529 (p.524).

of *Sentiments* as the Scottish Enlightenment's authoritative account of self, with the 'active' mind of Reidian common sense, is perhaps reflective of a more general loss of confidence in a socially constituted form of identity and judgement, and even a desire to isolate the elite intellect from the prejudice and volatility of the crowd. Following the outbreak of the French Revolution a year later in 1789, this shift would become infused with an additional political urgency.

As Leask argues, Currie seems to have been particularly drawn to Reid's restoration of agency to the individual mind.⁸⁰ For Reid, the will, or 'the power to determine' is fundamentally distinct from mere inclination, and from the ungoverned impulses of 'hope, fear, joy, sorrow, all our appetites, passions and affections'.⁸¹ Moreover, without the will, the faculties of judgement and deliberation would be without purpose, as there would be no 'active power' to realise their products in the forms of intention and conduct.⁸² Rather than being steered by received impressions, or a desire to harmonize one's sentiments with those of others, Reidian self-command is voluntary; Leask argues that for Currie this offered an attractive refutation of the necessitarian position favoured by his radical English contemporaries.⁸³ It is also Reid's volitional, active model of mind that Currie brings to bear in his analysis of Burns's failure to regulate his own passions and appetites. Yet in doing so Currie is alert to the practical implications of exhorting the use of the will as a treatment for an 'inordinate sensibility'. As Anderson remarks of Burns and others of his literary bent in his letter to Currie: '[s]imple volition is too weak to call forth the energies of such persons.'⁸⁴ While Currie stakes much on the power of the individual will to maintain happiness and tranquillity then, he argues that the mode of employment and instruction in which the subject is occupied, is equally critical to the production of a balanced moral and bodily constitution:

[h]ence the advantages, even in a moral point of view, of studies of a severer nature, which while they inform the understanding, employ the volition, that regulating power of the mind, which like all our other faculties is strengthened by exercise, and on the superiority of which, virtue, happiness, and honourable fame, are wholly dependent, hence

⁸⁰ See Nigel Leask, 'Robert Burns and Scottish Common Sense Philosophy', in *Romantic Empiricism*, ed. by Budge, pp.64-87.

⁸¹ Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* (Edinburgh; London: 1788), pp.59-60.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p.66.

⁸³ Leask, 'Robert Burns and Scottish Common Sense Philosophy', p.77.

⁸⁴ Correspondence of James Currie, Mitchell Library, Glasgow MS 1/1, 6pp, Envelope 18, No.13.

also the advantage of regular and constant application of habits, so necessary to the support of order and virtue, and so difficult to be formed in the temperament of genius. (Currie I 239-40)

For Currie, the power of the will can be improved by frequent attention to difficult mental and physical tasks. This presents something of a paradox however, for to undertake this form of ‘exercise’ requires the disposal of no small power of volition to begin with. Some level of external agency is therefore required. In his *Essays*, Reid establishes a distinction between: ‘those powers of the mind which are original and natural, and which make a part of the constitution of the mind,’ and those ‘other powers, which are acquired by use, exercise, or study, which are not called faculties, but habits.’⁸⁵ As Burns’s case is made to demonstrate in Currie’s hands, the problem with habit is its uncertain valence: whereas virtuous habits can appear to render the will redundant as a guarantor of right action then, what Currie describes as ‘habits of a very different nature’, are equally capable of locking their subjects into cycles of dissipation and destruction (Currie I 220).

This presents a serious challenge to the model of intellectual improvement advocated by Gilbert Burns, which in contrast to the Reidian approach adopted by Currie, is heavily based on the associative understanding of mind followed by Locke, Hume and Smith. In his discussion of Burns’s ‘morbid sensibility’, Currie refers to Hume’s essay on ‘The Delicacy of Taste and Passion’, in which he writes of a debilitating sensitivity to both pleasure and sadness that deprives its possessor of self-command. Hume distinguishes between delicacy of passion and delicacy of taste, and concludes that ‘nothing is so proper to cure us of this delicacy of passion, as the cultivating of that higher and more refined taste’.⁸⁶ But for Currie this is a doubly undesirable solution, as it delivers the responsibility for regulating the passions into the hands of what is simply a cognate, perhaps equally volatile faculty, and one that creates its own problems in a lower-class context, by increasing the labourer’s aesthetic alertness to the relative hardship of their own social condition. For Currie, that which Mee describes as the possibility of ‘self-regulation’ via ‘a process of gentrification through taste’, represented an inadequate guarantor of the mental tranquillity of the labouring-class mind.⁸⁷ Particularly in the case of Burns’s ‘mind of a higher order’, the restraint of the passions might be better achieved by strengthening

⁸⁵ Reid, *Essays*, p.15

⁸⁶ David Hume, *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* (London; Edinburgh: 1758), p.4.

⁸⁷ Mee, *Enthusiasm*, p.80.

the autonomous power of the will, a faculty less susceptible to the unpredictable play of the imagination and senses.

Describing the process by which a labourer adjusts to the arduous nature of his work, and thereby addressing Currie's fear that [d]elicacy of taste may make many necessary labours irksome or disgusting', Gilbert recalls that '[i]t was a favourite remark of my brothers, "that there was no part of the constitution of our nature to which we were more indebted than that by which "*custom makes things familiar and easy*," (a copy Mr. Murdoch used to set us to write)' (*Prose* 33). The formative role of custom, as perceived here by Robert and Gilbert Burns and their childhood tutor John Murdoch, plays a crucial role in a theory of instruction that is heavily based on the power of habituation. Gilbert further reflects that:

I am of opinion that if their minds are early and deeply imprest with a sense of the dignity of man as such, with the love of independence, and of industry, economy and temperance, as the most obvious means of making themselves independent and the virtues to be derived from the perusal of books calculated to improve the mind and refine the taste, without any danger of becoming more unhappy in their situation or discontent with it. (*Prose* 34)

Gilbert appeals here to the power of 'impression' to fix notions and habits of virtue in the mind of the labourer. But in doing so, Gilbert is basing his argument on what Reid names as 'a fundamental principle of the ideal system, that every object of thought must be an impression, or an idea, that is, a faint copy of some preceding impression.'⁸⁸ For Reid, this theory was nonsensical, because it implied the existence of ideas as physical things, proximate to atomic particles, which drift within the void, potentially independently from the actions of any thinking mind. Gilbert draws on what is essentially a different epistemic model to that on which Currie bases his arguments, and in that sense limits the authority of his own views on intellectual improvement as a riposte to those of his brother's biographer.

⁸⁸ Reid, *Inquiry*, p.59.

3.7 ‘The abstraction of his thoughts from the business of agriculture’: the argument of Currie’s ‘Life of Burns’

For Currie, the supremacy of the will over the appetites and the passions might in some cases only be secured through disciplinary force: the imposition of certain pedagogic or vocational conditions. This denotes a radical departure from the emphatically recreational, often sentimentally inclined model of intellectual improvement that Burns himself had both practised and advocated. It’s also a line of reasoning that underlines the importance of Currie’s discussion of the Scottish peasantry’s virtuous habits in his ‘Prefatory Remarks’. These are for Currie the upshot of topographical and institutional factors – *habit as habitat* – whose influence must be replaced by a more systematic approach to lower-class education throughout the Union, in order to reflect the flow of a labour market that increasingly draws not only Scots, but the rural poor of all four British nations into manufacturing communities.

In translating Reid’s theory of mind into a practicable disciplinary model, Currie may have been influenced by the methods of his own former teacher, Dr George Chapman, the master of Dumfries grammar-school, and author of a 1774 *Treatise on Education*.⁸⁹ Throughout his *Treatise*, Chapman emphasises the importance of intellectual and bodily exercise in order to instil in children the characteristics of regularity and order. Many of Chapman’s arguments closely match those later made by Currie. For example, Chapman avers that: ‘[t]he body, when softened by indolence, or mistaken tenderness, enfeebles the mind, relaxes its vigour, and unfits it for every great or difficult undertaking’.⁹⁰ Currie appears to apply a Reidian gloss to this admonition when he writes in his ‘Life of Burns’ that: ‘[a]s the strength of the body decays, the volition fails; in proportion as the sensations are soothed and gratified, the sensibility increases; and morbid sensibility is the parent of indolence, because while it impairs the regulating power of the mind, it exaggerates all the obstacles to exertion’ (Currie I 252). Currie’s recourse to pedagogic discipline and exercise as a way of normalising the bodily and mental faculties to deliver Reid’s voluntaristic model of intellectual and moral probity, may owe no small debt to the practices and writing of his own former teacher. Of further relevance to the broader social and political implications of Currie’s discussion of instruction in his

⁸⁹ *Memoir of James Currie*, ii, p.21.

⁹⁰ George Chapman, *A Treatise on Education, With a Sketch of the Author’s Method*, 2nd edn (London: 1774), p.6.

‘Prefatory Remarks’ and ‘Life of Burns’, is the section in Chapman’s *Treatise* on ‘the nature and degrees of Education necessary to the Lower Ranks of Mankind.’ There, Chapman asserts that those, ‘destined for employments which require bodily strength, such as labourers, servants, and the greatest part of manufacturers, need not a very extensive education.’⁹¹ But Chapman also writes that:

the rest of their time ought not to be spent in idleness, or unprofitable diversion. Their health, indeed, requires exercise: but that exercise should not be left entirely to their own choice; it should be directed by their parents and teachers, and regulated in such a manner, that, while it contributes to the strength and vigour of the body, it may correspond to the way of life for which they are designed, and serve as an easy preparation for it [...] habits of idleness, so hurtful to the morals of individuals, and so destructive to the state, would be prevented; in their stead habits of industry would be introduced among the common people; and industry, diffusing its salutary influence over the kingdom, would furnish the state with a healthy, virtuous, and happy race.⁹²

In Chapman’s *Treatise* as in Currie’s ‘Prefatory Remarks on the Character and Condition of the Scottish Peasantry’, the goal of popular education is named as the diffusion of ‘habits of industry’. The anxiety expressed here towards the prospect of the labourer falling into a state of unmediated ease when outwith the influence of pedagogy or work, contrasts starkly with Burns’s own valorisation of sentimental ‘counterpoise’ in the preface to the Kilmarnock Edition.

While they cannot have shared the model of mind elaborated in Reid’s *Essays*, Chapman and Currie’s arguments concerning the need for an external system of discipline to secure mental and bodily health in cases where ‘choice’ might be an unreliable arbiter, nonetheless exhibit some striking parallels with one another. In offering up the imposition of exercise as the cure for a lack of moral and physical vigour, Chapman’s version of labouring-class pedagogy might be seen to closely pre-empt, just as Currie’s would later answer, the question Adam Smith poses to civil society in *The Wealth of Nations*, when he describes the way in which the menial operative subjected to a high degree of the division

⁹¹ Ibid, p.71.

⁹² Ibid, pp.72-73.

of labour: ‘has no occasion to exert his understanding, or to exercise his invention in finding out expedients for removing difficulties which never occur [and] naturally looses, therefore, the habit of such exertion’. Part of Currie’s solution here is to propose a much narrower compass in terms of the content of labouring-class education, basing it more on the ‘penmanship of Butterworth, and the arithmetic of Cocker’ than on the tasteful essays of *The Mirror* and *The Lounger*, while simultaneously increasing its emphasis on discipline and the inculcation of regulatory habits. In this however, there is a notable departure from Smith’s position on the value of discipline and exercise in *The Wealth of Nations*. There, ‘[r]egularity, order, and prompt obedience to command’ are named as the desirable attributes of the professional soldier; a need created by the enfeeblement of the general populace by the division of labour, but whose qualities are not yet re-imposed onto the rest of society as criteria of virtue (WN II 302).

As his above reference to the advantages of ‘studies of a severer nature’ indicates however, Currie does not sanction the abandonment of all higher thought as a way of preemptively dispelling the quagmire of ‘morbid sensibility’ with which Burns had been afflicted. Thomas Reid himself, while scathing with regard to what he saw as the ‘excess of refinement’ characteristic of certain forms of philosophical disquisition, nonetheless recommended the exercise of reflection as the most reliable way of investigating the operations of our own faculties.⁹³ Concluding his *Inquiry in to the Human Mind, on the Principles of Common Sense*, Reid proposes that it is by reflection, through which we observe and become conscious of the workings of our own minds, ‘that we can form just and accurate notions of those operations.’⁹⁴ For Currie, Burns was accordingly closest to escaping the orbit of his appetitive, melancholic tendencies when he acted on the authority of his own reflections. This form of reflection is however very different from the sentimental ‘counterpoise’ canvassed by Burns in his Preface to the Kilmarnock Edition and in his advocacy of recreational, often sentimental reading. Currie writes that having taken the lease of a farm at Ellisland in Dumfriesshire in 1787, where he planned to establish himself and his family, ‘[t]he situation in which Burns now found himself was calculated to awaken reflection’ (Currie I 193). On the basis of a contemporary entry to his *Commonplace book*, Currie writes that Burns now resolved to: ‘abandon the gaiety and dissipation of which he had been too much enamoured; to ponder seriously on the past,

⁹³ Reid, *Inquiry*, p.58.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p.502.

and to form virtuous resolutions respecting the future' (I 194). Currie subsequently writes that:

[u]nder the impulse of these reflections, Burns immediately engaged in rebuilding the dwelling house on his farm, which, in the state he found it, was inadequate to the accommodation of his family. On this occasion, he himself resumed at times the occupation of a labourer, and found neither his strength nor his skill impaired [...] sentiments of independence buoyed up his mind, pictures of domestic content and peace rose on his imagination; and a few days passed away, as he himself informs us, the most tranquil, if not the happiest, which he had ever experienced. (I 196)

In a style redolent of Stewart's views on the purposes of intellectual improvement, tranquillity and happiness appear as Burns's reward for briefly resisting his 'inordinate sensibility' through the rigours of bodily labour. I would argue that at this point in Currie's 'Life', despite Currie's earlier protestations of documentary evidentialism, we might discern the emergence of something approaching a didactic point. For Currie, Burns's greatest opportunity for success did not arise with the publication of the Kilmarnock or Edinburgh Editions of his *Poems*, but with the chance at 'independence' offered by the lease of the farm at Ellisland. Burns's true misfortune, and terminal decline, as Currie has it, commenced when he, 'began to view his farm with dislike and despondence, if not with disgust' (Currie I 199). In this regard, Burns might be seen to have suffered the consequences of refining his taste rather than strengthening his will. For Currie, the grave result of Burns's disdain for agricultural toil was the loss of a source regulative 'constant application'. Burns's fate demonstrates for Currie that independence is attainable for the peasant through the application of talent and relentless exertion, but also that without the continuous exercise of self-command, such efforts might fail even in their final stages. Part of Currie's aim here seems to be to dissuade others of Burns's social background from attempting to emulate his rise to fame through literary acquirement rather than strict economy and 'habits of industry'. Strategies of social aspiration are however of secondary concern within Currie's discussion of labouring-class education. More urgent is the establishment of tranquillity in the minds of the majority, who are 'doomed to pass their lives in the station in which they were born'.

3.8 ‘A virtuous and enlightened populace’: literature and intellectual improvement in the 1800s

The element of Currie’s ‘Life of Burns’ that secures its exemplarity within wider discussions of the changing socio-economic conditions of labouring-class existence in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, is precisely this attribution of the poet’s ultimate downfall to ‘the abstraction of his thoughts from the business of agriculture’ (Currie I 205). Here, Currie is partly marshalling the eighteenth-century discourse of agricultural improvement invoked in his ‘Prefatory Remarks on the Character and Condition of the Scottish Peasantry’. In his 1776 ‘prose georgic’, *The Gentleman Farmer*, Henry Home, Lord Kames writes that:

[a]griculture corresponds to that degree of exercise, which is the best preservative of health. It requires no hurtful fatigue, on the one hand, nor indulges, on the other, indolence, still more hurtful [...] A gentleman thus occupied, becomes daily more active, and is daily gathering knowledge: as his mind is never suffered to languish, he is secure against the disease of low spirits.⁹⁵

What is for Kames a source of gentlemanly civic virtue, becomes for Currie a pedagogic model for the tenant farmer or rural labourer. According to Currie’s idealised notion of rural labour, the perfect palliative for Burns’s constitutional infirmity had always been readily to hand in the form of the ‘regular and constant occupation’ of agriculture (Currie I 238). But this conclusion may also have carried some worrying implications for the industrialising and urbanising Britain of the early-nineteenth century. Christopher Whatley writes of rural eighteenth-century Scotland’s changing society that, ‘small tenants, sub-tenants and cottars who no longer had a place in the capitalist farm structure left the countryside for the towns and villages to engage in industrial work.’⁹⁶ Agriculture could no longer be relied upon as a form of corrective exercise universally available to the lower classes of the period. That there might for this reason be little singular about Burns’s case, lends

⁹⁵ Henry Home, Lord Kames, *The Gentleman Farmer, Being an attempt to improve agriculture, by subjecting I tot the test of rational principles* (Edinburgh: 1776), xv.

⁹⁶ Christopher A. Whatley, *Scottish Society 1707-1830: Beyond Jacobitism, Towards Industrialisation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2000), p.81.

an urgency to Currie's observations on the need for a programmatic labouring-class pedagogy in his 'Life of Burns'. It also sheds further light on the significance of his praise for Scotland's parochial school system in a series of 'Prefatory Remarks', written: 'not with the view of their being read by Scotchmen only, but also by natives of England, and of other countries where the English language is spoken or understood'. Currie's discussion of the benefits of the Scottish parish school stand not only as an explanation of Burns's literary accomplishments, but as an assertion of the need to develop a widespread system of education to mitigate the effects of manufacturing and urbanisation on a growing British proletariat.

Currie was not alone among turn of the century writers in addressing the moral condition of the Scottish lower classes as a pressing social and political question, though others did not necessarily share his mixed biographical and historical approach. For Fiona Price, the educationalist and novelist Elizabeth Hamilton effected 'the application of both Common sense philosophy and the association of ideas to a fully-fledged pedagogic theory of social improvement.'⁹⁷ Hamilton's 1808 novel, *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* depicts the attempted reform of a family of Scottish tenant farmers, the MacClartys, by the conscientious Mrs Mason. Indolent and filthy, the MacClartys – whose name derives from a Scots word for 'dirty' – represent the comic antithesis of the diligent labourers praised in Currie's 'Prefatory Remarks': their common refrain when confronted with their responsibility for their own condition is that they 'cou'dna be fash'd' to improve it.⁹⁸ Mrs Mason is eventually unable to divert the McClartys from the destructive course that their habitual negligence has prepared for them. Her efforts do however yield success in the surrounding community, particularly her attempts to reform the local parish school, which, we are told becomes highly proficient, 'in improving the hearts and disposition of the youth of both sexes, and in confirming them in habits of industry and virtue'.⁹⁹ The production of 'habits of industry and virtue' is likewise the desired outcome of Dugald Stewart and Currie's proposed schemes of popular

⁹⁷ Fiona Price, 'Elizabeth Hamilton's *Letters on Education*: Common Sense Alternatives to Scepticism and Their Aesthetic Consequences' in *Romantic Empiricism: Poetics and the Philosophy of Common Sense, 1780-1830*, ed. by Gavin Budge (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007), pp.88-111 (p.107).

⁹⁸ Elizabeth Hamilton, *The Cottagers of Glenburnie and Other Educational Writing*, ed. by Pam Perkins (Glasgow: The Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1808, repr. 2010), passim.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p.214.

education, reflecting the three writers' shared grounding in the philosophy of Thomas Reid. Like Currie, Hamilton was also closely associated with Stewart.¹⁰⁰

But in contrast to Currie, Price points out that Hamilton is willing to place stock in the faculty of taste as an arbiter of morality. Price argues that for Hamilton, taste represents a form of "attention", which: '[d]irected by the will [...] improves the quality of one's perceptions, enabling the formation of correct associations and the development of reason, in the same way as in Reid's philosophy sustained attention develops perceptual acuity'.¹⁰¹ For Price, the condition of Hamilton's McClarty family might be interpreted as a result of their 'lack of taste'.¹⁰² If for Currie, the harsh necessities of labour render taste an impediment, Hamilton is alert to the opposite implication, that taste prevents the lower classes from neglecting their hygiene and moral duties.

As Price notes, this position requires an obsessive attention to 'the boundary between taste and fashion', a distinction which Hamilton had explored in her first printed piece of writing, an anonymous essay for Henry Mackenzie's periodical, *The Lounger* in 1785.¹⁰³ There, Hamilton writes as Almeria, a young woman who learns in typically sentimental style, 'to derive a happiness from the humble consciousness of superior virtue' as opposed to the 'flattery' lavished on the fashionable (*Lounger* 181-184). Hamilton's trajectory as an author is suggestive in its movement from the polite periodical essay of the 1780s to the didactic novel of the 1800s. Hamilton's *Cottagers* might be seen as an attempt to steer a popular taste for the 'moral fiction' of *The Mirror* and *The Lounger* towards texts that place less of a burden of interpretation than that entailed by sentimental literature, on the potentially unreliable faculties of an unknown reader.

The ambivalent outcome of Hamilton's *Cottagers of Glenburnie* seems to imply that while the parish school has the potential to be, as Currie argues, the site of a carefully managed popular pedagogy, the efforts of the improver will be defeated if exercise and regularity cannot be extended to the domestic sphere itself. Hamilton dedicates her novel to the anti-Jacobin Whig propagandist Hector MacNeill, whose didactic 1795 poem *Scotland's Skaith*, laments Robert Burns's posthumous influence as an emblem of lower-

¹⁰⁰ See Budge, pp.26-27.

¹⁰¹ Price, p.100.

¹⁰² Ibid, p.102.

¹⁰³ Price, p.105; *The Lounger* 46 (December 17, 1785), attributed in Clare Grogan, *Politics and Genre in the Works of Elizabeth Hamilton, 1756-1816* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), p.27.

class dissipation, conviviality and radical politics. MacNeill's poem mirrors the contemporary efforts of Hannah More to displace a dubious melange of inexpensive popular literature with moral works through her *Cheap Repository Tracts* (1795-98). For popular moralists, Burns's legacy represented a dubious inheritance: while it had furnished them with 'The Cotter's Saturday', a kind of moral and domestic georgic whose ideal they touted as a model of improvement for the rural lower classes, other elements of the poet's life and works, including his political radicalism, seemed to have made an artistic self-justification out of intemperance.

While Gilbert Burns draws largely on eighteenth-century constructions of taste and politeness in his response to Currie's 'Life', he also advances a more programmatic understanding of the moral function of literature, comparable to that pursued by his contemporaries. In apparent reference to the political anxieties of the previous decade, Gilbert writes:

To those who are afraid that the improvement of the minds of the common people might be dangerous to the state, or the established order of society, I would remark, that turbulence and commotion are certainly very inimical to the feelings of a refined mind. Let the matter be brought to the test of experience and observation of what description of people are mobs and insurrections composed? Are they not universally owing to the want of enlargement and improvement of mind among the common people? [...] I suppose few of the common people who were to be found in such societies, had the education and turn of mind I have been endeavouring to recommend. (*Prose* 34-35)

Gilbert not only begins to suggest the potential of literary taste as a tool for distinguishing the polite from the vulgar, he arguably broaches the ideological function of literature as a system for the inculcation of hegemonic values that will forestall revolt against the current social and political order. More intriguingly, towards the end of his letter, Gilbert delineates his plan for a comprehensive system of pedagogy, in which teachers, their salaries increased to 'make parish-schools worth the attention of men fitted for the important duty of that office', would play a key role. It seems probable that Gilbert has in mind the close ties between John Murdoch and the Burnes household, as well as the

recreational reading enabled by the Ayr Library Society and the Clubs at Mauchline and Tarbolton, when he writes:

I would then have a sort of high english class established, not only for the purpose of teaching the pupils to read in that graceful and agreeable manner that might make them fond of reading, but to make them understand what they read, and discover the beautys of the author in composition and sentiment. I would have established in every parish a small circulating library consisting of the books which the young people had read extracts from in the collections they had at school, and any other books well calculated to refine the mind, improve the moral feelings, recommend the practise of virtue, and communicate such knowledge as might be useful or suitable to the labouring classes of men. I would have the school-master act as librarian, and in recommending books to his young friends, formerly his pupils, and letting in the light of the upon their young minds, he should have the assistance of the minister. If once such education were become general, the low delights of the public house, and other scenes of riot and depravity should be contemned and neglected, while industry, and to, cleanliness and every virtue which taste and independence of mind could recommend, would prevail and flourish. Thus possessed of a virtuous and enlightened populace, with the high delight I should consider my native country as the head of all the nations of the earth, ancient or modern. (*Prose* 35)

Gilbert's far reaching scheme for the educational reform of Scotland is of course entirely speculative, but it might partly be interpreted as an expansion of the form of literary pedagogy that he had encountered through Arthur Masson's *Collection of English Prose and Verse for The Use of Schools*, for McIlvanney, 'a kind of junior version of the Belles Lettres courses taught by Hugh Blair and others in Scottish

universities.’¹⁰⁴ On a number of levels, Gilbert’s proposal also reflects the growing significance that the notion of literature was coming to acquire within a developing Romantic theory of culture. In *Literature, Education and Romanticism*, Alan Richardson writes of the way in which ‘the Romantic era sees not only the emergence of a regulated “popular” literature, but also of “Literature” as such, a cultural institution predicated on a canonical set of “imaginative” works, disseminated through schools and centralized publishing venues, and managed by a professional group of critics and interpreters.’¹⁰⁵ In this light, Gilbert’s response to Currie’s ‘Life of Burns’, while grounded in a philosophical model that the latter perceived to be obsolete and inadequate to the task of theorizing the regulation of self in modern society, nonetheless appears the more thoroughly forward looking in the way that it anticipates the literary turn of the nineteenth century, which culminated in Matthew Arnold’s 1869 *Culture and Anarchy*. But Gilbert’s vision falls short of identifying the growing significance of the critic and author as the arbiters of taste and morality within the newly autonomous field of Romantic literature, and devolves that work instead to the local figures of the librarian, parish school teacher and minister. In this sense, Gilbert’s projection perhaps reflects the model of intellectual improvement in which it is rooted: diffusive, associative, lacking the unitary power of a ‘will’. In the case of both the labouring and middle-class reader, the early nineteenth century would see the rise of a more robustly disciplinary approach to the cultivation of the taste and intellect.

¹⁰⁴ McIlvanney, p.47.

¹⁰⁵ Richardson, p.31.

4

Leisure, Improvement, and Pastoral Optimism in the Early Writing of James Hogg

Here we're charm'd wi' works o' Nature,
 Craggy cliff, an' lonely glen;
 There I oft stood like a statue,
 Wond'ring at the works o' men.

James Hogg, 'Willie an' Keatie, A Pastoral', in *Scottish Pastorals, Poems, Songs, &c.*, Edinburgh, 1801¹

[...]the face of an agricultural country cannot be very kindling to the sense or imagination. It is all subordinated to separate and distinct uses; one great end, namely production, is constantly obtruded on the mind among all the shews of scenery and that alone must be fatal to all play of imagination.

John Wilson, in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 1819²

A shepherd has a great deal of leisure; a husbandman, in the rude state of husbandry, has some; an artificer or manufacturer has none at all.

Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (II 299)

¹James Hogg, *Scottish Pastorals: Poems, Songs, &c. Mostly Written in the Dialect of the South*, ed. by Elaine Petrie (Stirling: Stirling University Press, 1988), pp.13-20, ll.53-56. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

²Wilson, 'Some Observations on the Poetry of the Agricultural and that of the Pastoral Districts of Scotland, Illustrated by a Comparative View of the genius of Burns and the Ettrick Shepherd', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 4:23 (1819), p.523.

4.1 The Ettrick Shepherd and the division of labour

Writing for *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1819, John Wilson compares Robert Burns to 'The Ettrick Shepherd', James Hogg, Wilson's fellow *Blackwood's* contributor and the magazine's resident peasant poet. Entitled 'Some Observations on the Poetry of the Agricultural and that of the Pastoral Districts of Scotland, Illustrated by a Comparative View of the genius of Burns and the Ettrick Shepherd', Wilson's essay purports to explore: 'the difference of poetical feeling and genius in an agricultural and pastoral state of life, - exemplified as that difference appears to be in the poetry of Burns, and his only worthy successor, the Ettrick Shepherd.'³ Wilson identifies Burns's poetry as insufficiently visionary, and attributes this to his exposure to the division of labour: a prerequisite of agricultural improvement, which enervates the intellect and imagination by splitting off their powers and allotting them 'to separate and distinct uses'.⁴ Recalling Adam Smith's reflections upon the dangers presented to both the lower ranks and the polity at large by the division of labour and applying them to the sphere of agricultural production, Wilson reflects that: 'the knowledge which men thus situated are likely to wish to attain, is of a narrow and worldly kind, immediately connected with the means of subsistence, and not linked with objects fitted to awaken much enthusiastic or imaginative feelings'.⁵ In an agricultural, as opposed to a pastoral state of life, the worker's relationship to landscape and nature is instrumental rather than intimate, resulting in an inferior quality of poetic feeling.

In contrast to Burns, Hogg is posited in Wilson's essay as the representative of a primitive pastoral society, in which the demands of economic progress have not yet curtailed the innate poetical feeling of the lower classes: that fountainhead of the cultural nationalism of which *Blackwood's* was the self-styled exponent. Indeed, throughout a literary career which was catalysed by the antiquarian project of Walter Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, Hogg was frequently represented as having emerged from a condition of historical stasis, removed from processes of economic change. In the above extract from Hogg's 1801 collection, *Scottish Pastorals, Poems, Songs, &c, Mostly Written in the Dialect of the South*, a shepherd describes his descent from a mountainous sublime of peak and crag, to a valley of human industry and civilization. Surveying the

³ Ibid, p.521.

⁴ Ibid, p.523.

⁵ Ibid.

spectacle of improvement, Hogg's speaker describes himself as being 'like a statue', motionless and immutable in the face of a changing physical and economic landscape, a figure for the Romantic 'anachronism' discussed by Chandler.⁶ The simile anticipates the way in which Hogg's occupation as a shepherd would facilitate his portrayal as a representative of an archaic pastoral state, both at his own hands and those of his *Blackwood's* associates.

Wilson's piece appears symptomatic of what Ian Duncan has called, 'a major shift in Edinburgh literary politics from the Moderate Whig, neo-enlightenment regime of the *Edinburgh Review* to the new Romantic Tory dispensation of *Blackwood's Magazine*.'⁷ This intellectual coup, Duncan continues, 'carries a paradigmatic force in the pitting of political economy – the scientific project of the *Edinburgh Review* – against the Blackwoodian reaction formation [...] of national culture.'⁸ The legacy of Robert Burns and the critical reception of his heir apparent, James Hogg, formed the battleground upon which the Blackwoodians pitted their potent combination of, in Duncan's words, 'Schlegel's schema of national literary history and (behind that) Schiller's "aesthetic education" with the counterrevolutionary tropes of an organic constitutionalism devised by Edmund Burke,' against the then hegemonic synthesis of political economy and civic judgement represented by the *Edinburgh Review*.⁹ In Wilson's essay, Hogg's accession to the post of Scotland's national poet, displacing Burns, is the corollary of *Blackwood's* usurpation of the place of the *Edinburgh Review* within Scotland's literary public sphere. According to Duncan, the ideological counterpoise established between post-Enlightenment Edinburgh's two dominant periodicals gives: 'institutional definition to the discursive opposition between social science and "culture" that opens with the Lake poets' repudiation of Malthus'.¹⁰ For John Wilson, the act of comparing the two major Scottish poets of the immediate and preceding periods offers an opportunity to shift the conflict between national culture and political economy towards an aesthetic territory in which the former is at a rhetorical advantage. Wilson presents as virtues the qualities of enthusiasm and imagination, the very forces which Currie had exhorted the labouring-class talent to

⁶ James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), p.108.

⁷ Ian Duncan, *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p.49.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.48.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.49.

‘restrain rather than to impel,’ and locates a potential source of social cohesion in a national culture expressed through the transporting powers of the individual genius (Currie I 239). This formula of course usurps the authority of sentimentalism and sensibility as cyphers of literary talent, rendering obsolete Mackenzie’s famous late eighteenth-century construct: the ‘Heaven-taught ploughman’.

But Wilson’s article also discloses Blackwoodian Romanticism’s deep roots in the conjectural history and political-economic theory of the Scottish Enlightenment. Agricultural improvement, Wilson seems to suggest, has been destructive of the innate poetic disposition of the Scottish peasantry, fixing their energies upon the imperative of ‘production’, and eroding their native ‘depth of moral feeling’ by requiring them to perform repetitive physical tasks.¹¹ Wilson’s argument advances a dialectic of improvement and Romanticism, the two elements of which, it is implied, are respectively embodied by the *Edinburgh Review* and *Blackwood’s Magazine* and to an extent, by the figures of Burns and Hogg themselves. But the authority of his argument rests heavily on a Smithian notion of the division of labour, and the anxieties surrounding its apparent tendency to debase or narrow the intellectual and moral lives of those subject to it.

Given its title, Wilson’s essay has strangely little to say about pastoral as a literary genre. Instead, Wilson emphasises Hogg’s claim to the laureateship of ‘the Court of Faëry’, mainly on the basis of his 1813 collection *The Queen’s Wake*, but also his earlier collections of ballad imitations and songs, *The Mountain Bard* (1807) and *The Forest Minstrel* (1810).¹² It is in keeping with its author’s later avowal that he, ‘had hopes long ago that it had been consigned to eternal oblivion’, that Wilson makes no reference in his argument to *Scottish Pastorals*, Hogg’s first collection of poetry. In his ‘Memoir of the Author’s Life’, Hogg recalls paying an Edinburgh bookseller to print a thousand copies of a pamphlet of his own poems and songs during a trip to market.¹³ Hogg presents the episode as a premature foray into the literary marketplace before moving on to describe how the ballad imitations of Scott’s *Minstrelsy* compelled him to produce his own.¹⁴ Insulated from the main narrative of Hogg’s literary career by both author and critic, *Scottish Pastorals* – the work of a professional shepherd and amateur poet – represents a

¹¹ Wilson, p.523.

¹² Wilson, p.529.

¹³ James Hogg, *Altrive Tales: Collected among the Peasantry of Scotland and from Foreign Adventurers*, ed. by Gillian Hughes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), p.21.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

crucial but anomalous moment in Hogg's corpus, materialising germinal aesthetic and thematic concerns which would reach maturity in his later writing, but also revealing potentialities which fit uneasily with the Blackwoodian cause for which Hogg is claimed by Wilson in 1819. My aim here is to reassert the significance of the *Scottish Pastorals* for our understanding of Hogg's writing, by placing them within the context of his contemporary engagement with the literature of agricultural improvement, represented by Hogg's accounts of his Highland tours of 1802, 1803 and 1804. As I argue below, the tours evince a distinctive improving pastoral idealism, or a discursive fusion of socio-economic optimism with the aesthetics of landscape description and the pastoral idyllic, that inflects the nascent Romanticism of Hogg's *Scottish Pastorals* in a manner incompatible with the binary of improvement and visionary lyricism later formulated by Wilson in *Blackwood's Magazine*. Despite Wilson's claims to the contrary, the Ettrick Shepherd, like the 'Heaven-taught ploughman', was emphatically a product of intellectual and agricultural improvement.

4.2 Hogg's paths to improvement

As I argued in the previous chapter, the events of the 1790s and an underlying movement towards disciplinarity had begun to profoundly alter the scope and texture of labouring-class intellectual improvement and the diffusion of knowledge in Scotland. While Wilson's Romantic reconstruction of the distinction between Burns and Hogg as an issue of visionary genius appears to flaunt Currie's Whiggish anxieties towards allowing the labourer's literary imagination full reign, it also implicitly heeds his broader caution against the refinement of the labouring-class intellect. For Wilson, Hogg's poetry discloses his innate genius, rather than his pursuit of intellectual improvement. This view of course belies the reality of Hogg's early attempts to establish himself as a writer in Edinburgh in the early 1810s. During this period, Hogg became involved in the circle of James Gray, former school-master to Robert Burns's children in Dumfries.¹⁵ Gray not only introduced Hogg to Gilbert Burns, but according to Gillian Hughes, was 'at the centre of a literary culture for those with more intelligence and talent than money and social position,' and in 1807 had formed an association at whose meetings papers on literary

¹⁵ See James A. Mackay, *A Biography of Robert Burns* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1992), pp.665-667.

subjects were delivered and subsequently debated.¹⁶ In his famous ‘Memoir of the Author’s Life’, Hogg recounts his involvement in a public debating society known as the Forum, during his time in Edinburgh in the early 1810s. Of those with whom he shared the organisational and oratorical duties of the Edinburgh Forum, Hogg would later write:

I have scarcely known any society of young men who have all got so well on. Their progress has been singular; and, I am certain, people may say what they will, that they were greatly improved by their weekly appearances in the Forum [...] Of this I am certain, that I was greatly the better for it, and might safely say I never was at school before. I might and would have written the “Queen’s Wake” had the Forum never existed, but without the weekly lessons that I got there I could not have succeeded as I did.¹⁷

Hogg identifies his involvement with the public of the Edinburgh Forum as one of the mediums of his literary self-formation and describes the society as a platform for ‘improvement’, understood both in terms of worldly advancement, and the general refinement of the faculties. We might here recall James Currie’s recommendation in his ‘Life of Burns’, prompted by his account of the Tarbolton Bachelor’s Club, that debating societies should not exceed ‘seven to twelve persons’ and that the ‘powers of private conversation are to be employed, not those of public debate’ (Currie I 116-117). In contrast, Hogg’s Forum appears to have been a large organisation, specifically oriented towards ‘public debate’ and with its events announced and reported on in newspapers.¹⁸

Earlier, Hogg had edited and written for *The Spy* (1810-11), a polite essay periodical based upon those of Addison and Mackenzie. That Gilbert Burns’s defence of the suitability of *The Mirror* and *Lounger* as reading material for the lower classes was by this point an appendix to the collected edition of his late brother’s *Works*, is at least suggestive of a potential resonance between Hogg’s literary ambitions at this point in his career, and the periodical milieu which had informed both Burns’s own reading, and his approach to the intellectual improvement of the labouring classes. Such factors suggest the extent to which, despite his later claim to exceptionalism as a labouring-class Scottish author of national prominence, Hogg’s making as a writer was based around his pursuit of

¹⁶ Gillian Hughes, *James Hogg: A Life* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p.93.

¹⁷ *Altrive Tales*, p.28.

¹⁸ See *Caledonian Mercury*, 20 June, 1811.

intellectual improvement through literary learning: a path that had also been followed by Burns. This commonality reinscribes the importance of Hogg's pastoral background, on both a semantic level, as the means through which Hogg was configured as distinct from his ploughman predecessor and his own labouring contemporaries, and on a material level, as a vocational context which heavily structured his intellectual milieu and framed his initial forays in literature.

It was to the advantage of the Blackwoodian annexation of Hogg as a representative of an authentic national culture, that pastoral husbandry had largely evaded the semantic links established between arable farming and political economy through the identification of the price of grain as the key determinant of the cost of labour and all subsequent production. Furthermore, prior to the trauma of the nineteenth-century Highland Clearances, the displacement of subtenants and cotters may have been associated with the enclosure of arable estates rather than with the depopulation of land for pastoral farming, while the sites of popular rural unrest tended to be those of grain storage and exportation, rather than sheep farming or woollen manufacture.¹⁹ While John Wilson tries to avoid raising such political discontents in his discussion of Burns and Hogg via a Kailyard gloss of the former's song, 'Man Was Made to Mourn', the shepherd surely presented a more attractive avatar for a socially unproblematic national identity than did the ploughman.²⁰ As Ian Duncan has argued, political tensions and problems of class identity in writing by and about Hogg, tended to be defused through the trope of the 'scrape' – the figuration of 'a shared social resentment that might bind together ex-shepherds and radical weavers', as the harmless farce of Hogg's rustic manners and their ridicule by his social superiors in the *Blackwood's* set.²¹

Like Wilson, Hogg was aware that the figure of the shepherd and that of the ploughman connoted different things in both the literary and agricultural spheres in which he was simultaneously pursuing professions in the early 1800s. Echoing the argument of Wilson's 1819 essay, Hogg would recall in 1832 how favourable to poetic production his younger self imagined his own condition to be in comparison to that of Burns: reasoning that as a shepherd, 'I have much more time to read and compose than any ploughman

¹⁹Christopher A. Whatley, *Scottish Society 1707-1830: Beyond Jacobitism, Towards Industrialisation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2000), p.289.

²⁰Wilson, p.524.

²¹Duncan, p.152

could have, and can sing more old songs than ever ploughman could in the world.’²² Here, Hogg alludes to the circumscription of Burns’s poetic capacity by the demands of his vocation. With most of his temporal and intellectual resources allocated to the business of agriculture, the ploughman poet cannot match the shepherd for lyrical power and spontaneity, while his residence in an improved part of the country compromises his relationship to local tradition. Whereas Burns laboured to produce pastoral poetry from within a georgic environment, Hogg, in a manner consonant with the later Blackwoodian obsession with ‘authenticity effects’, is a pastoral poet who is also a shepherd.²³

As the example of John Dyer’s 1757 poem *The Fleece* demonstrates however, following the eighteenth-century attribution of a civic and even aesthetic value to improvement through the figure of georgic, there was no longer any necessary connection between *literary* pastoral and *agricultural* pastoral. *The Fleece* deals with all subjects relating to the production of wool, from the correct preparation of pasture to the export of manufactured items to distant British colonies.²⁴ Hogg too produced georgic writing on the subject of pastoral, but his contributions fall on the opposite side from Dyer’s of the genre’s transition to prose, marked for Heinzelman by Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*. Hogg’s introduction to his own prose georgic, *The Shepherd’s Guide: Being a Practical Treatise on the Disease of Sheep, their Causes and the Best Means of Preventing Them*, published in 1807, proposes to aid ‘national utility’ and to ‘contribute to the cause of humanity, as well as to individual advantage, and national benefit.’²⁵ Addressed to the improving landowner Alexander Dirom, Hogg’s work clearly declares its alignment with the patriotic ideology of improvement, and in doing so attempts to establish its author’s experiential and social capital with the influential organisation which Dirom represented: the Highland Society of Scotland.

However *The Guide* is also alert to the generic demands of georgic. The work’s title page attributes it to ‘James Hogg, The Ettrick Shepherd’, suggesting that the famous moniker which denoted Hogg’s bardic authority in his later productions, was shared with the vocational authority which he invoked as the writer of an improving treatise. In the *Guide* Hogg introduces himself as ‘an illiterate’, who has steadily acquired a stock of

²² *Altrive Tales*, p.18.

²³ Duncan, *Scott’s Shadow*.

²⁴ John Dyer, *The Fleece: A Poem in Four Books* (London: 1757).

²⁵ James Hogg, *The Shepherd’s Guide: Being a Practical on the Diseases of Sheep, their Causes and the Best Means of Preventing Them; with Observations on the Most Suitable Farm-Stocking for the Various Climates of this Country* (Edinburgh: 1807), p.2.

useful knowledge through his experience as an improving shepherd. He then asserts that those who have been in a position to obtain the most expertise as shepherds have, necessarily, not had the opportunity to develop ‘their literary acquirements’ to the same level. Subsequently, Hogg requests that he ‘be allowed to retain a homely and plain style [...] otherwise, I would be unintelligible to the very class of men to whom these hints can be of any use.’²⁶ Hogg’s apology is redolent of the imperative of plain speaking paradigmatically described by Thomas Sprat in his 1667 *History of the Royal Society*: ‘a close, naked, natural way of speaking; positive expressions, clear senses; an native easiness: bringing all things as near the Mathematical plainness, as they can: and preferring the language of Artizans, Countrymen, and Merchants, before that, of Wits, or Scholars.’²⁷ Hogg’s introduction to the *Shepherd’s Guide* invokes theories of the division of labour: the improving farmer’s lack of literary prowess becomes evidence of his expertise in agricultural matters. However as Sprat’s list of professions denotes, the mode of prose georgic asserts not only the experience and authority of labour within a specific trade, but the legitimisation of work through its relationship to commerce. While the utility of georgic is grounded in the field of political economy, the same cannot normally be said of pastoral with its valorisation of idleness and repose, or *otium* rather than *negotium*.

In both the *Highland Journeys* and his 1800 collection of poetry and song *Scottish Pastorals*, Hogg’s improving pastoral idealism partly circumvents the very thing that distinguishes Burns’s pastoral poetry from earlier eighteenth-century examples of the genre: namely his exploitation of a generative tension between the georgic ideology of improvement and its antithesis in the *carpe diem* ethos of pastoral.²⁸ The Ettrick Shepherd’s alignment of vocation with symbol is double-edged, simultaneously underwriting Hogg’s claims to pastoral authenticity, and erasing the distinction between cultivation and nature he would later capitalise upon in the form of his Blackwoodian persona. Penny Fielding argues that ‘Hogg was self-consciously and provocatively the Ettrick Shepherd’, employing his famous moniker as ‘a brand name to further his career

²⁶ *Shepherd’s Guide*, p.4.

²⁷ Thomas Sprat, *The history of the Royal-Society of London, for the improving of natural knowledge* (London: 1702), p.113.

²⁸ See Nigel Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral: Poetry and Improvement in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

and in keeping his readers guessing as to how far his shepherd-persona was identical with a naïve resident of the Ettrick Valley.’²⁹

This strategy seems to have been successful at least as early as 1804, with one reader writing to ask the editor of *The Scots Magazine and Edinburgh Literary Miscellany*, a periodical to which Hogg was then a regular contributor, what the Ettrick Shepherd’s actual vocation was, ‘as the appellation of shepherd must be merely affected’.³⁰ This query was printed with a reply from the editor confirming that Hogg was indeed a shepherd, and followed with a full biographical account in 1805, that forms the template for the ‘Memoir of the Author’s Life’ included in *The Mountain Bard* and several of Hogg’s subsequent works.³¹ Early in his career then, Hogg sought to both engender and supply a demand for the figure of his rustic persona in a manner analogous to Burns’s performance of a rural, labouring-class identity in the preface to the Kilmarnock Edition. Hogg’s position as a contributor to *The Scots Magazine* and later a core member of the *Blackwood’s* set meant that he was more able than Burns to adapt and develop his representation in the periodical press. While Hogg signs himself as ‘SHEPHERD’ in the epistolary *Highland Journeys* however, the *Scottish Pastorals* predate Hogg’s famous persona, underlining that text’s anteriority to the comfortable mediation of labouring-class identity and romantic genius achieved in Hogg’s later work.³²

4.3 Enlightenment and pastoral improvement in the Scottish Borders

Undertaken in summers of 1802, 1803 and 1804, Hogg’s three recorded Highland tours represent perhaps his most sustained engagement with the aesthetic and economic ideals of agricultural improvement. Thus, while an interaction with external nature through the description of landscape is one aspect of Hogg’s tours, it often appears as a feature of an overarching discussion of the “pastoralisation” of the rural economy of the Highlands, rather than in the lyrical, aesthetic form prescribed by John Wilson. As H. B. de Groot writes in his introduction to the Stirling/South-Carolina edition of the collected *Highland*

²⁹ Penny Fielding, *Scotland and the Fictions of Geography: North Britain, 1760-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p.161.

³⁰ *The Scots Magazine, and Edinburgh Literary Miscellany, Being a General Repository of Literature, History and Politics* (Edinburgh: 1804), lxvi, p.573.

³¹ *The Scots Magazine* (1805), lxvii, p.501.

³² James Hogg, *Highland Journeys*, ed. by H. B. de Groot (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p.21. Further references are given after quotations in the text and are abbreviated to ‘*Journeys*’.

Journeys, Hogg's accounts of his tours present features of both the miscellaneous surveys offered by his eighteenth-century predecessors, and of the subjective, experiential style of nineteenth-century travel writing (xi). To an extent, this reflects the status of the *Highland Journeys* as a study of a specific topos – the improvement of sheep farming in the Highlands – by a writer who had hopes of establishing himself both as an individual agent and practitioner of pastoral improvement, and as an expert writer upon the subject.

Originally presented as a series of letters addressed to Walter Scott in *The Scots Magazine*, Hogg, had plans before 1806 to collate his tours in a published volume. De Groot's introduction reproduces an 1805 notice from *The Scots Magazine*, in which Hogg lays out his intentions:

Mr Hogg (the Ettrick Shepherd) [...] is about to publish, by subscription, a Collection of Letters, written during his journies through the Northern and Western Highlands and Islands of Scotland, in the summers of 1802, 1803, and 1804. Describing the scenery, manner, and rural economy of each district; the local advantages and disadvantages of each; with suggestions on the best probable means of improvement, adventures, anecdotes, &c. to which will be added a *Supplement*, addressed to the Highland Society, on the utility of encouraging the system of Sheep-farming in some districts, and Population in others. (*Journeys* xiv)

As a prospectus this passage provides an apt summary of the contents of Hogg's *Journeys*, and its jargon of 'rural economy', 'means of improvement', 'utility' and 'system' is telling, suggesting parallels with the *Observations* on various regions of Scotland which William Fullarton, James Anderson and others had drawn up for the British government's Board of Agriculture a decade previously. This surveying mode is undercut by the anecdotal nature of Hogg's writing, but also by his historical sympathy with the inhabitants of the Highlands. As the above passage makes clear, Hogg by no means perceived clearance as the necessary concomitant of pastoral improvement, but viewed the retention of the **Highlands' rural** population as a desirable end, albeit one that would require significant changes to the region's social fabric.

The 1805 advertisement for a projected volume edition also suggests that we might read the tours as part of an on-going attempt by Hogg to increase his economic and intellectual capital in the eyes of the potential patronage network that constituted the

Highland Society of Scotland. Hogg's private correspondence with Scott from the period between 1804 and 1806 narrates the formulation and failure of this plan, as well as hinting at Hogg's motives for pursuing it. In a letter of March 1806, Hogg tells Scott of his preparations for his ballad collection of the following year – *The Mountain Bard* – writing that 'the most favourable season for the Highland letters is lost but this must proceed cost what it will.' Hogg then entreats Scott to forward him any information he might receive about available tenancies, confessing, 'I long to be my own man again'.³³ In the event, the 'Supplement' promised in the prospectus to the collected tours was published as an appendix to 1807's treatise on the diseases of sheep, *The Shepherd's Guide*. That text represents the effective terminus of Hogg's conventional writing on agricultural improvement, although the subject of pastoral life was one he later returned to in his 'Shepherd's Calendar' series for *Blackwood's Magazine*. When Hogg eventually did secure a Highland Society commission in 1819, it was from the London as opposed to the Edinburgh based organisation, and for the production of *The Jacobite Relics of Scotland* rather than a treatise on agricultural improvement.³⁴ Like the above letter to Scott, this outcome suggests a transferal of Hogg's ambitions for economic independence from the literature of agricultural improvement, to the collection of ballads and songs.

Hogg's Highland tours however, represent an immediate and a prospective bid for economic and vocational independence, both of which are rooted in his pastoral expertise and ambitions. Part of the impetus for Hogg's undertaking of the 1802 journey was provided by the impending expiration of his parents' lease on their farm at Ettrick House, and Hogg refers explicitly in the 1802 tour to his hopes of securing a tenancy as a Highland sheep farmer:

I had, amongst with my aged parents, been thrust from our little patrimonial farm, and though possessed of more partiality for my native soil than I am willing at all times to acknowledge, my heart exulted in the thought of finding amongst the Grampian mountains a cheap and quiet retreat in the bosom of some sequestered glen, where unawed by the proud, or unenvied by any, I would nourish and increase my fleecy

³³ James Hogg, *The Collected Letters of James Hogg*, 3 vols. ed. by Gillian Hughes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), I, p.55

³⁴ See Murray Pittock, 'James Hogg: Scottish Romanticism, Song, and the Public Sphere', in *James Hogg and the Literary Marketplace: Scottish Romanticism and the Working-Class Author*, ed. by Sharon Alker and Holly Faith Nelson (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp.111-122 (p.121).

store, and awaken, with the pipe and violin, echoes which had slept for a thousand years, unless aroused to a transient hum by the voice of the hunter, or the savage howl of the wild beast of the desert. – “Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher: Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” (*Journeys* 30)

A certain vacillation of style is perhaps inevitable in a text whose content ranges from discussions of history and anecdote, to technical comparisons of the suitability of various breeds of sheep to different types of terrain. As a skilled Border shepherd imagining his effective transplantation to the frontier of contemporary pastoral improvement in the British Isles, Hogg chooses to adopt an idiom that combines elements of Thomas Gray’s ‘Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard’ with Ossianic nostalgia, while betraying an impulsive parsimony in his wish for his idyll to be a ‘cheap’ one. Even before its Biblical addendum makes its presence felt, this vignette both elevates and deflates Hogg’s aspiration to become a Highland sheep-farmer, apotheosizing it as a fantasy of pastoral retirement, rather than financial independence, and hinting at the unattainability of both. The passage is redolent of the economic masking strategies deployed by **Mackenzie’s sentimental hero**, Harley, in the way that it lays claim to a higher spiritual motive while simultaneously disclosing a conventional grasp of the economic worth of things.

Hogg’s elision rather than erasure of his economic motives in undertaking to tour the Highlands, is also representative of the compatibility of Romantic and agricultural improvement which characterises the pastoralism of his *Highland Journeys* and first collection of poetry. John Wilson would later interpret Hogg’s pastoral origins and occupation as evidence of his visionary credentials, attributing the Ettrick Shepherd’s ‘wild enthusiasm’ to a solitary youth spent ‘among the most beautiful pastoral vallies in the world’.³⁵ Like the title of Hogg’s 1807 song collection, *The Mountain Bard*, Wilson’s pastoralism seems almost to invoke Currie’s argument in his ‘Prefatory Remarks’, that the inhabitants of ‘mountainous countries [...] are usually divided into small communities on the sides of their separate vallies, and on the banks of their respective streams; situations well calculated to call forth and to concentrate the social affections, amidst scenery that acts most powerfully on the sight, and makes a lasting impression on the memory’ (Currie I 29-30). Currie’s geographical assumptions certainly seem to underpin Wilson’s

³⁵ Wilson, p.527

contention that ‘it has been in the pastoral vallies of the south of Scotland that the poetical genius of our country has been most beautifully displayed’.³⁶ Fielding draws attention to Richard Warner’s observation in his 1802, *A Tour through the Northern Counties of England, and the Borders of Scotland*, that: ‘[t]he inhabitants of the Scottish Borders are ‘more national in their manners, practices, and ideas than the northern counties of the kingdom; from the circumstances of effects being still felt in these parts, which have long faded away in the more distant divisions of the country’.³⁷ In his Highland tour of the same year, Hogg echoes this sentiment, claiming that his native Ettrick Forest, ‘being surrounded by high mountains remained long excluded from any intercourse with the more fertile districts surrounding these’ (*Journeys* 10), with the result that, ‘the manners of the common people are truly singular’ (7). While the landscape and inhabitants of Burns’s south west might have been absorbed into the anonymity of a rationalised agrarian labour and commodity market, the Romantic Borders remain simultaneously an area subject to exceptional geographical, legal and representational modes and processes, and ‘an indeterminate, archaic ballad space’: both distinct from the rest of Scotland, and distinctly Scottish.³⁸

Yet the Scottish and English Romantic construction of the Borders as a locus of ancient traditions and manners belies the social and economic transformation which the region had been undergoing for several decades by the end of the eighteenth century, as Britain’s expanding urban centres and manufacturing industry stimulated the growth of agricultural capitalism.³⁹ Hogg’s employer from 1790 to 1800, the sheep farmer James Laidlaw of Blackhouse, was at the forefront of a process of improvement spurred by the high price of wool. In the 1791 *Statistical Account of Scotland*, the entry for Yarrow, in which Blackhouse was located, notes that the majority of farms were still stocked with, ‘the old breed of sheep [...] whose wool is of the coarsest kind, and little adapted for manufacture.’⁴⁰ As Laidlaw’s shepherd, Hogg would have been involved in an intensive process of experimentation in pastoral husbandry, providing him with experience that he would put to use in the form of frequent contributions to agricultural periodicals while

³⁶ Wilson, pp.523-4

³⁷ Fielding, p.81

³⁸ Ibid, p.92

³⁹ T. M. Devine, *Clearance and Improvement: Land, Power and People in Scotland, 1700-1900* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2006), p.98.

⁴⁰ Sinclair, *Statistical Account*, xii, p.502.

establishing himself as a poet in the early 1800s.⁴¹ *The Statistical Account* also offers insight into the economic and social order of the Border town of Galashiels, recording that:

[t]he manufacture of coarse woollen cloth is here carried on to great extent. It has rapidly increased within these few years, and is now brought to great perfection.⁴²

To explain recent progress in this industry, the correspondent turns to the science of political economy and cites the implementation of the division of labour, and the advantages in efficiency which it entails, asserting that:

it seems probable, that the fewer employments any man follows, the greater will be his proficiency in them. They, who constantly and exclusively are kept scribbling wool, will work more, and to better purpose, than others, who are accustomed equally to perform every branch of the manufacturing line.⁴³

As a shepherd, Hogg was, as Burns had been, involved in the production of a commodity, just as his own labour was commoditized. The Ettrick Shepherd's role in the chain of production described above, was to safeguard the commodity upon which the wool industry was based through the principles of improved sheep husbandry. While Wilson would vaunt Hogg's pastoral vocation as evidence of his stadial primitivism, in reality, Hogg's profession as a shepherd was strictly delimited according to the demands of a thriving local manufacturing economy, predicated on the principle of the division of labour.

There is also evidence that the literary, like the social circumstances of Hogg's background, did not correspond to those later represented by his rustic persona. In the case of John Wilson's synthesis of natural genius and national song, the relationship between poetry and learning had to be disavowed – an end to which Hogg was superficially far better suited than Robert Burns, and one which it may have been in his interest to serve in his autobiographical representation. Like Burns's 1787 letter to John Moore, the frequently revisited and revised 'Memoir of the Author's Life' that first appeared as the

⁴¹ Hughes, p.38.

⁴² Sinclair, *Statistical Account*, ii, p.308.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p.312

preface to Hogg's *The Mountain Bard* in 1807 and reached its final version in 1832's *Altrive Tales*, was a vehicle for the literary self-fashioning of its subject. As in the case of Burns, Hogg's account of his education and reading comprised an important part of this operation, and in this context, Hogg may have understandably sought to augment his credentials as a rustic genius rather than provide an exhaustive list of his early reading and literary influences. In his 1832 'Memoir', Hogg claims that he only began to read at the age of eighteen, while employed as shepherd to the Laidlaws of Willenslee, with the books to which he was provided access being described as 'chiefly theological', though he also read Allan Ramsay's *The Gentle Shepherd*, in addition to the occasional newspaper.⁴⁴

Hogg's reading seems to have expanded significantly during his employment by James Laidlaw of Blackhouse. Hogg notes that Laidlaw owned 'a number of valuable books, which were all open to my perusal', however Hogg's move to Blackhouse also facilitated his access to a circulating library run by the bookseller Alexander Elder in Peebles.⁴⁵ This library was also frequented by a young Robert Chambers, and patronised by his father. The list of texts available from Elder's library that Chambers recalls in his memoirs, detail a selection that we might place within William St. Clair's, 'old canon'.⁴⁶ Chambers names several canonical mainstays of the eighteenth century and earlier in his description of the library, including *Gulliver's Travels*, *Don Quixote*, Tobias Smollet's *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* and works by Pope and Goldsmith.⁴⁷

However there is also evidence to suggest that while serving as a shepherd at Blackhouse, Hogg may have had access to a far wider range of reading material than that offered by Elder's library in Peebles. Hogg's employer James Laidlaw was a member of the Selkirk Subscription Library which, founded in 1772, appears to have been comparable to the institution formed in Ayr the decade previously.⁴⁸ The library's presence suggests that **the intellectual culture of the Scottish Borders at the end of the eighteenth century** may have been more lively than is suggested by the disparate list of authors and texts which constitute Hogg's account of his early reading. Like the Ayr

⁴⁴ *Altrive Tales*, p.11

⁴⁵ *Altrive Tales*, p.17, Hughes, p.24.

⁴⁶ William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.121.

⁴⁷ Robert Chambers, *Man of Letters: The early life and love letters of Robert Chambers*, ed. by C.H. Layman (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), pp.130-131.

⁴⁸ Scottish Borders Archives and Local History Centre S/PL/7/1, Selkirk Subscription Library Registers, 1799-1808.

Library Society, the Selkirk Subscription Library's founders were members of a professional middling rank consisting of ministers, surgeons, lawyers and merchants. Membership was initially priced at 7s 6d per annum, and raised to five pounds a year in 1801, to reflect the library's vastly expanded catalogue.⁴⁹ In 1779, a policy of admitting non-members as readers for a half guinea a year was introduced. Laidlaw however, appears from the presence of his name in the Library's register and daybook, to have been a subscribing borrower rather than casual reader.⁵⁰

The library's membership included several prominent local figures, such as the brothers of the explorer Mungo Park, and although he never joined, Walter Scott apparently donated copies of his pre-1814 works to the library on their publication.⁵¹ Like those of its counterpart in Ayr, the regulations of the Selkirk library stipulated against the purchase of books of 'Divinity', but upon the outbreak of the revolution, seems to have been unable to avoid controversy altogether. The library's members apparently regarded the outbreak of revolution in France as an occasion of sufficient moment to postpone a meeting in 1789, while in 1793, they agreed, in common with the members of the Ayr library, to burn their copy of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*.⁵²

Like those of the Ayr Library Society, the Selkirk Subscription Library's holdings were representative of a simultaneous economic and ideological investment in agricultural and intellectual improvement on the part of its members. While the library's minute book and catalogue have not been preserved, its lending register contains a familiar pantheon of Scottish Enlightenment bestsellers, as well as a wide range of eighteenth-century English texts and translations of European authors, that testifies to the civic and social ambitions of the **institution's members**, as well as to their economic prosperity. Works by Smith, Blair, Stewart, Reid, Ferguson, Kames, Gibbon, Sinclair, Hume and Robertson feature heavily in the lists of books borrowed, and are accompanied by the writing of Rousseau, Lavater, Johnson, Goldsmith and Paley. Also present are volumes of unspecified pamphlets, periodicals such as Christie's *Analytical Review* and the *Edinburgh Review*, as well as the poetry of Burns and Ramsay. The Selkirk Library was clearly an institution committed to the diffusion of useful knowledge, but it also admitted what might be

⁴⁹ T. Craig Brown, 'Selkirk Subscription Library', in *Southern Reporter*, 23 May 1901

⁵⁰ Scottish Borders Archives and Local History Centre S/PL/7/1 and 2, Selkirk Subscription Library Registers, 1799-1808 and Daybook, 1808-1814.

⁵¹ Ibid, Craig, 'Selkirk Subscription Library'.

⁵² Craig, 'Selkirk Subscription Library'.

described as works of taste and feeling, such as the novels and periodicals of Henry Mackenzie. James Laidlaw's borrowings between 1799 and 1814 included works such as: Oliver Goldsmith's *History of the Earth and Animated Nature*; poetical and philosophical works by James Beattie; Robert Burns's *Poems*; Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*; the *Transactions* of the Royal Highland Society; Kames's *Elements of Criticism*; various accounts of foreign voyages and travels; the *Works* of Shakespeare and Johnson; volumes of the *Farmer's Magazine*; Thomas Malthus's *Essay on Population* and novels by Anne Radcliffe, Elizabeth Hamilton, Maria Edgeworth and, eventually, Walter Scott.⁵³ Over this period of fifteen years, Laidlaw's interests as a reader were varied, encompassing the gothic novel, the agricultural periodical and a wide range of intervening material, much of which clearly pertained to Laidlaw's vocation as an improving farmer, and some of which can only have been recreational.

The majority of these texts were loaned to James Laidlaw between 1806 and 1814, long after his intellectual milieu and that of Hogg had diverged. It's also unfortunate that there are no records for borrowings from earlier than 1799 – the year before Hogg left Laidlaw's service at Blackhouse. I would argue however, that the presence of the Selkirk Subscription Library and the membership of a figure whose domestic space and reading Hogg frequently shared, does allow us to search for a far greater range of literary influence and allusion in Hogg's early writing than Robert Chambers's account of Alexander Elder's establishment in Peebles might permit. At the same time, it offers a direct point of comparison between the intellectual milieu of Robert Burns in 1770s and 1780s Ayrshire, and that of James Hogg in the Borders of the 1790s. Of the fifty users listed in the library's Daybook of 1808-14, twenty-one are tenant farmers, demonstrating the emergence of that profession as a prosperous elite within the social structure of rural Lowland Scotland.⁵⁴ Hogg's introduction by Laidlaw's son William to the library of Alexander Elder as opposed to its more upmarket equivalent in Selkirk, demonstrates the material obstacle to participation presented by the cost of subscribing to a library, but also the capacity of such institutions to act as instruments of social distinction for an emergent bourgeoisie – reifying the hierarchy of master and servant in the case of Laidlaw and Hogg – rather than disinterestedly facilitating the diffusion of knowledge. Polite literature

⁵³ Selkirk Subscription Library Registers, 1799-1808 and Daybook, 1808-1814.

⁵⁴ Selkirk Subscription Library Daybook, 1808-1814.

in Hogg's early intellectual milieu had the potential to stratify readers not only through mechanisms of style, language and genre, but through its very availability.

4.4 The pastoral gaze of the Ettrick Shepherd

The details of Hogg's intellectual life before 1802 cast the Highland Journeys as the writing of highly informed and experienced proponent of agricultural improvement. Though not in the way that John Wilson suggests, Hogg's background as a shepherd permeates his early writing, not only in the form of his famous Ettrick Shepherd moniker, but as a governing influence upon his authorial perspective. T. M. Devine writes of the Scottish Borders during the expansion of commercial pastoralism which Hogg both lived through and contributed to, that: 'the large farms steadily absorbed the arable lands of many small communities and led to depopulation and migration, the social process, in general if not in particular terms, was analogous to the impact of the big sheep farms on the Highlands a century later.'⁵⁵ The historical reality of 'agricultural rationalism' in the Borders and the clearances which accompanied it, cast an interesting light upon the mountainous isolation and pastoral solitude which Wilson cites as the matrix of Hogg's poetic genius, as well as the representation of landscape in Hogg's *Scottish Pastorals* and *Journeys*. Reifying the parallels drawn by Devine between the expansion of commercial pastoralism in the Borders during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and in the Highlands in the nineteenth, the *Journeys* offer up the 'extensive commercial pastoralism'⁵⁶ which Hogg perceived to have brought prosperity and 'great proficiency in the arts and sciences, as well as in trade and manufactures' to his native region as a model for the improvement of the Highlands (*Journeys* 10). The amazement 'at the works of men' on the part of Hogg's naïve shepherd in *Scottish Pastorals*, may pertain not only to the transformation of the landscape through arable improvement, but to the unfamiliar sight of concentrated human population and settlement – a spectacle absent from the cleared pastoral estates of the upland Borders. In Hogg's case, the Romantic topoi of solitude and elevation are as amenable to an improved, as they are to a primitive pastoral, with the earlier sections of the 1802 tour, describing Hogg's native Ettrick Valley as 'being truly pastoral', and no less than 'the Arcadia of Britain' (*Journeys* 7). Accordingly,

⁵⁵ Devine, p.98.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

for Hogg, the aesthetics of landscape do not necessarily agitate the conflicting impulses of agricultural improver and pastoral itinerant suggested in his description of his motives for the 1802 tour.

That one of John Wilson's greatest criticisms of Burns's poetry in his 'Comparative View' of 1819, is its inability to 'startle' even under the inspirational impetus of Highland scenery, attests to the exceptional aesthetic status which the region had acquired for Romantic writers.⁵⁷ As Peter Womack argues in his study *Improvement and Romance*, the opposition between nature and improvement emphasized by Wilson and other critics of Whig political economy, ascribed a particular ideological force to the mixture of sublime landscape, violent history and national nostalgia which the Highlands were coming to represent. Womack argues that the eighteenth century's aesthetic encoding of the unimproved Highland landscape in terms of a 'negative sublime' was co-driven by, 'a humanistic preference for signs of productivity and use, and by a newer feeling for the untamed.'⁵⁸ As Hogg would later observe, the rent-value of mountainous country tended to be far less than that of flat, cultivatable land.⁵⁹ The sublime therefore, represented a mode of displacing an economic anxiety towards the infertility of precipitous topographies – the intractable natural limits of improvement – by ascribing them a symbolic value.

For Wilson and earlier writers, the negative sublime was perceived to be productive of an enthusiastic engagement with almost alien imaginative forms, evincing their belief that: 'the fancy is roused to feverish activity by the inhuman emptiness of the mountains.'⁶⁰ When juxtaposed with scenes of cultivation and improvement, this sublime contributed to the coveted effect of the picturesque. In his 1803 tour, Hogg distances himself from eighteenth and early nineteenth-century aesthetic conventions regarding landscape and travel writing by claiming that it is not his intention to 'attempt a general description after those of a Kaimes, [sic] a Pennant, and a thousand others' (*Journeys* 73). In his introduction to the *Highland Journeys* however, de Groot points out that while Hogg never refers directly to the category of the 'picturesque', certain passages in his account of his travels, particularly his description of Inveraray in his 1803 tour, do deal in equivalent conventions (xli).

⁵⁷ Wilson, p.524.

⁵⁸ Peter Womack, *Improvement and Romance: Constructing the Myth of the Highlands* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1988), p.71.

⁵⁹ *The Shepherd's Guide*, p.304.

⁶⁰ Womack, p.76.

Moreover, the disavowed 'Kames' appears to represent a potential influence upon Hogg's style of landscape description. While the philosopher and judge Henry Home, Lord Kames was not known as a writer of picturesque tours, he did produce an influential treatise on aesthetics, *Elements of Criticism*. Published in 1762 and available in the Selkirk Subscription Library, Kames's *Elements* adopts a somewhat schematic theory of the sublime, which holds simply that '[g]reat and elevated objects considered with relation to the emotions produced by them, are termed *grand* and *sublime*.'⁶¹ For Kames, the sublime denotes the upper level of an aesthetic hierarchy, in which elevation or altitude corresponds to greatness; lowness to insignificance or meanness. Kames argues that, 'to look down upon objects, makes part of the pleasure of elevation', although this becomes, 'painful when the object is so far below as to create dizziness; and even when that is the case, we feel a sort of pleasure mixt with the pain.'⁶² At one point in his description of the mountains of the Letterewe estate, Hogg seems to take Kames's account of the mixed pleasure and pain of surveying precipitous a slope to a more absurd imaginative level, writing, '[s]hould a merry companion choose, in order to enjoy the site of the most profound and exquisite tumble, to give you an unmannerly push from the top of it, you might descend for nearly half a mile in the most straight line towards the centre of gravity.' In a supplementary observation that is again playfully redolent of the Kamesian sublime of elevation and perspective, Hogg laments that, 'the pleasure arising from a view of your gracefully alighting would be entirely lost from the top, as you would appear of no greater magnitude than a forked bulrush' (*Journeys* 108). For Hogg, Kames's privileging of elevation may have been particularly appealing because it was amenable to a moral and aesthetic hierarchy of rural production, with higher ground accommodating the creative superiority of the pastoral and its correspondence with wider nature, and the lower hosting the economically mired spheres of manufacturing and arable farming – a projection of the division of labour onto natural topography. This schema is acted out in both a description of the Border landscape in Hogg's 1802 tour, and in the shepherd's descent in the third poem of *Scottish Pastorals*: 'Willie and Keatie, A Pastoral'.

Superficially, the piece unfolds as the narrative of a conventional pastoral courtship. The poem hints however, at the mutual plasticity of nature and mind which Hogg would later explore in his description of a 'land of thought' in 'Kilmenny', a piece

⁶¹ Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: 1762), i, p.266.

⁶² *Ibid*, p.273.

that features in 1813's *The Queen's Wake*.⁶³ On one level, 'Willie an' Keatie' narrates a visionary descent from a pastoral mountainside to a picturesque valley that produces an imaginative geography of Hogg's Border environs. The poem begins by exhorting its reader to 'see yon lofty mountain,/ Where the wanton lambies play,' going on to describe 'its summits, beat wi' weather' and its 'purple crown,/ Made of bonny bloomin' heather' (ll.1-2). The description anticipates that which Hogg would give of the White Coom, a mountain in the vicinity of Etrick Forest, when writing his first 1802 tour of the Highlands. **At the summit of the White Coom, Hogg claims, the viewer's gaze takes in 'the German and Irish seas; all round, to the south and east at prodigious distances, rise the fells of Cockermouth, Skiddaw, Cheviot and Lammermoor; and in the interstices between these it is lost in space.'** On a lesser scale, Hogg describes the, 'surrounding rocks which have been, time out of mind, the impregnable refuge of the fox, the eagle and all the other beasts and birds of prey know in these countries.' Elsewhere, 'you will see the smoke rising in many a small steamer out of the city of Glasgow and, beyond that, the sovereigns of the north headed by Ben Lomond, like a regiment of blue pyramids, towering their everlasting tops behind one another, vying with emulation, who shall be the first to bid good-morrow to the sun.' Here, Hogg writes, 'you only have to lift your eyes to behold the cheering and enlivening prospect of a large extent of country, flourishing in peace and plenty, and all the corners of the world pouring in their commerce on each side of you' (*Journeys* 5-6).

However, Hogg's gazing out over the Borders and beyond in his account of the White Coom, like the rest of the tour in which it appears, is also readable as a less poeticized form of economic survey, such as that which had been pioneered by Sinclair's *Statistical Account* during the previous decade. That Hogg should have chosen to interweave a detailed description of his own locality with an ostensible journal of his travels in the Highlands, is suggestive of the way in which he absorbed the landscapes of the north and west of Scotland into the purview of his improving pastoralism. The description is perhaps comparable to a prose version of the unfolding of Burns's poetic territory upon Coila's mantle in 'The Vision' – the pastoral slopes of the Borders are presented as the locus of Hogg's authorial self-fashioning, just as the improving arable tenancies of Ayrshire are the site of Burns's (K62). Nigel Leask argues that vista of

⁶³ See James Hogg, *The Queen's Wake*, ed. by Douglas S. Mack (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

Burns's poem presents the viewer with a map, rather than an individual's view of a physical landscape.⁶⁴ However, in Hogg's 'Willie and Keatie', and in his description of the view from the White Coom, the distortion of aspect according to dynamics of economic and social power lacks an equivalent matrix of explanation.

Instead, Hogg demonstrates a transportive fluidity of perspective that subordinates the topography of the observable world to that of the imagination. A similarly dizzying effect is achieved in 'Willie an' Keatie', with the speaker guiding his reader past the domain of the 'cunning foxie' and 'Hawks and ravens,' to observe a pining shepherd on the mountainside. As the poetic voice shifts to that of the revealed shepherd, the poem loses none of its momentum, guiding the reader through 'craggy cliff, an' lonely glen', to a landscape of: "Verdant pastures, grand inclosures,/ Thrivin' woods, and buildings new" (ll.57-58). Here again, Hogg's description of landscape perhaps shows the influence of Kames's *Elements*. Womack writes that:

[c]ontrast, in Kames's thoroughly psychological system, offers a strenuous pleasure denied by the prospect of uniformly 'delightful' objects; the comprehension of such mighty differences in one view stimulates a corresponding expansiveness of feeling [...] Wilderness is there not to threaten but to validate the totalising successes of the eye; the rock and the heath, "in themselves disagreeable", yield up a converse beauty once they are placed within a larger system of agreements.⁶⁵

In 'Willie and Keatie' as in 1802's description of the White Coom, the rocks and dens of the upper slopes transition into the pastoral and eventually arable landscapes of the valleys below, resulting in a composition that is gradually, rather than immediately productive of a Kamesian picturesque. In the lower valley of 'Willie and Keatie', the 'wanton lambies' are absent, and in their place we are shown 'the weary swain' making his way home from the day's labours, marking one of the few allusions to agricultural labour in the *Pastorals* (l.68). Later sections of the poem present vivid night skies, in which 'Orion's radiant circle beams' and 'Venus, in the west descending,/ Flames like light'ning on the streams.' This spectacle leads its observer to ponder:

'Who those fluid films, that wheeled

⁶⁴ Leask, p.108.

⁶⁵ Womack, p.62.

Loosely thro' primaeval night,
By a breath to worlds congealed;
Masses of illuvid light!' (ll.165-69)

It's a stanza which arguably foreshadows Hogg's later astronomical poem, 'The Pilgrims of the Sun'.⁶⁶ Here however, the shepherd's contemplation of the divine faculty of creation is in many ways similar to the manner in which Hogg's human speakers animate the landscapes around them through moments of visionary transport. Throughout the poem established pastoral tropes are juxtaposed with flashes of imaginative apprehension, in which the idea of a landscape and its physicality are inseparable. A similar dynamic is perhaps at work in the passage of Hogg's description of the summit of the White Coom, in which he describes the perceptibility of 'all the corners of the world pouring in their commerce on each side of you.' The construction is rendered unusual by virtue of its attribution of agency to the world's imaginary corners themselves, but also because of its characterisation of the abstract notion of commerce as a substantive entity. Hogg could here be imagining the Scottish Lowland vista as a site of economic exchange – an interpretation supported by the accompanying reference to Glasgow's steamers but not the procession of mountain-tops that are described receding behind them – or to a general sensory engagement with an external world that is shaped, like the fluidic primordial space of the shepherd's night sky, by the actions of a consciousness upon it. Equally however, the piece evokes James Thomson's description in *The Seasons*, of the manner in which the sun and mountains, stimulating the circulation of water between rain, river and sea: 'A social Commerce hold, and firm support/ The full-adjusted Harmony of Things.'⁶⁷ For Womack, 'Thomson's serene formulation returns us to the always latent content of political economy: nature has the intelligible diversity of commercial society, and by the same token society exhibits the harmony of nature.'⁶⁸

Matthew Wickman has written that in Walter Scott's treatments of landscape, the reader is presented with, 'a picturesque patchwork of divergent aesthetic qualities and historical types.'⁶⁹ The same might be said of Hogg's descriptions of landscape in his *Highland Journeys*, in which a mode of topographical survey that assesses the suitability

⁶⁶ See James Hogg, *The Pilgrims of the Sun; A Poem* (Edinburgh; London: 1815).

⁶⁷ James Thomson, *The poetical works of James Thomson. Containing, the seasons, liberty, the castle of indolence, and poems on several occasions* (Dublin: 1756), ll.739-46.

⁶⁸ Womack p.64.

⁶⁹ Mathew Wickman, 'Travel Writing and the Picturesque' in *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Romanticism*, ed. by Murray Pittock (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp.61-71, 71.

of various slopes and summits to sheep-rearing – the mountains of Glenshiel for example are ‘interlined with green stripes, covered with sweet and nutritious grasses’ (91) – sits at odds with accounts of scenery: ‘everywhere distorted by dark slits, gaping and yawning chasms, with every feature of a most awful deformity, conveying to the attentive spectator ideas of horror which could scarcely be excelled by a glimpse of hell itself!’ (108) While the first of these modes of analysis is clearly attributable to Hogg’s profession as an improving shepherd, the second might be ascribed to an engagement with the sublime and the beautiful in the terms laid out in Edmund Burke’s famous 1757 *Philosophical Inquiry* into their nature. An adherence on the part of Hogg to the principles of the Burkean sublime, ‘stained’ as Ian Duncan’s writes, ‘by Burke’s late politicization of them in the *Reflections on the Revolution in France*,’ would certainly support John Wilson’s thesis that Hogg’s status as an avatar of national culture is evidenced by his ability to apprehend an organic, fundamentally conservative aesthetic unity of landscape.⁷⁰

Womack’s analysis of the ideologically loaded aesthetics of Highland scenery however, offers a more nuanced way of approaching the apparent contradictions presented by landscape description in Hogg’s *Journeys*. In his ‘Memoir of the Author’s Life’ Hogg implies that the sublime acquired an extra potency for him by way of Thomas Burnet’s 1684 *Sacred Theory of the Earth*, a theological account of geology which Hogg describes as having ‘overturned [his] brain altogether’ when he read it as an adolescent.⁷¹ This influence arises in the *Highland Journeys* when, describing the ‘Trossack’ mountain range in his 1803 tour, Hogg engages in an extended meditation upon the origins and purpose of the region’s, ‘thousand little ragged eminences’ reflecting initially that, ‘Nature hath thrown these together in a rage’. On further consideration, Hogg conjectures that: ‘prior to the universal deluge, the Trossacks had formed a steep bar [...] but on the declension of the waters of the flood from around it; and leaving the huge glen filled up to the brim, unable to sustain the mighty pressure, the Trossacks had given way, when the impetuous torrent had carried all before it, saving the everlasting rocks which yet remain, the shattered monuments of that dreadful breach’ (*Journeys* 61). Womack points out that Burnet’s *Theory* represents the point of departure for an ongoing eighteenth-century debate over divine intention towards the economic amenability of the world’s extreme topographies. Womack writes that, ‘for Burnet, mountains were the debris of the Flood,

⁷⁰ Duncan, *Scott’s Shadow*, p.270.

⁷¹ *Altrive Tales*, p.16.

not a primordial part of Creation but ruinous memorials of divine anger.’⁷² This was a position refuted by the tour writer and exponent of the picturesque William Gilpin, who drew upon sources which, ‘sought to vindicate the wisdom of God in Creation against Burnet by finding out uses – humanistically defined ones for the most part – for the ostensibly useless productions of nature.’⁷³ Hogg’s willingness to follow Burnet in ascribing the status of diluvian remnant to the Trossachs potentially indicates the limitations of his improving optimism – some landscapes may not be the cultivatable product of a providential Creation, but the debris of divine chastisement.

Womack argues in *Improvement and Romance* that the negative sublimity of the Highland landscape carried a double significance as a desirable element of the totalizing spectacle of the picturesque, and as evidence of the region’s savage natural state and its need for economic and ecological intervention in the form of improvement. For Womack, the counter-formation to the negative sublime is a kind of highland arcadianism, in which: ‘plenty is not the reward of industry but the spontaneous gift of nature’.⁷⁴ For Hogg’s particular mode of pastoral improvement, questions surrounding the economic purposivity of hostile topographies require a less binary approach. As the above reference to inhospitable slopes ‘interlined with green stripes’ suggests, even an apparently barren topography might be capable of sustaining a sufficiently hardy breed of sheep. Here perhaps, are the roots of Hogg’s tendency to deviate from the established conventions of picturesque and sublime landscape description. As Womack argues, the opposing aesthetics of fertility and barrenness characteristic of Highland landscape description in the late eighteenth century proceed from a lowland, arable-oriented perspective in which: ‘[i]mprovement is the improvement of the land.’⁷⁵ From Hogg’s pastoral viewpoint however, the improvement of the husbandman and breed is of equal if not greater significance.

Following the three accounts of his *Highland Journeys*, the most substantial contribution which Hogg would make to the literature of agricultural improvement was *The Shepherd’s Guide*. Advising on the best means of preventing ‘Rot’, Hogg observes in that treatise that while draining boggy land is often necessary, the same, ostensibly useless

⁷² Womack, p.64.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p.84.

⁷⁵ Womack, p.61.

terrain can also be productive of ‘very wholesome and nutritive food’ for sheep.⁷⁶ Similarly, in his ‘Essay On the utility of encouraging the system of Sheep-Farming in some districts of the Highlands, and Population in others’, originally intended to accompany a collected volume of the tours but eventually appended to the *Guide*, Hogg writes of the preferability of ‘Coarse land [...] Soft grasses being very pernicious to sheep’.⁷⁷ Deftly anticipating the pastoral hegemony of the Highland landscape of the following decades, Hogg posits the sheep as the potential instrument of the negative sublime’s acquiescence to the demands of agricultural improvement. Rather than deferring entirely to existing aesthetic conventions, Hogg’s pastoral idealism in the *Highland Journeys* allows him to absorb hostile landscapes into a mediated, pragmatic arcadianism for which his native Ettrick Valley is the model.

4.5 History and improvement in the *Highland Journeys*

While Hogg’s pastoral focus does distance his *Journeys* from contemporary debates and discourses surrounding the aesthetics of improved landscape and their discontents, he was neither blind to nor disinterested in their implications. Describing the estates of the Duke of Athol in the account of his 1802 tour, Hogg begins by praising a pleasing topography and cultivation, writing that the scenery exceeds, ‘anything that ever I saw in beauty.’ Hogg then informs his reader: ‘paint to yourself the most charming landscape that you can conceive; you may unite propriety with elegance; elegance with beauty; and beauty with sublimity; yet you never will match Dunkeld if you have not seen it’ (*Journeys* 34). Hogg’s repetitious listing of aesthetic categories exposes them as empty signifiers rather than qualities of landscape. The mental painting of the polite reader and the conventions according to which it is composed are certainly targets in Hogg’s account of Dunkeld’s scenery, but as the passage continues, the scope of Hogg’s critique expands, and the ambiguity of topographical description becomes emblematic of the values of agricultural improvement more generally. Hogg states that the Duke of Athol has established a farm in his estate, ‘which he manageth after the most liberal plan’ as an example to his tenants, who are additionally bound by the terms of their leases to fallow a certain portion of their land (35). As above, Hogg’s sudden adoption of a generic vocabulary, in this case a

⁷⁶ *The Shepherd’s Guide*, p.156.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.288.

georgic one of proprietary liberality and crop rotation, seems to invite doubt as to what its terms in fact connote. Continuing, Hogg relates an encounter with one of the Duke's former tenants:

he was one of nineteen farmers who were removed from the Duke's land to make way for one man, who now possessed the whole of what they, with their families, lived happily upon. On expressing my astonishment what could move his Grace to such a proceeding, he replied, "Ah! Cot pless him, hit pe nane of his doings." (36)

The above mixture of anecdote, survey and description, represents all of the elements that would be promised in 1805's unfulfilled advertisement for a collected volume of Hogg's Highland tours. Hogg's unornamented juxtaposition of proprietary indifference with peasant loyalty passes implicit judgment upon the situation presented, and acknowledges displacement and dispossession as an inevitable concomitant of agricultural improvement. However, Hogg's use of phonetic spelling, conjuring up what is for Womack, 'a fool's language analogous to the comic dialects spoken by Irishmen and Frenchmen on the eighteenth-century stage',⁷⁸ signals both his socio-cultural distance from and perhaps, perceived superiority to, his interlocutor. The Celticisation of the Highland tenant's reported speech suggests parallels between the victims of agricultural improvement and those of the post-1746 repression of Jacobite sympathizers. Hogg's designs to become precisely the type of farmer whose lease would replace those of multiple incumbent tenants means that sympathy and sentiment are more available forms of response to the spectacle of clearance than action. It's a moment that echoes Burns's 'To a Mouse', in which the dispossessor can only proffer the meagre consolation of sympathy to the dispossessed.

Throughout the tours, the instability of Hogg's pastoral lens, oscillating between the gaze of the individual shepherd and what John Barrell, in reference to Thomson's *Seasons* terms the *Equal Wide Survey* of the gentleman improver, results in a mixture of subjectivity and anecdote with schematic topographical and economic reflection – a combination that itself is frequently tintured by Hogg's sympathy for the losing side of the 1745 Jacobite rebellion. This latter influence is often refracted through Hogg's ambivalence towards aristocratic paternalism, which, as in his account of the Duke of

⁷⁸ Womack, p.8.

Athol's estate, he portrays as simultaneously an instrument of exploitation and the most effectual means of agricultural improvement. In his 1803 tour, Hogg reflects that, 'traversing the scenes, where the patient sufferings of the one party, and the cruelties of the other were so affectingly displayed, I could not help being a bit of a Jacobite in my heart, and blessing myself that in those days I did not exist, or I had certainly been hanged' (81). Hogg's romantic attachment to the Stuart cause is constructed here as a moral and emotional reflex activated by the brutality which Jacobite landowners and their dependents were subjected to after Culloden. In Hogg's 1802 tour however, the topos of Stuart dignity in the face of historical injustice is extended to contemporary political analogy. Viewing the castle on Loch Leven in which Mary Queen of Scots was incarcerated by the Scottish peerage, Hogg recalls that:

there injured and amiable majesty suffered imprisonment, and that by the very persons who were bound by all the laws of God and man, to reverence and obey her, who have left an indelible blot on their name and nation, who swayed by prejudice, and selfish ends, made a handle of a few youthful levities natural to her sex and station, to violate the sacred rights of sovereignty; to hunt and persecute their lawful queen; oblige her to become a fugitive in a foreign land; and there, unmoved, saw here proceeded against as a delinquent[...] (*Journeys* 28)

The passage is redolent of Burke's lament in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, that, 'never more, shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of exalted freedom.'⁷⁹ Just as the Jacobite leader John Graham of Claverhouse is praised for his bravery and loyalty to his sovereign (32), Hogg's gloss upon the incarceration of Mary Stuart presents a politically freighted defence of monarchical legitimacy, which accomplishes an implicit transference of Jacobite allegiance into anti-revolutionary loyalty towards the current Hanoverian regime. This is a strategy which Hogg had previously used in his patriotic pro-war song of 1801, 'Donald MacDonald', in which a Highland soldier ascribes his community's former support for Charles Edward Stuart to an irrational 'tenderness' of feeling that might have been extended to George the Second had he 'come friendless among us', invoking what is for

⁷⁹ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: 1790), p.113.

Womack a topos of: ‘civil war reduced to an over-enthusiastic expression of hospitality’ in which ‘the Highlands are identified as an irrational source of pure loyalty.’⁸⁰

While the precise valence of Hogg’s sympathy towards the Stuarts and their former adherents changes according to whether it is directed towards the proprietary or peasant class however, Jacobitism often serves in the *Highland Journeys* as an analogy for a form of popular political conservatism. As such, it might be expected to clash with Hogg’s faith in agricultural improvement, which often appears to align itself in opposition to the combination of paternalism and dependence of which the proverbial readiness of the Highlanders to follow their chieftains into battle is the corollary. In his 1803 tour Hogg writes disapprovingly of the purchase of Highland estates by Lowland proprietors, admitting:

I cannot endure to hear of a Highland chieftain selling his patrimonial property, the cause of which misfortune I always attribute to the goodness of his heart, and the liberality of his sentiments; unwilling to drive off the people who have so long looked to him as their protector, yet whose system of farming cannot furnish them with the means of paying one fourth, and in some situations not more than a tenth of the value of his land; and as unwilling to let fall the dignity of his house, and the consequence amongst his friends, which his fathers maintained (*Journeys* 110)

Eric Richards writes in his history *The Highland Clearances*, that in this passage, Hogg ‘defined accurately and vividly the dilemma of landlords.’⁸¹ Here as above, the Highland virtues of generosity and the subordination of economy to sentiment are to the fore. However, as in Hogg’s encounter with a still-loyal former tenant of the Duke of Athol in his 1802 tour, an adherence to traditional systems of paternalism in the face of agricultural rationalism appears to serve neither dependent nor proprietor. And yet Hogg frequently writes of the advantages which he expects the Highland populace would derive from the development of their rural economy. In his 1803 tour, Hogg singles out a scheme of secure tenures and fishing settlements devised by the Mackenzies of Applecross as, ‘an example of which every reflecting mind must approve’. Hogg continues, writing that, ‘it is only by

⁸⁰ Womack, p.54.

⁸¹ Eric Richards, *The Highland Clearances: People, Landlords and Rural Turmoil* (Edinburgh: Birlin, 2008), p.144.

concentrating these hardy and determined people into such bodies, that they shall ever be enabled to acquire the proper benefit of the inestimable fishing on their coasts, or that ever the germs of manufactures shall be successfully planted on these distant shores' (*Journeys* 99). For Hogg, this scheme is evidence that in the Highland context, pastoral improvement and emigration are not necessarily concomitant, and that a rationalisation of infrastructure and settlement rather than arbitrary clearance might increase the wealth of both proprietors and dependents.

Accordingly, Hogg uses his remarks upon the planned Caledonian Canal – which would eventually link the east and west coasts of the Highlands via a navigable channel – as an opportunity to advance his alternative vision for the region's improvement. Expressing his doubt that the proposed canal will be heavily used enough to justify the expense, Hogg warns his addressee (in this case Walter Scott) that he is: 'not aware what prodigious numbers of poor people drag on a wretched existence in these distant glens and islands' (84). Hogg argues that the temporary employment and increase in trade that the construction of the canal can be expected to bring will not provide a means of support for the region's large population. Instead of being invested in a prospective scheme to increase commerce and trade, Hogg argues, 'one third of the money laid out upon the great canal, would have been better employed in purchasing land to be let out in Feus to those tribes and families annually vomited out by their own native inhospitable shores, and forced to seek for a more certain means of subsistence in the western world' (85). Hogg recommends that public money be used to purchase secure tenancies for the impoverished Highland population. This would allow the redistribution of population among areas where 'woolen manufactories' and fisheries could provide employment. In a tone that recalls the agrarian optimism of earlier Scottish improvers, Hogg declares that, '*men, sheep and fish* are the great staple commodities of Scotland; and that, though a number of other improvements *may* contribute to its emolument, yet whatever tends more particularly to encourage or improve any of these *will* do it' (85).

The passage as a whole anticipates many of the arguments that Hogg would later make in his 'Essay On the utility of encouraging the system of Sheep-Farming in some districts of the Highlands, and Population in others, Addressed to the Honourable President and Members of the Highland Society'. As de Groot relates in his introduction to the *Highland Journeys*, Hogg originally planned to publish the 'Essay' alongside the *Journeys*, although it eventually appeared in print as an appendix to 1807's *The*

Shepherd's Guide. There, Hogg recommends that the 'pyramidal' Highland mountains be turned over to pasture, and that the populace of the 'wild inhospitable glens' be granted feus in regions of organized fishing and woollen manufacture (*Journeys* 213). Hogg's sympathy for the Highland people and his desire to see the area become subject to the process of pastoral improvement are thus reconciled through a scheme which according to Devine, is in fact largely representative of the manner in which pastoral improvement had already been conducted in the southern Highlands.⁸² The reorganisation of estates which Hogg recommends in his essay were now being applied by landlords in the north and west of the region, creating what would become the familiar practice of crofting.

In his study *The Making of the Crofting Community*, James Hunter writes that, 'where its appearance coincided with the handing over of vast tracts of territory to sheep farmers, crofting was seen as a convenient and potentially profitable way of disposing of a displaced population'.⁸³ Hogg's recommendations for the improvement of the Highlands chime almost exactly with the procedures which accompanied the contemporary expansion of capitalist agronomy in the region. Hogg's 'Essay' also offers us another way to read the rural economy that is presented in the pastoral arcadia of his poem 'Willie an' Keatie'. In moving from depopulated mountain pasture to thriving valley, Hogg's shepherd is perhaps traversing a rationally managed estate in which tenants have been concentrated in the areas best suited to arable farming and manufacturing. In this case, the naivety of the peasant narrator would be re-inscribed as that of the humble labourer, unable, despite his physically elevated view point, to comprehend the Thomsonian 'equal wide survey' from which the proprietor has organized his estates.

4.6 Leisure and politics in Hogg's *Scottish Pastorals*

My argument thus far has been that Hogg's engagement with pastoral improvement to a large extent undermines the generic distinction between pastoral and georgic. But this generic dynamic might be re-inflected as a question of class. While Hogg would later perfect a labouring voice which insisted upon the exceptionality of the vocation in which it originated, the question of social rank in his *Scottish Pastorals* is vexed, with the volume presenting itself neither as the product of an untutored labourer whose primary claim to

⁸² Devine, p.179.

⁸³ James Hunter, *The Making of the Crofting Community* (Edinburgh: Birlin, 2010), p.52.

literary legitimacy is a Burnsian ‘a spark o’ Nature’s fire’, nor as an attempt to appropriate the aristocratic voice of the previous century’s enamelled pastoral.

By his own account, Hogg was familiar with the work of Burns from as early as 1797, so it is perhaps especially surprising, given its allusive titular substitution of ‘*Mostly Written*’ for the ‘*Chiefly*’ of Burns’s *Poems*, that the contents of Hogg’s collection display relatively little in the way of a debt to the ‘Heaven-taught ploughman’. In the introduction to her 1988 edition of *Scottish Pastorals*, Elaine Petrie argues that, ‘Hogg’s wish to be a writer was partly inspired by the example of Burns and the Kilmarnock Poems were clearly in his mind when he set about producing *Scottish Pastorals*.’⁸⁴ Petrie also suggest however, that it may have been due to the ‘classical canon’ available in Elder’s library that ‘it was the writing of Pope and Gray rather than of his contemporaries that provided Hogg’s literary models.’⁸⁵ It is on its engagement with this earlier canon of writers, to which, as we will see, the Scots poet Allan Ramsay should certainly be added, that *Scottish Pastorals* founds its authority, rather than upon the identity of its practically invisible author. If the concept of labour is invoked at all in *Scottish Pastorals*, it is only associatively, through the text’s focus on its opposite: idleness or leisure.

The bulk of the poetry in *Scottish Pastorals*, is written in tetrameter couplets of Border Scots, avoiding, as Petrie notes, any attempt to engage with the standard Habbie form by this point so thoroughly established as a mainstay of Scots poetry.⁸⁶ The collection contains four lyric poems, one ballad air and two songs. My focus here is upon the poems, partly because they represent a notable incongruity within the corpus of a writer whose rise to fame was based on the mastery of ballad song that he demonstrated in *The Forest Minstrel* and *The Mountain Bard*. Accordingly, my argument here will be that the poetry of *Scottish Pastorals* represents something of a false start in the development of what would come to be perceived as the Ettrick Shepherd’s characteristic literary practices, not only in terms of form, but of content also. The first poem of the *Pastorals*, ‘Geordie Fa’s Dirge’ presents an irreverent elegy in six stanzas of irregular length, for a local fiddler with a repertoire of popular Scottish songs, who has also found employment as a shepherd, fisherman and huntsman. The poem bears some striking resemblances to Burns’s ‘Tam Samson’s Elegy’, an addition to 1787’s Edinburgh Edition (K117). Like

⁸⁴ See also Petrie’s introduction to Hogg, *Pastorals*, vii.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, ix.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, xvii.

Burns's poem, 'Geordie Fa's Dirge' catalogues its subject's sporting exploits: 'What fish he kill'd when young and clever,' and 'What cocks he kill'd, what hares he hundert'. Where Burns's poem exhorts 'ye birring Paitricks' and 'cootie moorcocks' to celebrate the demise of their 'mortal Fae' (ll.37-41), Hogg's assures 'poachers' and 'fishers' that 'the muirs an' streams will sport afford ye,' following the death of their preternaturally successful competitor (l.51). Again in the style of Burns, 'Geordie Fa's Dirge' also celebrates the social virtues of the deceased, particularly his lack of affectation, reflecting that, 'Whatever rank/Chance plac'd him in, he still was frank' (ll.61-62).

Perhaps the dominant influence here however, is not the poetry of Burns, but that of Allan Ramsay's Scots Elegies.⁸⁷ In his 'Memoir' Hogg recalls being 'confounded' by the 'Scottish dialect' of Ramsay's *Gentle Shepherd*; his professed alienation setting his claims to pastoral authenticity against the classical pastoralism evident in Ramsay's referential synthesis of a Scots 'Doric' idiom.⁸⁸ That Hogg claims to have found his first encounter with *The Gentle Shepherd* so baffling, and his first encounter with Burns so affirmative, is perhaps indicative of the extent to which the Scottish pastoral tradition had been advanced by Burns's incorporation of additional literary and vernacular influences. And yet it is to the older of these two models of vernacular Scottish poetry which the opening poem of Hogg's first printed volume seems to allude. Murray Pittock has pointed to the way in which Ramsay's 'Elegy on Maggy Johnston' takes for its subject: 'no Lycidas nor bishop's wife, but a Brewster and publican, an apparently 'low' figure who in reality stands as a synecdoche for all classes in Scotland's capital.'⁸⁹ Pittock argues that the effect is to associate the death of the elegy's subject, 'with a loss of community, native skills, and perhaps even the native tongue.'⁹⁰

The activities at which Geordie Fa's prowess are noted – hunting, fishing, music, 'vigour at the baa' – anticipate those which Hogg would soon after associate with the Shepherds of the Ettrick Valley in his Highland tour of 1802, suggesting the character's role as a 'synecdoche' for, in this case, a particular class of Borders society. The account of the Ettrick Valley which Hogg gives there celebrates physical pursuits as well as local oral traditions as a source of restorative and creative leisure for rural labourers. Hogg

⁸⁷ Alan Ramsay, 'Elegy on Maggy Johnston, who died Anno 1711', in *Before Burns: Eighteenth Century Scottish Poetry*, ed. by Christopher MacLachlan (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2002), pp.34-38.

⁸⁸ *Altrive Tales*, p.15.

⁸⁹ Murray Pittock, *Scottish and Irish Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.38.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p.42.

writes that, ‘shepherds, having much spare on their hands, devote it to active pastimes’, such as foot races. In tones reminiscent of eighteenth-century descriptions of the effects of the division of labour upon the intellectual and martial efficacy of the labouring poor and the ways of mitigating them, Hogg asserts that:

It is well known, that the minds of young people must be employed on something: and such pastimes, and preparation for them, being excellently adapted for invigorating the bodily frame, so, the thoughts of contesting the victory with his opponent, who perhaps has vanquished him before, presides in the shepherd’s heart above every consideration, bearing down those affections which might prove far more immoral and debilitating. (*Journeys* 8)

Hogg’s valorisation of physical exercise as a source of virtue suggests a formulation in which leisure provides an opportunity for civic and individual of improvement. In her notes to Hogg’s ‘Dirge’, Elaine Petrie writes that, ‘the name Fa, Faa, Faw or Fell was that of one of the most prominent gipsy or tinker families on the south east Borders.’⁹¹ While Geordie Fa might represent many of the values of the pastoral community which Hogg would describe in his 1802 tour then, he is also external to that community in a way that mirrors Hogg’s notion of singularity, or the relationship of the Borders themselves to the rest of Scotland. In particular, while Geordie might have found employment as a skilled shepherd, fiddler and gamekeeper, he was not, unlike Hogg and his peers, necessarily subject to the master and servant hierarchy of agricultural labour. Geordie’s death, while presenting a tangible loss to the wider community by depriving it of his musical prowess, perhaps also symbolises the end of its connection to a classically pastoral way of life, in which lyrical and social pleasures are not subordinated to the imperatives of labour.

If Geordie’s death becomes a site of commemoration for a former state of pastoral independence however, it also presents an opportunity for Hogg to lay claim to that vanished state of society’s poetic tradition, with the speaker of the poem stating: ‘O’ a’ his sangs I gat a share’ (l.14). ‘Geordie Fa’s Dirge’ is thus not only a demonstration of Hogg’s command of eighteenth-century Scots poetry and an allusion to the work of its most famous exponents, but a claim to his minstrel status as a living medium of the region’s fading song culture. The point is arguably driven home by the fact that unlike the elegies

⁹¹ *Pastorals*, p.38.

of Burns or Ramsay discussed above, Hogg's 'Dirge' does not insert a 'PER CONTRA' to its final epitaph. While 'Tam Samson's Elegy' concludes with the declaration that its subject is still '*livin!*' (l.100) – contributing to the ebullient tone of the composition and asserting the immortality of the virtues which the deceased represents – Hogg's poem omits any equivalent, again ensuring the passage of the traditions which it celebrates into the hands of the author. 'Geordie Fa's Dirge' negotiates a double inheritance then: partly conducted by 'an authentic connection, through birth and environment to an existing oral tradition', and partly through Hogg's practised command of a form of Scots poetry used first by Ramsay and then by Burns.⁹²

'Dusty, or, Watie an' Geordie's Review of Politics' (3-12), the second piece in *Scottish Pastorals*, continues to assert Hogg's familiarity with established poetic forms – in this case the eclogue. There are echoes here of Burns's 'Twa Dogs' (K71), albeit without the disparity of rank or titular conceit that set that poem apart from other examples of the genre. Hogg's speakers are, more conventionally, human. However it is a surprising poem, particularly given that its author would at around the same time pen the jingoistic pro-war song 'Donald MacDonald'. 'Dusty' presents a more nuanced view of wartime Scottish politics, relaying an exchange between two shepherds during the June of 1798. Perhaps significantly, the conversation takes place, 'A wee bit frae the parish school,' (l.4), the seat of intellectual authority in rural eighteenth-century Scotland. Whether by virtue of the parochial education system or otherwise, Hogg's interlocutors are certainly informed, capable of discussing 'th' affairs o' their ain nation' (l.8) and of drawing analogies between Peter the Great's defeat of Sweden at the battle of Poltava and that nation's subsequent decline as a European power, and the political situation in post-revolutionary Europe (ll.121-30).

This is an incongruous frame of historical reference which resurfaces in Hogg's 1824 *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, when Robert Wringhim naming, in Ian Duncan's words, 'a fantasy of enlightened despotism', surmises that the mysterious Gil Martin must be Peter the Great, come to survey a foreign nation in disguise.⁹³ As Petrie notes, the Swedish-Russian war also provides the setting for Hogg's later tale, 'The Adventures of

⁹² Kirsteen McCue, "Singing 'more old songs than ever ploughman could': The Songs of James Hogg and Robert Burns in the Musical Marketplace", in *James Hogg and the Literary Marketplace: Scottish Romanticism and the Working-Class Author*, ed. by Sharon Alker and Holly Faith Nelson (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp.123-139 (p.124).

⁹³ Duncan, p.271

Captain John Lochy.’⁹⁴ The source of Hogg’s fascination with this strand of European history may have been a reference to ‘Immortal PETER’ in Thomson’s *The Seasons* – the allusion in *Scottish Pastorals* thereby constituting an invocation of improvement in its most authoritarian guise (l.956). The historical specificity of Geordie and Watie’s exchange however, points to an additional influence in Jakob von Staehlin’s 1788 *Original Anecdotes of Peter the Great*, a volume which contained numerous short sketches of the Tsar’s character and deeds, including his fascination with how his reign was perceived by other nations, and an account of his victory at Poltava. The text was among those available at the Selkirk Subscription Library, suggesting that ‘Geordie and Watie’ might be read as a glimpse into the political debates and surprising eclecticism of Hogg’s own intellectual milieu at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Hogg’s eclogue begins with Watie asking his friend Geordie to explain his dour mood, to which the latter responds that he cannot be carefree, ‘while viewin’/ My dear dear country gaun to ruin’ (l.30). While Watie initially threatens to ‘nock’ his unpatriotic companion, he quickly agrees to ‘argue out the matter’, asking Geordie to justify his pessimism. (ll.32-34) In spite of his trenchant, though insistently insubordinate Toryism, Hogg’s poem appears to present us with the spectacle of two rural labourers engaging in a rational political debate – a scene of which Francis Jeffrey might have approved more readily than any of Hogg’s future *Blackwood’s* colleagues. Geordie’s argument however, paints him as something of a Presbyterian chauvinist, with the embittered peasant complaining that ‘Religion’s grown a laughing stock’ (l.43) and that ‘sen they past the Papish bill,/ Frae ae mischief they’ve run t’nother,/ An’ neer had luck i’ ane nor other’ (ll.86-88). In response, Watie mocks his friend’s ‘Cameronian rants,/ ‘Bout solemn leagues an’ covenants,’ and asserts his belief in the superiority of the British constitution (ll.69-74). Hogg’s poem then, presents a relatively complex image of the cross-grained, historically freighted politics of rural lowland Scotland. However Hogg ventures into potentially volatile territory as the two friends continue to discuss politics. Alluding to the popular appeal of republicanism, Geordie warns that Britain’s allies will desert her in favour of France:

Fo’ks een are open’d now, they see
The French design them liberty;

⁹⁴ *Pastorals*, p.45, *Altrive Tales*, pp.79-159

By makin' laws which fo'ks admire,
They've won mair than by sword an' fire. (ll.93-96)

Watie argues that French dominion has in fact eradicated 'Fair Liberty [...] Frae States, where ance ador'd,' (ll.99-100) but Geordie persists, stating that regardless of the outcome of the revolutionary wars: '[...] I'm indiff'rent;/ For come they, bide they, we've a liferent/ O slav'ry o' the hardest kind' (ll.135-37). Arguing that the financial burden of war falls disproportionately upon the poorest, and presenting a strikingly alternative view of rural life to that offered by the energetic independence of 'Geordie Fa's Dirge', Hogg's shepherd approaches a denunciation of the social injustice of the British state. We might expect the political weight of Geordie's sentiments to be somewhat mitigated by the eclogue's dialogic structure, however the rhetorical strength of the poem falls largely on Geordie's side at this point of the poem, with Watie's arguments relying on historical analogy and conditional syntax, and his opponent's on a radical Whig vocabulary of 'downright slav'ry' and 'proud oppressors' (ll.140-62). Geordie builds to an ominous prediction of economically induced riot: 'if they raise the taxes higher,/ They'll set alunt that smoostin' fire,/ Whilk ilka session helps to beet,/ An', when it burns, they'll get a heat' (ll.155-59).

Unable to win his friend round, Watie diagnoses Geordie with the dis-ordering physical symptoms of popular radicalism:

These cursed notions you've imbibit,
Hae made your look – I can't describe it. –
Your cheeks are thin, your colour sallow,
The very white o'y'r een's turn'd yellow (ll.167-70)

Furthermore, this is a disease with a traceable source in the form of the local press, with Watie declaring: 'I ken that, frankit, by Lord Napier,/ Ilk week you read the Kelso Paper' (ll.183-84). Here again, we might argue that Watie and Geordie's discussion draws upon Hogg's own reading and social circles as its context. Hogg had access to newspapers while working for the Laidlaws of Willenslee and for James Laidlaw at Blackhouse, some of which were apparently received second hand from a local landowner, Francis Napier. These included James Palmer's radical *Kelso Chronicle*, which was forced to close in

1798.⁹⁵ Hogg's reference to the publication alongside Napier's name in the above lines led to a heated epistolary exchange between Hogg and his friend, James Laidlaw's son, William. Hogg responded to Laidlaw's warning that Napier might treat as libel the association of his name with the circulation of a radical paper among the local tenantry in surprisingly defiant tones, writing: 'as it is I don't give a farthing for him nor any nobleman in Scotland; for if he should ever see the book, which in all probability he never will, and should be induced to view it in the right light, the most dangerous consequence that can ensue will be a duel betwixt me and his lordship'. The tone here is one of self-mocking bravado, but Hogg's private lack of deference for the Whig peer Napier (which he justifies by reference to Burns's freedom of manner 'with people of far higher station'), again paints the poet in a paradoxical light, as a socially combative Tory.⁹⁶

Comparison might be drawn here with Hector MacNeill's conservative Whig polemic of 1795, *Scotland's Skaith, or The History O' Will and Jean: An Ou'r True Tale*.⁹⁷ The piece takes the form of a pastoral romance, written in the same Scots tetrameter as much of the poetry from Hogg's first collection. *Scotland's Skaith* narrates the tale of the Stirlingshire farm labourer Willie Gairlace and his wooing of the local beauty Jeanie Miller. Following their romance and marriage however, the couple's, 'YOUTH and WORTH and BEAUTY' is threatened by the corruptive influence of 'NEWS and WHISKY' (4) to which Willie is introduced by a fellow labourer, Tam. The sociability of the tavern immerses Willy in a combination of political discussion and social drinking, causing him to neglect his vocational and familial duties. The 'deadly poison' eventually affects Jeanie, causing her to turn from 'the tenderest mither' to being 'heart harden'd a'thegither' (11). Singled out by the poem for particular opprobrium is a publication closely associated with the Scottish Friends of the People – *The Edinburgh Gazetteer*. This 'scandalous paper,' a note to the poem informs us, is 'evidently calculated to inflame the minds of people against Government, by an insertion of gross falsehoods and misrepresentation' (8). Also lamented is the influence of 'Rabby Burns' who damagingly, and 'Loudly sings in whisky's praise' (11). As in Watie's description of the influence of dissent upon Geordie in Hogg's eclogue, the combined effect of the radical press, convivial political discussion and alcohol in *Scotland's Skaith*, is to sap the physical health and beauty of its victims, leaving them 'Daver'd, doited, daiz'd and blinking/

⁹⁵ *Pastorals*, p.46

⁹⁶ Hogg, *Collected Letters*, I pp.9-10.

⁹⁷ Hector MacNeill, *Scotland's Skaith, or The History O' Will and Jean: An Ou'r True Tale* (Stirling: 1795)

Worne to perfect skin and banel!’ (12) However Hogg’s poem is distinct from MacNeill’s polemic in a number of significant ways. Firstly, as Petrie writes, Hogg’s ‘use of a dialogue to review the state of affairs of the world’, not only mimics the form of Burns’s ‘Twa Dogs’, but elaborates on that poem’s description of the lower classes laying, ‘aside their private cares,/ To mind the Kirk and State affairs’, immediately distancing ‘Watie and Geordie’ from MacNeill’s assessment of Burns’s poetry as socially deleterious.⁹⁸ Perhaps more crucial however, is the sobriety of both of Hogg’s protagonists, who meet to discuss news and politics not in their local tavern, but in the open air in front of the parish school.

As the poem goes on, the cause of Geordie’s political disaffection is revealed to be the levying of a five-shilling tax on dogs that has forced him to have his own companion, the eponymous ‘Dusty’, hanged. According to Hughes, Hogg writes partly from personal experience here, having been forced to part with his dog under similar circumstances.⁹⁹ While this revelation establishes a partial thematic affinity between Hogg’s eclogue and Burns’s famous ‘Tale’, it also disperses the poem’s political tension, suggesting that the complaints of rural labourers against the ruling classes can be attributed to localised causes, rather than any general affinity with radical ideology. In Hogg’s essay ‘Dogs’, an 1824 contribution to *The Shepherd’s Calendar*, his long-running series of reflections on pastoral life for *Blackwood’s Magazine*, the significance of Geordie’s grievance is thrown into relief. Without his dog, Hogg writes, a shepherd is ‘a mere post... a nonentity as a shepherd – no better than one of the grey stones upon the side of his hill.’ Continuing, Hogg asserts that:

without this docile little animal, the pastoral life would be a complete blank. Without the shepherd’s dog, the whole of the open mountainous land in Scotland would not be worth a sixpence. It would require more hands to manage a stock of sheep, gather them from the hills, force them into houses and folds, and drive them to markets, than the profits of the whole stock were capable of maintaining.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ *Pastorals*, p.48

⁹⁹ Hughes, p.41

¹⁰⁰ James Hogg, *The Shepherd’s Calendar*, ed. by Douglas S. Mack (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), p.57

The sheep dog then, is a vital instrument of the improving commercial pastoralism upon which the economy of Hogg's Ettrick Valley is entirely based. As Hogg's later writing would make clear, Geordie's loss of his dog represents not just the loss of a companion, but a threat to his livelihood and identity. In this sense, 'Dusty' is perhaps comparable to Burns's poem 'The Author's Earnest Cry and Prayer' (K81) as a poetic exhortation upon a critical point of plebeian politics and agricultural economy, directed towards an ignorant legislature.

While the narrator of *Scotland's Skaith* warns of the alcohol and politics-fuelled malaise that it describes, 'whan HA IT'S ROOTED/ Few hae pith the root to pu'' (10), the causes of popular discontent in 'Dusty' are shown to be discoverable through sociable debate. Where the rhetorical strategy of MacNeill's poem is one of moral judgement and didacticism, Hogg's eclogue appeals to sympathy, tracing Geordie's seditious political tendencies back to a moment of personal loss – the hanging of Dusty – which is described by Hogg in harrowing detail:

At first he spurr'd, an' fell a bocking,
Then gollar'd, pisht, and just was choaking:
Deil; tak the King, an' burn his crown,
Quoth I, an' ran to cut him down;
When poor, unlucky, senseless brute!
(Afore I never saw him do't)
He bate me till the blude did spring;
Confus'd an' hurt, I loot him hing
Owr lang for life; for on the green
He sprawl'd to death before my een. (ll.269-78)

There are perhaps echoes here of the accidental strangulation of the eponymous ewe in Burns's 'Poor Mailie's Elogy', but without the comic conceit of the animal adopting a human voice to admonish its careless owner. A more apt comparison might be drawn with William Hamilton of Gilbertfield's 1706 poem 'The Last Dying Words of Bonnie Heck', in which a lame greyhound laments its imminent hanging and recounts the athletic feats of its youth.¹⁰¹ In Hogg's poem however, the animal's death is not attributed to the owner's poor husbandry or lack of compassion, but to misgovernment on the part of the Pitt

¹⁰¹ William Hamilton of Gilbertfield, 'The Last Dying Words of Bonnie Heck, in *Before Burns*, pp.15-17

regime. Hogg's precise use of vernacular Scots, refusing polite sentimentality and witty conceits, approaches an alternative interpretation of Wordsworth's 'real language of men in a state of vivid sensation', resulting in a form of pastoral realism arguably quite distinct from anything in Burns or Ramsay's treatments of the genre.¹⁰²

The two speakers of 'Dusty' part on good terms, though not without expressing a tinge of paranoia. Geordie, following his near regicidal outburst, entreats his friend, 'Be o' our cracks a wee discreeter,/ For HOGG pits a' we say to meter' (ll.323-24). Hogg here rehearses the role he would later play as the eponymous social observer of his periodical experiment *The Spy*, albeit with slightly more sinister connotations. At this point, Hogg may be drawing upon his own experiences, recounted in the essay 'Storms', as a member of a rural debating society which became an object of suspicion to the surrounding community when one of its meetings coincided with a violent hurricane in 1794. The supernatural hysteria of Ettrick's inhabitants, provoked by their belief that the members of Hogg's literary association had brought about the storm through some 'correspondence with the powers of darkness', coincides with the height of Pitt's counterrevolutionary crackdown.¹⁰³ Hogg's native valleys felt some of the effects of this reactionary impulse. In 1792, measures had been drawn up by the Bailies of nearby Selkirk to counteract 'certain seditious pamphlets and associations published and entered into by fractious and discontented people', while two years later, one George Lawson, a local minister and member of the Selkirk Subscription Library, was forced to defend himself against accusations that he harboured revolutionary sympathies.¹⁰⁴ Hogg's account of the risks of intellectual association in the mid-1790s, 'Dusty' offers an unorthodox perspective upon the political climate of the Scottish Borders during the revolutionary decade. If its politics fall short of Robert Burns's erstwhile republicanism, like Gilbert Burns's response to James Currie's 1800 biography of his brother, Hogg's poem nonetheless acts as a defence of leisure as a site of labouring-class intellectual improvement and discussion. Indeed, Hogg's defence of plebeian debate as a salutary form of recreation foreshadows his later involvement in the Edinburgh Forum, even as it runs radically counter to the reactionary approach to popular politics and labouring-class reading evinced by the work of writers such as MacNeill and Hannah Moore.

¹⁰² William Wordsworth, *Lyrical ballads, with other poems*, 2 vols. (London: 1800), i, p.5.

¹⁰³ *The Shepherd's Calendar*, p.15

¹⁰⁴ T. Craig Brown, *The History of Selkirkshire or Chronicles of Ettrick Forest*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: 1886), ii. p.126

4.7 'Dialogue in a Country Church-Yard'

Suggesting that its author had saved his most outlandish piece until after his credentials as a poet of established forms and contemporary rural life had been established, the fourth poem of Hogg's *Pastorals*, following the romance of 'Willie and Keatie' discussed above, investigates the possibility of a constant affinity between the individual imagination and the external world. Misleadingly titled 'A Dialogue in a Country Church-Yard', this poem approaches the question of a human sympathy with larger, intangible natural forces, in the form of an encounter between two Ettrick Shepherds – Colin and Nicholas – who have disturbing reports to share with one another (21-27). Initially, the poem appears to have little in common with Gray's 'Church Yard Elegy', or with the elegies of Allan Ramsay and Robert Burns that Hogg emulates elsewhere in his collection. Significantly, Hogg's 'Dialogue' is also the only poem in the *Pastorals* to be written entirely in English, partly in allusion to the poetry of Gray and his contemporaries, but perhaps also to the puritan tracts which its imagery seems to invoke. In a blurring of scientific curiosity and the supernatural that would later typify novels such as Hogg's *Three Perils of Women* (1823) and *Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) the 'Dialogue' recounts a series of dreams which happen to have prefigured the sudden death of the interlocutors' mutual friend. One of the speakers, Nicholas, presents a plutonic inversion of the topography which Hogg would later dub an 'Arcadia', unfolding a landscape in which, 'O'er caves of death, and dens of woe,/ On rocks the blasted forests hung' (ll.93-94). Nicholas then describes crowds of people toppling from rocky precipices into a noxious lake:

All bent on trifles, all enjoy'd
 When once in the pursuer's power;
 And millions nothing else employ'd
 Than pushing others headlong o'er. (ll.105-08)

It's an image which evokes the combination of blind emulation and industry that Adam Smith had imagined to be the actuating power behind the process of improvement. In Nicholas's Bunyanesque allegorical vision, economic greed and selfishness become the basis of mass-damnation. Here, the role of the elect is filled by a 'swain', free from any 'shade of ostentatious glare' and endowed with the epithet of 'FRIEND OF MAN' (ll.121-36). The culmination of Nicholas's nightmare is this figure's fall into the gulf below.

Colin, the second of that poem's speakers, interprets Nicholas's visionary presaging of the death of this 'FRIEND' via an 'aerial whisper' as evidence of the mysterious links between the material world and the mind (l.161). It's a preoccupation which Hogg would return to repeatedly in his later career, writing in *The Spy* that, 'the human soul is animated and directed, in some persons, by corporeal functions formed of different materials from those of others'.¹⁰⁵ In a contribution to *The Shepherd's Calendar* entitled 'George Dobson's Expedition to Hell', Hogg would write of, 'a distinct existence of the soul, and its lively and rapid intelligence with external nature, as well as with a world of spirits with which it has no acquaintance'.¹⁰⁶ In the context of Hogg's earliest poetry, this interest in the pluripotency of the senses might be compared to Burns's image in 'The Vision', of the rustic poet '[b]y passion driven' (K62 l.236). But Hogg's configuration of a sensually articulated enthusiasm as literary agency differs from that of Burns I would argue, in its emphasis on imaginative apprehension over sentimental response. On this level, Hogg's 'Dialogue' begins to reflect the way in which for Mee, the Romantic construction of 'the unworlding visionary ideal prevented genuine poetic enthusiasm becoming confused with the bodily passions'.¹⁰⁷

Hogg's claims to 'singular' genius and its conservative interpolation by John Wilson also partly attest to the transition from a socially grounded, empirical notion of a self that 'could only be judged by observing its interaction with others,' typical of eighteenth-century writers such as Smith and Mackenzie, to what Klancher calls, 'the positive hermeneutic of *Blackwood's Magazine*'.¹⁰⁸ This valorisation of the individual genius might of course be partly attributed to the influence of Burns's works themselves, and their privileging of 'Nature's fire' as the criterion of poetic legitimacy. Removed from the moral philosophy and sentimental literature which informed it, this aspect of Burns's writing possesses an affinity with Romantic, post-enlightenment and post-sentimental notions of natural genius and the power of the imagination. In later versions of his 'Memoir', Hogg would strive to distinguish himself from Burns, while recalling that his initial 1797 encounter with his predecessor's work 'formed a new epoch' in his own

¹⁰⁵ James Hogg, *The Spy*, ed. by Gillian Hughes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p.293.

¹⁰⁶ *The Shepherd's Calendar*, p.119.

¹⁰⁷ Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.216.

¹⁰⁸ Manning and Ahnert, 'Introduction: Character, Self and Sociability in the Scottish Enlightenment', in *Character, Self, and Sociability in the Scottish Enlightenment*, p.6;. Klancher, p.60.

development as a writer.¹⁰⁹ But I would argue that in Hogg's early writing this distinctiveness is anchored in a sense of the improving shepherd's vocational specificity, which synthesizes the surveyor's view of expansive swathes of landscape with the individual operative's elevated mountain perspective. This allowed Hogg to claim an authority that was simultaneously grounded in and transcendent of his vocational origins; the Ettrick Shepherd came to embody a Romantic universalisation of the local or singular.

The 'swain' of Nicholas's portentous dream, referred to in Hogg's 'Dialogue' only as 'BRYDEN' or the 'FRIEND OF MAN', turns out to have been Walter Bryden, a benefactor who had earlier saved Hogg and his parents from homelessness by arranging employment as a shepherd for Hogg's father.¹¹⁰ For Hogg, Bryden's death in 1799 may have served as a reminder of his relative insecurity within the pastoral division of labour and an omen of future hardship. On this level, the 'Dialogue' arguably echoes what Leask calls the 'Meliboean voice' of Burns's Kilmarnock persona.¹¹¹ The critique of improvement's emulative foundations in Hogg's 'Dialogue' is redolent of those previously mounted by Burns and Mackenzie. But the threat of ruin to all and sundry, regardless of individual virtue, is perhaps equally evocative of the economic precariousness which agricultural capitalism imposed on rural life in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Leask argues that this uncertainty partly spurred Burns's decision to make his way in the world through literature rather than agriculture.¹¹² For Hogg on the other hand, the insecurity of the hired shepherd spurred the pursuit of agricultural professionalism in the Shepherd's guide; an ambition replaced by literary aspirations when he failed to find a position as a Highland sheep farmer.

Intertextually present in Hogg's *Scottish Pastorals* through the titular allusion of his 'Dialogue', Thomas Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' is also quoted at length in Hogg's account of his 1802 Highland tour. Describing the area surrounding the bridge of Garry, Hogg writes:

In the hollows or flats on the sides of the mountains, here and there a few miserable hamlets present themselves which, though a degree better than those in the more northern districts, yet being the first that

¹⁰⁹ *Altrive Tales*, p.16.

¹¹⁰ Hughes, p.11.

¹¹¹ Leask, *Burns and Pastoral*, p.80.

¹¹² See *ibid.*, pp.81-114.

encounter the view of the traveller on his way northward have, I dare say, ere now brought to recollection Gray's beautiful stanza:

‘Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear;
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness in the desert air.’

Many a mind capable of all those noble powers which learning and philosophy can improve is here doomed to take shelter from the rude inclemency of the seasons in the midst of a heap of mud – “in a cottage of clay, whose foundation is in the dust” – and in a few years lies down in peace with his fathers in the land of forgetfulness, alike unknowing and unknown. (39)

Hogg's depiction of the Highlands is once again framed by his role as an improving shepherd, leading him to see the landscapes and inhabitants of Gaelic speaking Scotland as a scene of wasted potential. But this sense of the urgency of amelioration is perhaps inseparable from the advantages that would be afforded to the improving shepherd in fulfilling it. John Guillory suggests of Gray's 'Elegy' that the 'narrative scenario in which Gray imagines what the illiterate peasant might have been (the unfound gem) valorizes the process of social mobility as circulation *per se*: what cannot move (up) is waste, and waste is at the same time the necessary cost of circulation: every success is at the expense of another's failure.'¹¹³ If Burns flattens the dualism of success and failure into a topos of total ruin in the Kilmarnock Edition's 'To a Mountain Daisy', refiguring the promise of social advancement through the work of improvement as the spectre of a shared 'doom', Hogg nullifies it by optimistically positing improvement's apparently limitless upward drive as a mechanism that produces only winners. Hogg situates himself firmly within this paradigm of upward mobility. As his introduction to *The Shepherd's Guide* suggests, Hogg viewed pastoral improvement as the driving force behind the irruption of the illiterate rustic into the literary sphere; the subversion of Gray's 'Elegy' provides the schema for Hogg's progress in his twin careers as writer and shepherd.

¹¹³ John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), p.95

The Ettrick Shepherd lays claim to the untutored eloquence of Gray's 'hoary-headed Swain' as the contradictorily 'illiterate' voice of *The Shepherd's Guide*, but also to the purview of the experienced improver, and to the authority of the Scots vernacular tradition exemplified in the works of Burns and Ramsay and mediated in *Scottish Pastorals*. Despite its later refiguring as the unmediated product of a visionary imagination, the 'singular' persona which Hogg puts to work in his early writing bears the imprint of his vocational role as an improving shepherd.¹¹⁴ But on another level Hogg's singularity undermines the optimistic interpretation of Gray's 'Elegy' offered in the *Journeys*, drawing attention to the way in which his pastoral solitude would become a self-fulfilling prophecy in terms of his status as the sole representative of labouring-class success in Scottish writing of the Romantic period.

If Hogg's shepherd status anchored and legitimated his lyrical enthusiasm, it also served to distance him from the problems associated with the modern division of labour. In the preface to his 1810 collection of songs *The Forest Minstrel*, Hogg would describe the recently deceased Paisley weaver poet Robert Tannahill as 'the best imitator of Burns who hath yet appeared' – a piece of praise which tactfully gives Tannahill his dues, while simultaneously, and crucially, distancing Hogg himself from the dubious category of 'imitators of Burns'.¹¹⁵ It's perhaps not hard to see why, writing in 1810, Hogg might have felt it urgent to distinguish himself from the ephemeral flock of labouring-class poets who modelled themselves after Burns, particularly after the commercial and critical false-start of *Scottish Pastorals*. Hogg's dismissal of the weaver poet Tannahill as a simple imitator of Burns's song, underlines the thesis conveyed in his first collection of poems and the *Highland Journeys*: that the leisured autonomy enjoyed by the shepherd is a prerequisite of literariness in the context of labouring-class composition. In terms of the partial co-opting of his image by the Blackwoodian cultural project, Hogg's self-differentiation from the ranks of Scotland's restive manufacturing classes through both his visionary legitimacy and the exceptionality of his pastoral vocation, might also be read as a reflection of political necessity. Hogg's singularity as, in Wilson's words Burns's 'only worthy successor' becomes self-evidential, simultaneously legitimating class hierarchy in the domain of literature, and in the rapidly changing society which it overlooked.

¹¹⁴ On Hogg's 'singularity' see Fielding, p.162.

¹¹⁵ James Hogg, *The Forest Minstrel*, p.7

5

‘Labouring under a fit of insanity’: Surveillance and Intellectual Improvement in Nineteenth-Century Glasgow

5.1 An awful murder in Bridgeton

In December 1825, a broadside published by the Glasgow printer John Muir presented readers with an account of the ‘cruel and inhuman Murder’ of the eighteen year old millworker Sarah McVicar. The murderer was McVicar’s onetime partner and fellow cotton industry operative, the thirty two year old Charles Campbell; the setting a dance at a public-house in Bridgeton, then a manufacturing suburb to the east of Glasgow. The broadside reports that Campbell became ‘fired with jealousy’ after finding McVicar sitting on the knee of another man. He approached McVicar with a knife and ‘instantly thrust the weapon with so deadly an aim, into the unfortunate girl’s throat, that she fell at his feet, and expired in a few seconds.’ A doctor was called, ‘but all was of no avail, life had for ever fled, and the unfortunate victim of lawless passion lay steeped in her gore.’ Campbell, who seems to have left the scene after inflicting the mortal wound, was quickly apprehended by the police of Glasgow’s Calton district and conveyed to the cell where he awoke the next morning, apparently unaware of the events of the night before.¹

The account of the murder in Muir’s broadside and corresponding ones in the Glasgow press – that in turn were echoed in national journals such as the *London Morning Chronicle* and *Morning Post* – seem to have been calculated to produce sensation among readers, as much as for the purposes of public information.² These initial reports however, were soon overshadowed by Campbell’s strange treatment at the hands of the law. At Campbell’s trial before the Circuit Court of Justiciary in Glasgow in 1826, the judge Lord Meadowbank, instructed the jury to find the panel guilty of murder, but ineligible for the death penalty, because he had committed the crime while: ‘labouring under a *fit of insanity*’.³

¹ *Awful Murder in Bridgeton* (Glasgow: 1825).

² *The Morning Chronicle*, 12 December 1825; *The Morning Post*, 13 December 1825; *The Newcastle Courant*, 17 December 1825.

³ Charles Campbell, *Memoirs of Charles Campbell, at present prisoner in the Jail of Glasgow, Including his adventures as a seaman, and as an overseer in the West Indies. Written by Himself. To Which is Appended, an Account of his Trial Before the Circuit Court of Justiciary, at Glasgow, 27th April, 1826*, 2nd edn

What the Muir broadside had originally described as ‘a fit of jealousy’, was commuted into what both medicine and law saw fit to designate a ‘*fit of insanity*’, at a trial during which Meadowbank remarked that he could not remember, ‘ever having met with a case which called for such a patient examination, or which kept the mind on such a painful stretch of excitement as the present one’ (*Memoirs* 49). Campbell was found to have been insane on the basis of witness testimonies arranged by his defence counsel, or more precisely, the interpretation derived from those testimonies by a physician who had originally been called to testify against Campbell for the Crown. This was Dr James Corkindale, the surgeon who had examined McVicar’s body after the murder, and who had observed Campbell in prison prior to the trial on fifteen separate occasions.⁴ But from his conversations with Campbell during these visits, Corkindale had concluded that there was ‘no doubt’ that Campbell ‘was quite sane.’⁵

It was only Corkindale’s professional interpretation of witness testimony from Campbell’s fellow cotton spinners that convinced the court that the accused had been suffering from temporary insanity at the time of the murder. These testimonies ranged from a description of Campbell as merely ‘silly’, to an account of ‘something *outré*’ in his bearing, to reports of conversations during which he confided his paranoid delusions, and in one instance detailed his theory: ‘that sound had no limits; that the lowest whisper can be heard at an infinite distance; and even that if you only *think*, your ideas will be conveyed any where you pleased’ (*Memoirs* 43-46). These separate anecdotes of Campbell’s strange behaviour from his fellow labourers had to be valorised by medical opinion – interpolated within a narrative of insanity by Corkindale – before they could function as decisive legal evidence. Campbell was sentenced to life imprisonment on the grounds that while he could not be held responsible for McVicar’s murder, neither justice nor public safety would be served by his release; a seemingly unsatisfactory compromise, but one with an established precedent in Scottish legal procedure.⁶

A further layer of intrigue was added to the Campbell case in 1828, when the Glasgow stationer and printer James Duncan published the pamphlet-length *Memoirs of Charles Campbell, at present prisoner in the Jail of Glasgow, Including his adventures as*

(Glasgow; Edinburgh; London: 1828), p.49. Further references are given after quotations in the text and are abbreviated to ‘*Memoirs*’.

⁴ *Glasgow Herald*, 1 May, 1826.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ See Archibald Alison, *Principles of the Criminal Law of Scotland* (Edinburgh: 1832) p.645.

a seaman, and as an overseer in the West Indies. Written by Himself. To Which is Appended, an Account of his Trial Before the Circuit Court of Justiciary, at Glasgow, 27th April, 1826. The editorial juxtaposition of Campbell's autobiography with an account of his trial taken from the *Glasgow Free Press* newspaper, would seem to suggest an inherent tension between Campbell's narration of his past from the perspective of a coherent consciousness or self, and that same self's role as the object of a legal and medical cross examination of an 'insane intellect' (*Memoirs* 48). This conflict is particularly acute because Campbell devotes a significant portion of his *Memoirs* to an account of his pursuit of intellectual improvement as an apprentice cotton spinner. In his study of *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, Jonathan Rose cites Campbell's membership of a literary club as evidence of the value placed upon the 'disinterested pursuit of knowledge' by the Scottish labouring classes of the early nineteenth century; Campbell devotes a significant portion of his *Memoirs* to his pursuit of intellectual improvement during his time in the town of Johnstone, and recalls his membership of both a local circulating library and a debating club modelled upon those established by Robert Burns in 1780s Ayrshire.⁷ Indeed, Burns casts a long shadow over Campbell's *Memoirs*: not only as the 'peasant of Ayrshire' whose 'devotion to the Scottish muse, had produced a crowd of ephemeral imitators in almost every Lowland district of Scotland', but as an example of labouring-class enlightenment, and, apparently mediated through James Currie's 1800 'Life of Burns', a paradigm of ill-fated poetic genius (*Memoirs* 11). While the *Memoirs* attest on one level to Campbell's continuing faith in the benefits of intellectual cultivation among manual labourers, his own descent into insanity, and murder of his onetime partner, would appear to render such pursuits of dubious value.

5.2 The insanity defence: self and society in early industrial Scotland

At Campbell's trial, Corkindale was called upon to not only affirm Campbell's temporary insanity, but to qualify it, leading to a revealing courtroom exchange in which he was forced to clarify the relationship between Campbell's faculties at the point of his crime. Corkindale asserted that Campbell, 'knew [...] very well what he was doing; but he was compelled to the act by the ungovernable strength of a particular hallucination.' When

⁷ Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2001), p.21.

asked whether this amounted to ‘more an insanity of the *will* than of the *intellect*’, Corkindale replied that rather: ‘[t]he intellect was eclipsed, upon a particular subject, by a delusion, and the *will*, though perhaps sound in itself, was directed a wrong way by an insane intellect.’ In summary, the judge Lord Meadowbank posited, to Corkindale’s approval, that the murder, ‘was not the offspring of an ungovernable passion excited in a *sound* mind: but of a passion, roused by circumstances, in a *diseased* one’ (*Memoirs* 48). In part, Corkindale’s distinction between insanity of the will and that of the intellect, and the queries that it addressed, were mandated by legal reason. The use of insanity as a legal defence in the Campbell case rested on the supposition that madness was not merely ‘ungovernable passion’, and that these forces were fundamentally distinct, otherwise any criminal who could claim that their will had been overcome by a powerful emotional impulse would be as non-culpable as somebody suffering from insanity. If Campbell’s will had been diseased he would merely have been the criminal described in the initial newspaper reports and Glasgow broadside, who had acted upon a ‘lawless passion’: because his intellect was diseased and his will sound, Campbell was categorised as insane. Like Thomas Reid’s theory of ‘active powers’, discussed in Chapter 3, the logic of legal culpability deployed at Campbell’s trial imbues the individual agent with a certain internal hierarchy. All action must be mediated by the will, but the will itself is directed by the intellect, and both the intellect and will are to an extent subject to the passions which they are at the same time tasked with restraining. The notion of the free agent paradoxically reinscribes the determinism that it attempts to escape, by locating strength of will as the absolute prerequisite of subjective action. Insanity and criminality seem only to be differentiated through the faculties whose respective failures produce them.

Professionally tasked with identifying criminal guilt rather than interrogating its basis, Meadowbank and Corkindale may not have been perturbed by the implications that seem to arise here. But for those invested in the moral and social reform of the labouring classes, such reasoning had to be addressed or confronted if improvement was to produce its desired effects. In his 1800 ‘Life of Burns’, James Currie had argued for a form of disciplinary **labouring-class education**, that would prioritise the strengthening of the volition, rather than the refinement of the taste and intellect. While a properly trained will is capable of governing wayward passions and counteracting the effects of an active sensibility, an overly refined intellect is both vulnerable to the vicissitudes of the passions, and capable of misdirecting the will. By Currie’s reasoning, and through the lens of a legal

verdict of temporary insanity, Campbell's improvement of his intellect appears as the root cause of a dangerous unbalancing of his moral faculties, which though not criminally culpable, might have been prevented by the correct regime of training and discipline.

What Campbell's case further seems to illustrate, is that such discipline might require a degree of external intervention, hitherto absent from the informal practices of labouring-class self-improvers. Jerrold Seigel has written of: 'the polarity of determinism and freedom as an element in the problematic of character and the sharper form it took in the nineteenth century.'⁸ Seigel argues that while eighteenth-century Scottish philosophers including David Hume and Adam Smith had posited theories of character that accommodated both determinism and voluntarism by placing sympathy in a mediatory role between individual conscience and social and material circumstances, the spectacle of the French Revolution and the growth of an urban manufacturing class prevented their intellectual heirs from advocating such a relaxed synthesis. We might characterise this shift in terms of a changing understanding of the effects of society and socialization, in which the salutary effects of company, described by Smith and Hume, are replaced by a paranoid apprehension of society at large, as a vast, unpredictable mass of individuals and systems. As Seigel notes, the question of whether character is the product of a subjective will or an effect determined by external factors, was reframed in the early nineteenth century not only by the influence of psychological materialism, but by increasing anxieties over how the socio-political temperament of the labouring classes would be shaped by their condition under an industrialising economic regime; anxieties which were in turn aggravated by a fear of political radicalism that persisted long after the French Revolution. For Seigel, these concerns contributed to the formation of 'a perhaps paradoxical but [...] defining feature of nineteenth-century thinking, namely the heightened emphasis it gave at once to the prospect of human freedom and to the determining power of material circumstances.'⁹

For Seigel, an important expression of the 'problematic of character' as a response to industrial modernity is represented by Robert Owen's assertion that 'character is

⁸ Jerrold Seigel, 'Necessity, Freedom, and Character Formation from the Eighteenth Century to the Nineteenth', in *Character, Self, and Sociability in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. by Susan Manning and Thomas Ahnert (New York; Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) pp.249-266 (p.259).

⁹ *Ibid*, p.255.

universally formed *for* and not *by* the individual.’¹⁰ Owen argued that defects in society as it currently existed derived from its adherence to the contrary and false supposition that ‘it is in the power of every individual to form his own character’.¹¹ For Owen, notions of legal and religious guilt were an upshot of this flawed formula, and punished a criminality that was produced by external, social factors beyond the control of the individual. Through his *New View of Society: or, Essays on the Principle of the Formation of the Human Character* (1813-14), the famous socialist manufacturing community that he organised at New Lanark, and the ‘Institution Established for the Formation of Character’ that the latter incorporated, Owen elaborated a model for the shaping of virtuous and happy individuals, through the transformation of the external forces which he believed were wholly determinate of human nature.

To an Owenite, Campbell’s *Memoirs* and the attached account of his trial may have appeared as evidence of the problems directly produced by a socio-economic system in need of drastic amelioration. But they also seem to yield a potent example of all that the bourgeois reformers of the early nineteenth century feared would result from the unregulated pursuit of knowledge by the labouring classes. Campbell’s case offers a demonstration of the volatile materiality of mind within a labouring body: a site that with the nineteenth-century rise of an urban manufacturing class and the emergence of a political economics of scarcity marked by the publication of Thomas R. Malthus’s 1798 *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, was to become the focus of various regimes of control and regulation. While partly mandated by new political-economic imperatives, this disciplinary turn perhaps found further justification in the re-emergence of radical popular politics following the end of the Napoleonic wars. Readers of Campbell’s *Memoirs* and trial may have seen a certain symbolic resemblance between his sudden eruption into insanity, and the violent political convulsions of the previous decades. Textile operatives in particular had been involved in several political revolts since Waterloo. In 1817, a series of State Trials of supposed revolutionary conspirators saw some of the figures later involved in Campbell’s trial – the judge Lord Meadowbank among them – preside over a pre-emptive governmental strike against a supposed labouring-class revolt involving a network of conspiracies stretching from the cotton manufacturing communities of

¹⁰ Robert Owen, *New View of Society: or, Essays on the Principle of the Formation of the Human Character*, 3rd edn (London:1817). p.33

¹¹ *Ibid*, p.32.

Lancashire to those of the Scottish lowlands.¹² These circumstances are revealing of the significance of the Ettrick Shepherd as a synecdoche for the Scottish lower classes in Wilson's 1819 *Blackwood's* essay I would argue, demonstrating Hogg's potential function as a figure that symbolically contained the simmering political resentment of manufacturers and labourers. The State Trials were merely the prelude to the open violence of the Peterloo Massacre in Manchester in 1819, and the Scottish insurrection of 1820, in which mass strikes and an armed encounter between weavers and dragoons at Bonnymuir followed the declaration of a provisional government via anonymously distributed pamphlets.¹³ The violent conclusion to the uprising earned it the famous title of the 'Radical War'. The thematic schema suggested by Campbell's *Memoirs*, linking the pursuit of knowledge by the lower classes with intellectual disorderliness, and that potentially, with political revolt, outlines without making explicit, a correlation between popular enlightenment and radical uprising that may have seemed ominous for readers in the 1820s.

On this level, Campbell's *Memoirs* are complemented by the slightly earlier and partly autobiographical volume of another onetime textile worker: Alexander Richmond's 1824 *Narrative of the Condition of the Manufacturing Population and the Proceedings of Government which led to the State Trials in Scotland*. Originally an operative weaver by trade, Richmond was recruited as a government spy during the ferment of 1816-17, and tasked with determining whether Scottish radicals were in the process of forming secret societies with the intent of overthrowing the government. When the State Trials which resulted from his intelligence resulted in a verdict of not-proven and the release of those detained, Richmond was publically compromised, and was accused of having acted as a government *agent provocateur*, sent in to lure an otherwise politically docile Scottish labouring class into treasonous revolt. To the authorities who had recruited him, Richmond became a political liability and a reminder of both the underhanded tactics which they had used in order to undermine the suspected uprising, and the embarrassing debacle of their subsequent failure to prosecute those whom he had exposed. To supporters of bourgeois-centric political reform and those of a broader popular politics alike, Richmond became something of scapegoat: he was subjected to a prolonged series

¹² See *A Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings for High Treason and Other Crimes and Misdemeanours*, ed. by T. B. Howell, 33 vols. (London: 1816-1826) xxxiii.

¹³ For discussion of the 'Radical War' and its continued cultural significance, see Gordon Pentland, 'Betrayed by Infamous Spies'? The Commemoration of Scotland's 'Radical War' of 1820', *Past and Present*, 201 (2008) pp.141-173.

of attacks in the *Glasgow Chronicle* newspaper in 1817 and his reputation as an *agent provocateur* was sealed in 1832 by the journalist Peter Mackenzie's tract, *An Exposure of the Spy System*. In 1972, the historian W. M. Roach lamented that twentieth century studies of the radical movement in Scotland had tended to 'uncritically' accept Richmond's vilification by his contemporaries, and in doing so had overlooked the important evidence that his *Narrative* provides of the popular political climate between 1810 and 1820. Roach concluded that Richmond's *Narrative* is 'more reliable' than the accounts of his detractors, and that as a result of its neglect as a credible source – driven largely by political prejudice – '[t]he importance of [...] early reform movements in the development of political consciousness among the lower classes of society in Scotland has been largely ignored.'¹⁴

Given the posthumous reputation of its author, it is not surprising to find Richmond's *Narrative* is partly an exculpatory operation, in which he attempts to defend his actions, and to draw attention to the short-sightedness and duplicity of both those whom he had ostensibly betrayed, and the authorities who had afterwards abandoned, or as Richmond has it, 'sacrificed' him.¹⁵ The *Narrative* is also a political-economic polemic, which attempts to link the rebellions of 1816 and afterwards to the economic abasement of Scotland's labouring classes amidst the industrial transformations of the early nineteenth century. Like Campbell's *Memoirs* however, Richmond's *Narrative* is, to some extent, also an account of labouring-class enlightenment turned sour, although his choice of reading material seems to have differed fundamentally from Campbell's. Richmond repeatedly draws attention to the grasp of political economy and intellectual talents which brought him to prominence as a key organisational figure within an extensive labourers' association in 1812, and subsequently to the notice of the authorities as a figure of influence among his peers. In this sense, what follows below is a comparison of two very different models of popular enlightenment in the early nineteenth century: one political economic in its character and reading practice, the other *belle lettristic*.

In his *Narrative*, Richmond attempts not only to defend his intentions in undertaking surveillance activities on behalf of the authorities, but to present such tactics

¹⁴ W. M. Roach, 'Alexander Richmond and the Radical Reform Movements in Glasgow in 1816-17', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 151 (1972), 1-19 (p.19)

¹⁵ Alexander B. Richmond, *Narrative of the Condition of the Manufacturing Population and the Proceedings of Government which Led to the State Trials in Scotland* (London: 1824), p.86. Further references are given after quotations in the text and are abbreviated to '*Narrative*'.

as a valid instrument of moral intervention in a society where the condition of the labouring poor has deteriorated beyond the reach of conventional reform. Throughout his *Narrative*, a strange dynamic is established between Richmond the reader of political economy, who is able to attribute popular discontent to a lucidly analysed matrix of economic determinants, and Richmond the reluctant spy, who believed that he could correct the behaviour of the radicals whose conspiracy he infiltrated, and direct them towards a more constructive path to the improvement of their condition. In this sense, Richmond's *Narrative* – similarly circumscribed by its relationship to juridical power – registers a conflict also visible in Campbell's *Memoirs*, between an eighteenth-century model of labouring-class intellectual improvement as imaginative and moral cultivation, and the rise of a dispensatory, regulative and pedagogic approach to the betterment of the lower ranks. This resonates in turn with the approaches to the improvement and education of the labouring classes explored by many prominent middle class and elite commentators, including Owen, but also those on the opposite end of the political-economic spectrum, who sought to reshape the whole notion of labouring-class amelioration in response to the dire imperatives of Malthusian economics.

5.3 Labour politics in early nineteenth-century Scotland

In his *Memoirs*, Campbell recounts that he was born in 1793 in the village of Tarbert on the isthmus of the Kintyre peninsula in Argyll, and that his family moved while he was a child to the Renfrewshire town of Johnstone, where his father found employment in a cotton mill. Campbell writes of his father: '[b]y this excellent parent I was early sent to school, and between his private tuition and that of my first schoolmaster, I could read English fluently, and even write at six or seven years of age.' Campbell's father seems to have been eager to preserve his son's connection with his cultural background, and sent him back to Argyll to learn Gaelic after he had received his English education (*Memoirs* 6). The attention which Campbell's father paid to his son's education, and indeed Campbell's lifelong commitment to his own intellectual improvement, were not untypical among labourers in lowland Scotland at the turn of the nineteenth century. A contributor to John Sinclair's 1791 *Statistical Account of Scotland* observes of the parish of Renfrew, near Johnstone, that:

to the credit of the people in general, it may be remarked that not only tradesmen, but even day-labourers, give their children a good education. Scarce a boy is not taught reading, writing, and arithmetic, a little church music, &c. And should any of them be neglected in their youth, when they come to the years of discretion, they go to school, at their own expence, in order to acquire these branches.¹⁶

Campbell's *Memoirs* evince that the labourers of early industrial Renfrew and its hinterland often continued to educate themselves on their own initiative once they had passed the age of formal instruction. Campbell proudly states in his *Memoirs* that subsequent to his two spells of schooling, he continued to nurture his own 'taste for knowledge and science' despite significant economic obstacles (8-9). As he attests, the type of learning valued by his labouring-class cohort did not necessarily correspond to the instrumental fields of 'reading, writing, and arithmetic' prescribed by Currie.

Yet the commitment of Renfrewshire's lower classes to the education of both themselves and their offspring would be profoundly challenged in the nineteenth century by the growth in the area of a textile industry that readily employed children as young as eight, and in vocational roles in which even reading and writing were of little practical value.¹⁷ By the time Campbell's family moved to the area at the turn of the nineteenth century, Johnstone and the neighbouring settlement of Paisley already represented a significant site of textile manufacture. In his 1812 *General View of the Agriculture of Renfrewshire; With Observations on the Means of its Improvement*, drawn up for the Board of Agriculture, one John Wilson of Hurllet notes instances of run-rig cultivation on common land outside Renfrew, while a short way down the Clyde estuary towards the Atlantic, the ports of Greenock and Port Glasgow are described as rapidly growing centres of commerce and trade, handling thousands of tons of cotton, sugar and tobacco from the West Indies annually.¹⁸ This was a region in a state of rapid socio-economic transformation and 'uneven development'. Wilson writes that cotton spinning 'has become, by far, the greatest and most extended branch of business in this country', and

¹⁶ Sinclair, *Statistical Account*, ii, p.169.

¹⁷ John Wilson, *General View of the Agriculture of Renfrewshire with Observations on the Means of its Improvement and an account of its Commerce and Manufactures. Drawn up for the Consideration of the Board of Agriculture and Internal Improvement* (Paisley: 1812), p.253

¹⁸ See Wilson, *General View*.

records that since the late 1770s a number of expansive mills containing ‘powerful machinery’ have been built:

[s]o that, on the Levern, White-Cart, Black-Cart, Calder and Gryfe, there are now nineteen large cotton-mills, and several of less extent, on the smaller streams. Besides these there are in Paisley, Johnstone and Pollockshaws, many large structures for the same manufacture, the machinery of which is driven by powerful steam engines, on Bolton and watt’s construction: so that the whole number of cotton-mills in Renfrewshire, of every size and of every description, exclusive of those which are filling with looms, or are unoccupied, may at present be about forty-one. The introduction of this manufacture, and the capital employed in it, have produced a great addition to the population of the country, and a vast consumpt of cotton from the British colonies, and from North and South America.¹⁹

As a child, Charles Campbell was transplanted from the edges of the western Highlands to this crucible of industrial capitalism and its patchwork of growing manufacturing villages and towns. As émigrés from the Scottish *Ghàidhealtachd*, Campbell and his family represented a growing class of unskilled manual labourers who had left the Highlands in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries due to poverty or clearance, in order to seek employment in Britain’s burgeoning manufacturing towns. Fed by a ready supply of cheap labour, at first from the Highlands of Scotland and later from Ireland, the rapid growth of Glasgow’s population along with those of towns such as Johnstone and Paisley, meant that by the 1840s, seventy per cent of western Scotland’s population lived in urban areas, and by the 1850s, more than half of those living in Scotland’s ten most populous towns had migrated from elsewhere.²⁰

Campbell himself describes spinning as ‘a trade for which I had no great liking,’ and writes that his apprenticeship in Johnstone was conditional on his agreeing to a strict indenture, the terms of which his employer both stipulated and exploited. Campbell recalls of his master: ‘[h]e, therefore took occasion to use me rather harshly, and one time, when I resented his conduct by a spirited expression, he struck me, and turned me out of doors.’

¹⁹ Wilson, *General View*, pp.249-50.

²⁰ William Knox, *Industrial Nation: Work, Culture and Society in Scotland, 1800-Present* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) p.91.

After this, Campbell writes, ‘I now considered myself to be at liberty’. In the first manifestation of a defiant, and ultimately fatal impulsiveness of character that Campbell projects throughout his *Memoirs*, he writes, ‘I listened to the suggestions of my own heart’ and recounts that he subsequently embarked on a tour, ‘through one of the most romantic districts in Scotland’ (*Memoirs* 13). Campbell’s experience here would seem to reflect Christopher Whatley’s conclusion that ‘absconding was commonplace’ among young Scottish millworkers, due to the fact that through indentures such as that imposed upon Campbell, ‘they were being ruthlessly exploited by in their employers’ in an attempt to force down labour costs’.²¹

Campbell writes that on his return to Johnstone from his impromptu romantic tour of Scotland, his master demanded that he pay a fine of ten pounds for absconding from work or be sent to prison. Campbell attempted to raise enough money to pay-off his fine by publishing a collection of poetry. The resulting volume was printed but never circulated and Campbell reflects in his *Memoirs* that: ‘[f]rom this period, in spite of every endeavour after well-doing, my life has been one continued series of disappointments’ (*Memoirs* 14). In around 1812, as a consequence of the financial penalty he had incurred by breaking the terms of his indenture, Campbell ran away to sea – ‘the usual resort of the unfortunate’ – and joined the crew of a ship bound from Greenock for the West Indies, where he eventually found employment as a bookkeeper on a sugar plantation near Montego Bay in Jamaica, enacting as it were, an alternative outcome to the drama surrounding the publication of Burns’s breakthrough Kilmarnock Edition of poems.

During his time in Jamaica Campbell experienced the indifference of the island’s ex-patriot Scottish community of planters and merchants towards their former countrymen and conversed with Royal Navy conscripts fleeing the dire punitive consequences of mutinies they had led. He also witnessed the brutality to which Jamaica’s overseers and transient population of white sailors and traders subjected the black slaves labouring in the island’s ports and plantations (17-21). While Campbell does recount the violence peculiar to colonial chattel slavery in often unsettling detail, he also attempts to draw parallels between the slaves he encountered in Jamaica and the social stratum he belonged to before his departure from Scotland. For Campbell, ‘[a] West Indian slave is every whit as rational a creature as a Scots peasant or mechanic, and tinged with less vulgarity’ (27). Campbell’s

²¹ Christopher A. Whatley, *Scottish Society 1707-1830: Beyond Jacobitism, Towards Industrialisation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2000), p.265.

experience in the West Indies may have been a politically formative one.²² In their 2000 study *The Many-Headed Hydra* Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh appropriate the figures of self-mythologisation deployed in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century ideology of colonial endeavour and economic improvement to explore the subaltern political history of the Atlantic world. For Rediker and Linebaugh, the unruly multi-racial proletariat brought into existence by the growth of Atlantic trade corresponds to a ‘Many-Headed Hydra’ within the ‘Herculean’ narrative of global capitalism: its ‘circular transmission of human experience’ occurring alongside the circulation of the imperial commodities of sugar, cotton and tobacco, and frequently arising within these economic circuits to form their radical discontents.²³ In writing of his time as a bookkeeper on a plantation in the Caribbean, a spinner of imported cotton in Scotland and between, as a sailor on and in the ports of the intervening ocean, Campbell might be seen to produce an experiential account of life as a member of this ‘Atlantic working-class’.²⁴

Yet Campbell’s peripatetic relationship to the cotton spinning trade, and his clear though thwarted determination to escape it, complicate the relationship of his *Memoirs* to the developing labour politics of early nineteenth-century Scotland and the class consciousness that it eventually generated. When he returned to Scotland after little longer than a year in Jamaica, Campbell studied medicine at Glasgow University under a fellow alumnus of the literary club which he had attended as a young man in Renfrewshire (*Memoirs* 34). Campbell appears not to have completed his medical training, which at this period would have involved an apprenticeship of a number of years under a qualified physician, and was forced to return by the early 1820s to his original occupation as a cotton spinner – this time in the Calton district of Glasgow – in the hope of saving enough money to join his relatives as an émigré in North America (35).

After the end of the Napoleonic Wars, Scottish cotton producers suffered at the hands of increased competition both from abroad and from the much larger manufactories in Lancashire. A downward trend in the price of cotton was coupled with an expansion of capacity during a speculative boom in the mid-1820s, leading to the further mechanisation

²² For discussion of Campbell’s *Memoirs* in the context of Scottish/Caribbean history, see Michael Morris *Atlantic Archipelagos: A Cultural History of Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World, c.1740-1833* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 2013).

²³ Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden Story of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000) p.2.

²⁴ Alan Rice, *Radical Narratives of the Black Atlantic* (London: Continuum 2003) p.11.

and deskilling of the spinning trade.²⁵ At the same time, steady immigration from the Scottish Highlands and later Ireland combined with a growing mainland population and the relatively unskilled nature of cotton spinning to produce a highly competitive labour market and typically poor wages and working conditions. In response, organised labour gained considerable influence within the Scottish industry before the 1830s.²⁶ Indeed, Campbell himself seems to have been an active participant in the labour-politics of 1820s Glasgow. In the preface to his *Memoirs*, Campbell writes:

[m]y late occupation as a Cotton-Spinner in this neighbourhood induces me to look to that class of workers with a kind of fraternal confidence; and, while I acknowledge my obligations to them for past favours, I wish to remind them that I was one of their number in the day of their political conflict, and that my efforts were directed in defence of their disputed rights, during the most arduous of their struggles. I still wish to congratulate them on the peaceable and manly deportment with which they bore their sufferings, during a period of five months, in which not a single instance of violence occurred; and I trust that on all future occasions of the kind, they will regulate themselves by the same laudable and constitutional spirit, and so put it out of the power of Calumny itself to brand them with the epithets which the public prints were once liberal in bestowing.²⁷

Campbell's mention in his preface of 'disputed rights', 'manly deportment', and 'constitutional spirit', presents the demands of organised labour as amenable to a polite, loyalist public sphere. But this masculine voice may carry an extra resonance in the context of a vocation that employed more women than men, and in which female labour was frequently used to undermine the action of workers' combinations.²⁸ Anna Clark notes that male spinners often responded to the presence of women as rivals for wages and potential strike-breakers with 'simple misogynistic techniques' and physical violence, later replaced by a patriarchal approach to the relationship between male and female workers.²⁹

²⁵ See Whatley, p.265.

²⁶ See Knox, p.54.

²⁷ Campbell, 'Preface to the First Edition', in *Memoirs*.

²⁸ Anthony Cooke, *The Rise and Fall of the Scottish Cotton Industry, 1778-1914: The Secret Spring* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p7.

²⁹ Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1995), p.135.

As a woman spinner, McVicar would have been exposed to a higher degree of social and economic precarity than the man who murdered her.

As the historian Anthony Cooke also notes, peace and fraternity represented only one side of the experience of organised labour in early industrial Glasgow. Cooke documents one incident in Calton in 1824 – during the time that Campbell would have been working in the area as a spinner – in which **the owner of the Mile End mills** sacked and replaced his entire workforce and in doing so provoked large-scale strikes and demonstrations.³⁰ The owner in question was one Neil Snodgrass, who is in fact singled out for praise and thanks by Campbell in his *Memoirs*. Campbell refers to his obligations to ‘Mr. Neil Snodgrass of Mile-End, a gentleman not more distinguished for the ingenuity and usefulness of his numerous inventions in machinery, concerned with Cotton Spinning, than beloved by all who know him for a characteristic generosity of spirit.’ Campbell writes that Snodgrass took ‘deep interest’ in his case, secured him a defence counsel for his trial, and afterwards attempted (unsuccessfully) to bring about his release from prison.³¹ Campbell’s relationship with Snodgrass can hardly have endeared him to his fellow spinners, and might be seen as evidence that his class sympathies lay with the masters rather than the labourers. Witnesses at Campbell’s trial reported that his paranoia around the period of his mental collapse was directed towards not only so-called ‘nobs’ or strike-breakers, but ‘Irish bastards’ and even the Calton weavers; they also recalled that Campbell carried weapons to defend himself against these perceived threats and believed that: ‘there was a society existing, who possessed the power of life and death, and who had doomed him to die in the course of 24 hours at the farthest’ (*Memoirs* 47). The accounts of Campbell’s delusions are redolent of the covert strategies which spinners occasionally used to intimidate their political opponents: Clark writes of their use of a ‘terrorism [that] derived its legitimacy from a shadow community solidarity which its victims had violated.’³² Campbell’s eagerness to remind his fellow cotton spinners of his former political allegiance to their cause might be interpreted as an attempt to deflect any suspicions of disloyalty that might have arisen in a potential labouring-class Glaswegian readership, on account of his subsequent association with Snodgrass.

³⁰ Cooke, p.162.

³¹ Charles Campbell, *Memoirs*, 1st edn (Glasgow: 1828), p.28.

³² Clark, p.136.

In part then, Campbell's prefatory address to his fellow spinners reveals the difficulty of ascribing an entirely coherent class identity to his narrative voice. While Christopher Whatley argues that by the 1800s Scottish workers had, 'begun to think beyond the confines of their own occupational trade interests', Campbell's labour consciousness appears to have been founded upon an experience of industrial relations within his specific vocation rather than any broader political or economic identity.³³ Campbell's references to 'political conflict' and 'disputed rights' seem almost intentionally cryptic, although he may have in mind the wave of strikes and uprisings led by weavers from the hinterland of Glasgow and Renfrewshire, which constituted the so called 'Radical War' of 1820, and which had involved action by wage labourers and artisans from several trades, including many cotton spinners.³⁴ Campbell's specific fraternity with spinners however, and his reference to 'their' conflict, their eschewal of violence, and to a time-frame of 'five months' that does not match the relatively short-lived action associated with the insurrection of 1820, suggests that he may be alluding in his preface to one of many more localised and less famous disputes between textile operatives and manufacturing proprietors in the 1820s. Whatley argues that the very visible failure of the insurrection of 1820 belies its real significance as part of a wider trend towards increased organisation and activism among Scotland's labouring classes that peaked after the repeal in 1824 of the Combination Acts, which had officially prohibited the formation of labour unions.³⁵

Indeed, before 1824, the issue of unions and combinations seems to have been of definitive importance to the politics of Scotland's manufacturing classes, as Richmond's *Narrative* makes clear. Despite his centrality to an often debated episode of Scottish social and political history, little is known of Richmond's life prior to his involvement in the labour politics of the 1810s. His *Narrative*, due to its nature as part-political polemic part-exculpatory autobiography, picks up in the second decade of the nineteenth century, and provides no account of his upbringing or education. Between the years of roughly 1809 and 1813, Richmond was a cotton weaver in the village of Pollokshaws: south of Glasgow

³³ Whatley, pp.309-310.

³⁴ Ibid, p.308.

³⁵ Ibid.

and north of the emerging industrial cluster of Paisley and Johnstone, where Campbell was simultaneously apprenticed as a spinner.³⁶

Prior to the widespread introduction of power-looms during the 1830s, weavers were often able to work within their own homes and considered themselves to be largely independent, especially in contrast to the proletarianized wage-labourers of the spinning mills. The innovations of Richard Arkwright, James Hargreaves and Samuel Crompton in the last quarter of the eighteenth century had the effect of accelerating the production of cotton thread while simultaneously diminishing the role of the individual spinner's manual dexterity in that production process. According to Joel Mokyr, Crompton's invention of the spinning mule in 1779 in particular, 'competed with steam power for the title of paradigmatic invention of the Industrial Revolution.'³⁷ The labour associated with cotton spinners like Campbell was regarded as unskilled and 'disagreeable', and those who performed it were viewed, especially by the more artisanal ranks of silk-based 'fancy-weavers' as social inferiors. In the early 1830s, one master spinner attested to an enquiry into the condition of Irish migrant labourers that, '[m]ost natives of Paisley would, I believe, sooner earn 12/- a week at weaving with their own looms, having the command of their own time, and their ingenuity exercised in their own profession, than work in a cotton factory for 20/- or 25/- per week; our weavers, however destitute, seldom think of applying for employment in cotton factories.'³⁸ A two-fold increase in wages was perceived as inadequate compensation for the loss of the relative autonomy of working domestically, and its replacement by the discipline and oversight of the factory system imposed upon spinners.

Yet by 1810, the status and security of Scottish weavers were already under threat from the changing nature of industrial relations and the results of the ongoing mechanisation of the production process. The confrontation which developed between operative weavers and their employers during the first two decades of the nineteenth century seems to have been the formative context from which Alexander Richmond's politics, political-economy, and attitude to social change emerged. In his *Narrative* Richmond recalls that his involvement in labouring-class activism began after 1810, at a

³⁶ Clive Emsley, 'Richmond, Alexander Bailey (fl. 1809–1834)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)

³⁷ Joel Mokyr, *The Enlightened Economy: An Economic History of Britain, 1700-1850* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2009), p.128.

³⁸ J. E. Handley, *The Irish in Scotland, 1745-1845* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1943), p.93.

time when the restriction of trade with continental Europe due to the Napoleonic wars was placing increasing economic pressure upon manufacturing operatives, who already suffered from a state of continual oppression due to ‘the speculative opinions of the age’ (*Narrative* 11). If Campbell approaches the subject of labouring-class politics with a frustrating obliquity, Richmond does so with a mixture of analytical distance and angry polemicism.

What is perhaps most striking about Richmond’s analysis of the condition of his fellow weavers at this time, is the way in which he frames the economic distresses of the 1810s within the broader scope of the ongoing devaluation of manufacturing labour since the late eighteenth century, and relates this to a general problematic of political economy. In the opening paragraph of his *Narrative*, Richmond writes that:

[s]ince the publication of Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*, many eminent writers have been engaged in illustrating the principles of political economy and pointing out the leading circumstances which promote or retard the accumulation of national wealth, the discoveries and improvements made during the same period in the exact sciences, tending to supersede and abridge human labour, have called forth energies and produced results which have astonished the present age, and set at nought the calculations of the most acute and profound philosophers and politicians of former times, in our own country almost a total revolution has been effected in the whole frame of society; capital and the means of producing all the luxuries of life have been augmented, perhaps, in a tenfold ratio; yet it is questionable if, in the midst of all this apparent improvement, the substantial comfort and happiness of the great body of the people have in any degree been promoted, and whether the enlightened philanthropist will not consider they have been rather retrograded. (*Narrative* 1)

As Richmond observes, the abridgement of human labour through mechanisation has simultaneously deskilled manufacturing processes while multiplying the productive power of the individual operative and in doing so has lowered wages and increased competition for employment. Richmond describes the emergence of industrial capitalism with a remarkable perspicuity, and points out the degree to which the labouring classes have

suffered rather than benefitted as a result of the rapid technological and social changes which have facilitated unprecedented increases in economic productivity. Richmond's appeal to the judgement of 'the enlightened philanthropist' foregrounds the role that he believed himself to be playing when he agreed to become a government spy.

However, this opening gambit mobilises the vocabulary and sentiment of an eighteenth-century humanism that is derived in no small part from Adam Smith's 1776 *Wealth of Nations*: a text which Richmond here locates in an originary relationship to the discourse of political economy. There are also strong echoes here of Robert Owen's observations in his 1813 *New View of Society*, that '[t]he general diffusion of manufactures throughout a country generates a new character in its inhabitants; and as this character is formed upon a principle quite unfavourable to individual or general happiness, it will produce the most lamentable and permanent evils, unless its tendency be counteracted by legislative interference and direction.'³⁹ Whereas Owen's approach to the amelioration of the labouring classes hinged on their relocation to the model manufacturing community of New Lanark however, Richmond's initial recourse was to collective action in order to mitigate the downward pressure exerted by market speculation upon the condition of operative manufacturers.

On this level, Richmond's *Narrative* might be seen to offer an extended exegesis of Smith's discussion of combinations of workmen in the *Wealth of Nations*, conducted through the lens of his own experience of labouring-class activism. This underlines Gareth Stedman Jones's argument in his 2004 study *An End to Poverty*, that: '[o]n the evidence of the *Wealth of Nations*, Smith was an unqualified supporter of high wages, far more tolerant of combinations of labourers than of masters.'⁴⁰ As Smith argues, the power to combine in order to control the level of wages is one that law and public opinion seem to more readily afford masters rather than labourers, even though: 'in disputes with their workmen, masters must generally have the advantage' (WN I 82). Smith observes that because labourers are more immediately dependent upon their masters for subsistence than vice-versa, workmen's combinations are often compelled to 'act with the folly and extravagance of desperate men,' causing masters to 'call aloud for the assistance of the civil magistrate, and the rigorous execution of those laws which have been enacted with so much severity against the combinations of servants, labourers, and journeymen' (WN I

³⁹ Robert Owen, *Observations on the Effect of the Manufacturing System*, 2nd edn (London: 1817), p.5.

⁴⁰ Gareth Stedman Jones, *An End to Poverty: A Historical Debate* (London: Profile Books, 2004), pp.70-71.

83). As a result, Smith concludes, combinations formed under desperate circumstances ‘generally end in nothing, but the punishment or ruin of the ringleaders’ (WN I 83).

5.4 Richmond’s *Narrative* and the political economy of scarcity

The main thrust of Richmond’s *Narrative* is that the labouring-class reformism of the post-Waterloo years represents a misdirected and ignorant response on the part of the lower classes to the general deterioration of their economic condition. Richmond argues that agitated by ‘illiterate and unprincipled demagogues’, the labouring classes have directed their energies towards a political activism that has brought them into an unwinnable conflict with government, while their real interests would be served by organised efforts to raise the price of labour (*Narrative* 53). Richmond argues that ‘the evils in which we are involved are not necessarily interwoven with the frame of our government’ (192). Rather, they inhere in the sovereignty of a market which: ‘[e]xposing labour to the wildest system of combined and individual speculation, without reference to the comfort of the labourer, which, by pressing him down to the lowest possible means of subsistence, morally and physically degrades him, while legal and conventional restrictions confer special privileges which operate in favour of particular classes’ (192-93). For Richmond, the increasing poverty of manufactures, particularly of weavers, could be understood as the effect of the gradual erosion of an artisanal system of labour, through which power over apprenticeships and the price of goods had been gradually ceded by labourers to an emergent capitalist class. Simultaneously, the effects of agricultural improvement have ‘left the small farmer and cottager no alternative but to take refuge in the towns,’ leading in turn to the oversaturation of the labour market and further downward pressure on the price of labour (6-7).

Richmond writes that in the early 1800s, weavers were able to mitigate the effects of these forces upon their own condition by establishing a comprehensive regional system to regulate the ‘admission of hands into the trade’. According to Richmond, weavers were better equipped to respond to the economic fluctuations of the 1800s in Scotland than in England because: ‘the superior education and intelligence of her workmen, resulting from her parochial institutions, gave them a proportionate ascendancy, in all joint measures, for their mutual benefit’ (*Narrative* 12). The organised labouring-class activism of the early nineteenth century is, for Richmond, one beneficial product of Scotland’s parish school

system. While largely successful, this strategy was unable to prevent the fluctuation of wages due to speculation by masters and merchants upon the price of labour or goods produced, or combat the effects of rises in the cost of subsistence. For Richmond and his fellow weavers, the broader problem was market speculation and the prevalence of a free trade political economy that vehemently resisted attempts to fix the price of either subsistence or manufactured goods.

By 1811 Richmond had gained ‘a considerable degree of popularity’ among his fellow weavers due to his involvement in a committee whose purpose was to litigate in favour of fixing minimum prices for woven goods, that would reflect the value of the labour involved in their production and the rising cost of subsistence (*Narrative* 18). Richmond recalls that the organisation ‘consisted, with one or two exceptions, of practical men, acquainted only with the technicalities of their trade, and had no knowledge of the general theory upon which the arguments of our opponents were chiefly founded’ (18). Richmond implies that his own position as a labouring-class reader of political economy, conversant in ‘all the arguments of Smith, Malthus, and the economists of the French school,’ (35) meant that in disputations with masters and politicians: ‘the weight of the discussion, on the abstract points, fell on me’ (18). However, the continued recalcitrance of masters and magistrates eventually forced the organisation in which Richmond was involved to resort to strike action, rendering its existence illegal according to the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800. According to Richmond, this action involved over 200,000 operatives between the north of England and Aberdeen, with a support network of friendly societies which provided relief to the families of striking workers (*Narrative* 29). When Richmond refused the requests of local authorities to use his influence over weavers in the west of Scotland to disband the strike, he was indicted and imprisoned in Paisley Jail. Richmond’s case attracted the attention of several prominent Whig lawyers, including Francis Jeffrey and Henry Cockburn, the latter of whom records in his posthumously published *Memorials of his Time*, that Richmond’s ‘organization and management’ of the 1812 workmen’s combination, ‘was better evidence of his talent than many men of high political station could have produced.’⁴¹ (326)

If Richmond’s authority as a reader of political economy is partly derived from Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*, the body against which he brings it to bear is the school of

⁴¹ Cockburn, *Memorials*, p.326.

political economy derived from Thomas Malthus's 1798 *An Essay on the Principle of Population, as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society, With Remarks on the Speculations of Mr. Godwin, M. Condorcet, and other writers*. As its extended title reveals, Malthus's *Essay* constitutes both an extension of the enlightenment project of political economy, and a refutation of its more socially optimistic tendencies. In a critique of Smith, Malthus reasons that in advanced commercial societies, a greater portion of productive labour is directed to manufacture rather than to agriculture, with the result that the amount of subsistence produced relative to the labouring population decreases overall; therefore 'the increasing wealth of the nation has had little or no tendency to better the condition of the labouring poor.'⁴² As the opening comments of his *Narrative* make clear, Richmond would have had little reason to dispute this essential point. However, the notoriety of Malthus's *Essay* rested primarily on its argument that:

Population, when unchecked increases in a geometrical ratio. Subsistence increases only in an arithmetical ratio [...] By that law of our nature which makes food necessary to the life of man the effects of these two unequal powers must be kept equal [...] This implies a strong and constantly operating check on population from the difficulty of subsistence. (Malthus 14)

In other words, unrestrained population growth eventually places impossible demands upon the supply of food, and in doing so renders government efforts to regulate the price of subsistence, or to otherwise protect the poor from the effects of the market through provision not only futile, but an immoral incentive to self-destructive behaviour on the part of the lower classes. For Malthus, a manmade or natural disaster such as famine or war, can act as a necessary and unavoidable 'check' upon the proliferation of the human species. To attempt to circumvent the imposition of natural limits through the redistribution of wealth or the 'Genuine System of Property' proposed by William Godwin in his *Political Justice*, would not only fail to ultimately prevent the exhaustion of subsistence, but would worsen the condition of the whole of society by spreading resources more thinly than necessary.

⁴² Thomas R. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population, as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society, With Remarks on the Speculations of Mr. Godwin, M. Condorcet, and other writers* (London:1798), pp.312-313. Further references are given after quotations in the text and are abbreviated to 'Malthus'.

Malthus's political economy removes the moral burden of provision from the shoulders of the proprietorial classes of society, to reconstitute it as the moral and vital duty of the poor to labour and to master their carnal appetites. Phillip Connell writes that, 'Malthus's *Essay* has often been regarded as a formative contribution to the secular science of economics, its notorious conclusions on the subject of population growth actually formed part of a much broader, Christian rationalist theodicy, which attempted to justify the existence of all moral and physical evil by invoking providential natural laws'.⁴³ Indeed, as Donald Winch has argued, Malthus's conception of political economy is inimical to the Classical School of David Ricardo and its antecedents, in that it resists the formulation of economics as a scientific or mathematical discipline, divorced from morality and divinity.⁴⁴

Richmond seems to object not so much to the core premise of Malthus's *Principle of Population*, which, on the contrary, he seems rather to have absorbed, but to the committedly free-trade, class-inflected conclusions which Malthus draws from it. Richmond of course, believed that a 'redundancy of hands' was largely responsible for the deteriorating condition of skilled labourers such as weavers (*Narrative* 7). He may therefore have been inclined to agree with Malthus's conviction of the dangers inherent in excessive growth of population in proportion to the means of subsistence. Yet in the closing sections of his *Narrative*, Richmond launches a fervent attack against those who have used the findings of Malthus's *Essay* to justify wholly abandoning the welfare of the labouring classes to the ruthless speculation of the market, writing of 'a self-interested frigidity that has benumbed and blunted the finer feelings, like a deadly mildew, its paralyzing influence having reduced the moral sympathies and social affections to a money value' (*Narrative* 193). For Richmond, Malthus's notion of poverty as a preventive check against overpopulation is wholly ideological, 'a downright insult to men of understanding, when applied to a class who are once degraded' (194). Richmond perceived that the opposite effect from that imagined by Malthus would proceed from allowing the caprice of the market to dictate the conditions of the labouring poor, arguing that:

⁴³ Phillip Connell, *Romanticism, Economics and the Question of 'Culture'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p46.

⁴⁴ Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996), p.286.

improvident breeding follows, as the necessary consequence of a blind indulgence of the strongest propensity of animal nature, which, at the lowest point, continues to operate with undiminished force. Excessive labour, scanty, unwholesome food and unhealthy occupation, will shorten the duration of life, and will produce a quicker succession of beings, but it will not lessen the absolute number; on the contrary, the increase will continue, until they are forced to prey upon the lowest garbage. Thus, the physical and mental process of degeneracy is confirmed and perpetuated, until brutality and ignorance render amendment or escape almost hopeless. (195)

Richmond's prophesy of a cannibalistic apocalypse resulting from economic non-interference, underlines his conviction not only that the moral improvement of the labouring classes should be a national priority, but that it would be best facilitated by measures such as the fixing of minimum prices for labour, goods and subsistence, and the provision of relief during times of dearth – the latter of which he posits would have entirely averted the political turmoil of the post-war years. Sexual intercourse, Richmond implies, is often the last recourse of those without the means or learning to pursue other diversions from their daily labour. High and stable levels of wages as opposed to the threat of privation are thus for Richmond, a more effective method of establishing foresight and temperance among the labouring classes. Richmond asserts that: '[t]he question, therefore, resolves itself into this; whether man should be placed under the government of his moral and intellectual faculties, or left the slave of his mere animal appetites and physical propensities' (*Narrative* 194). As Richmond's conclusions above imply, Malthus's principle, even if rejected as a moral justification for surrendering the poor to the vicissitudes of the market, could mandate the reformulation of popular enlightenment or intellectual improvement as a method of inculcating the virtues of self-government and securing the ascendancy of the reason over the body – an instrumentalisation of the various character-forming projects that had developed over the last few decades of the eighteenth century in the writing of Henry Mackenzie, Smith, Currie and others.

At a time of political emergency however, an undereducated labouring class still exposed to economic privation and therefore not yet able to be relied upon to exert their own 'private judgement', appeared to Richmond to be in need of intervention by someone of superior reason and insight. In the case of the political conspiracies of Glasgow in 1816,

this person appeared to Richmond to be himself; the ‘general system of “*surveillance*”’ (Richmond’s emphasis) that had insured the smooth running of the combination in which he had been involved in 1812, offered itself as a potential model for the government of other assembled bodies of discontented labourers (*Narrative* 14). Such is the strange logic that Richmond employs to justify his spying activities.

5.5 Surveillance and the scene of urban reform

Richmond was initially recruited as a spy in 1816 by Kirkman Finlay, with whom he had come into contact as a spokesperson for the labourer’s association of 1812. Finlay was an unlikely ally: Lord Provost of Glasgow and a Member of Parliament, as well as being one of the city’s leading industrialists and antagonists of organised labour.⁴⁵ Richmond was still under a degree of duress due to his role in the illegal strike action which he had helped to coordinate earlier in the decade, but he insists that his decision to undertake the infiltration of his former comrades’ political association was driven by a philanthropic desire to dissuade them from a reckless course of action, rather than any promise by the authorities to improve his private situation. Government suspicion was centred around rumours of secret oaths being sworn by members of a supposed revolutionary conspiracy that incorporated corresponding networks of labourers in Scotland and England’s industrial heartlands. The taking of such oaths would constitute treason in itself, so Richmond’s task was to determine whether the rumours were true and report back; confirmation would provide the government with a legal pretext on which to arrest and charge the network’s ringleaders, setting an example through their execution that they hoped would deter any future rebellion on the part of Scotland’s lower classes.

Richmond, perhaps naively, had other ideas. He claims that his intention was never to inform upon and incriminate the group’s leaders, but to reform and influence them: ‘I felt very confident I was able to dissipate the conspiracy, without the necessity of inflicting punishment on any one, and without its existence ever being publically known’ (*Narrative* 65). Richmond writes that he was convinced that the majority of the political discontent present in Glasgow in 1816 resulted from the fact that ‘[i]n Glasgow and neighbourhood, the condition of the great mass of the labouring population was indeed

⁴⁵ Monica Clough, ‘Finlay, Kirkman (1773–1842)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

truly deplorable' as a result of unemployment and 'speculation on the price of labour'. Richmond argues that both the radical and conservative press exacerbated the situation by stirring class resentment. Of those in a position to influence the actions of the labouring classes, Richmond writes: 'their reasoning, if reasoning it might be called, was addressed to the passions and not the judgement' (*Narrative* 53-54). In a future state of society, Richmond submits, such crises might be negated by 'a more general diffusion of knowledge amongst the body of the people, which, by enabling them to take a comprehensive view of the relative situation, may prevent them, when involved in distress, from being misled by the ignorant (though perhaps well meaning) enthusiast, or duped by the designing' (*Narrative* 66). In the crisis of 1816 however, during which Richmond suspected that the government would have been happy to uncover a conspiracy which could then be spectacularly crushed, a more covert approach was required.

Again echoing Owen's thoughts on the production of criminality by defects in society at large, Richmond argues that: '[w]ith those who consider the prevention of crime preferable to its punishment, some such means of doing it will always be considered necessary, and, until society is differently constituted, and government have recourse to the primary principle of ameliorating the condition of the people, and resting the means of prevention in a superior education, and the diffusion of a better system of practical morality, I see no other remedy' (*Narrative* 67-68). Richmond admits that he is not morally opposed to government espionage and that it might even be viewed as a necessary expedient. But he argues that spying was acutely misused in 1816, as a means of guaranteeing punishment rather than avoiding it. When Richmond confirmed to Finlay that secret oaths were indeed being sworn within the radical associations of Glasgow, the authorities swooped and arrested those involved, Richmond claims, without giving him any forewarning. The botched State Trials that followed caused the punitive approach which Richmond criticises to backfire, at the same time he argues, their failure also sowed the seeds of the subsequent, more destructive uprisings of 1819 and 1820.

Richmond's defence of his spying seems an extraordinary one, in that it collapses the distinction between the philanthropic reform of the labouring classes and covert surveillance. Yet Richmond's spying, and his justification for it, finds a counterpoint I would argue, in a contemporary scheme for the amelioration of Glasgow's labouring poor that was based on a very different response to Malthus's political economy. From 1819 to 1823, in the east-end Glasgow parish of St Johns, abutting the Calton area in which

Charles Campbell was simultaneously employed as a spinner, the Presbyterian minister Thomas Chalmers staged an ambitious socio-economic and moral intervention, in which he deployed a mixture of evangelised popular education and Malthusian economic principles in an attempt to eliminate urban poverty. His approach, relying on the imposition of morality and reason through surveillance by outside agents rather than the gradual diffusion of improvement, bears some eerie resemblances to Richmond's contemporary attempt to reform Glasgow's labouring classes.

Born to a family of minor merchants in the Fife coastal town of Anstruther in 1780 and educated at St Andrews University, Chalmers is now primarily remembered for his instrumental role in the so-called 'Great Disruption' of 1843, in which the long running dispute between the Kirk's Evangelical and Moderate parties over the issue of clerical patronage, culminated in the secession of over a third of Scotland's ministers, and the formation of the Free Church of Scotland. In common with the Lake poets in the 1790s, Chalmers had flirted with radical political philosophy as a trainee theologian; he recommended William Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* to his peers, imbibed the works of the French *philosophes* (then the alleged influences behind the worst excesses of the Revolution) and largely rejected the orthodox Calvinism of his upbringing. After a period of serious illness however, Chalmers seems to have renounced Moderate Presbyterianism, and returned in early 1811 to preach at his parish in rural Fife as a committed evangelical.⁴⁶ It is therefore tempting to ascribe to Chalmers an 'apostasy' similar to that of his Romantic contemporaries, or indeed Malthus himself; initially enamoured with the radical possibilities of social change, Chalmers may have been politically chastened by the outcome of the French Revolution, and frightened into a more conservative stance by the onset of industrial capitalism. Chalmers's apostasy however, entailed the renunciation not only of the radical politics of the 1790s, but of the Enlightenment's optimistic formulation of the relationship between the diffusion of wealth and the welfare of mankind. Indeed, Chalmers speculated in 1821 that Malthus's *Essay*: 'had it been present to the mind of Mr. Smith, would we think, have modified certain of those doctrines and conclusions which he presented to the world'.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ See Stewart J. Brown, *Thomas Chalmers and the Godly Commonwealth in Scotland* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1982).

⁴⁷ Thomas Chalmers, *The Christian and Civic Economy of Large Towns*, 2 vols. (Glasgow: 1821), i, p.5. Further references are given after quotations in the text and are abbreviated to 'Chalmers'.

Given his own turn away from the philosophy of Godwin and the French *Philosophes*, Chalmers might have identified particularly strongly with Malthus's pessimistic Whiggism, his economics of scarcity, and his assertion that Godwin's attribution of 'all the vices and misery that are seen in civil society to human institutions' constituted an erroneous conception of 'the true and genuine situation of man on earth' (Malthus 175-176). According to Malthus, this 'true and genuine situation', demonstrated by the principle of population, is a state of hardship providentially fitted to encourage Christian virtue and conscience. Indeed, Malthus argues in the *Essay* that the divine purpose of the apparent obstacles presented to human happiness by natural laws is no less than: 'the creation and formation of mind; a process necessary to awaken inert, chaotic matter, into spirit; to sublimate the dust of the earth into soul; to elicit and aethereal spark from the clod of clay' (353). According to Malthus, the apparent imperfection, and indeed imperfectability, of worldly Creation reflects a divine intention to provoke the formation of the soul, lifting man from the torpidity of mere matter and making him capable of 'superior enjoyment' (354).

Richmond was vehemently opposed to the Malthusian belief that the economic hardship produced by the operation of the market was 'useful and necessary, to call forth the energies and develop the inventive faculties of man' (*Narrative* 196). According to Chalmers's interpretation of Malthusian political economy however, the unmitigated action of the market, which stimulates the development of conscience by inflicting hardship upon those who defy the simultaneously Christian and economic imperatives of moral restraint, and ensuring the welfare of those obey them, is an embodiment of natural theology. Providentially, the economic sphere offers an arena for the exercise of the moral sense, and the realisation of the individual subject as a moral agent.⁴⁸ The experience of economic exigency is the apogee of instruction: it is both the origin of the intellect and an incentive to its refinement.

For Chalmers however, Malthus's *Principle of Population* suggested an additional imperative of Christian intervention. If the poor were to be able to act within the providential system of the market as rational agents, they would have to be evangelised; to be made aware of the imperative to labour just as the Christian convert is made aware of the necessity of redemption. In a study of the synergy between evangelical and economic

⁴⁸ See Boyd Hilton, *The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1785-1865*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988 repr. 1997), pp.185-87.

thought entitled *The Age of Atonement*, Boyd Hilton traces the development of a theodicy of the free-market during the nineteenth century, in which the unrestrained hardships of poverty were construed as a providential exhortation to labour and moral propriety to be heeded by the lower classes, rather than grounds on which to censure the middle and upper classes. Hilton delineates an evangelical model of economic providence adapted from the late eighteenth to early nineteenth-century de-politicisation of political economy, the basis of which: ‘was not self-interest but the supremacy of economic conscience, the latter innate in man yet needing to be nurtured into a habitude through the mechanism of the free market, with its constant operation of temptation, trial, and exemplary suffering.’⁴⁹

In his 1821 treatise *The Christian and Civic Economy of Large Towns*, Chalmers writes that, ‘the mere principles of nature will not suffice for carrying the interest that is connected with the state of a country’s population, onwards to the condition that is best and safest for the public weal’ (Chalmers I 8). Therefore, the labouring classes must be the recipients of a religious education if they are to be able to participate in the economic sphere as moral actors, and endure its inevitable hardships in spiritual comfort and tranquillity: for Chalmers, popular enlightenment and the diffusion of knowledge, imply the widespread dissemination of, ‘the warm, and affectionate, and evangelical spirit of the New Testament’ (I 23). For Chalmers, exposure to economic hardship might have some instructive effect, but the unfettered actions of the market alone could not ensure the beneficent efficacy of the preventive check on population growth that hunger and poverty provided for:

[s]o long as there is generally a low and grovelling taste among the people, instead of an aspiring tendency towards something more in the way of comfort, and cleanliness, and elegance, than is to be with in the sordid habitations of a rude and demi-barbarous country, will they rush, with precipitation, into matrimony, and care not how unable they are to meet its expenses, and forfeit the whole ease and accommodation of the future, to the present ascendancy of a blind and uncalculating impulse [...] The tendency to excessive population, can only find its thorough and decisive counteraction, among the amended habits, and the

⁴⁹ Ibid, pp.69-70.

moralised characters, and the exalted principles, of the people themselves. (I 8)

Chalmers argues that while the effects of scarcity will inevitably prevent further population growth beyond a certain point, unless the population can be maintained at a level significantly below the Malthusian ceiling, the poorest will be condemned to perpetually exist at the margins of subsistence. If the morals of the poor were to be improved however, that is, if they could be inculcated with the virtues of sexual abstinence, an eagerness to labour and diligence in matters of domestic economy, this condition of permanent crisis could be avoided and they would be able to live in relative comfort. Chalmers hoped that the diffusion of the Gospel might institute a ‘moral preventive check’ that would suspend the operation of a check to subsistence (Chalmers I 16).

As well as conveying a palpable sense that through Malthus, ‘[f]rom a rambling “series of visions and projects, and convulsive efforts, which terminate in nothing”’ Chalmers had ‘discovered a sense of purpose’, the style of the treatise perhaps reflects its intended readership of Presbyterian ministers – the group best situated to carry out its recommendations.⁵⁰ Chalmers argues that the imperative of Malthus’s population principle could best be met by the proselytization of the urban poor by Presbyterian ministers, or as Chalmers puts it ‘Christian labourers’ (Chalmers I 14). While Chalmers imagines that the poor would respond scornfully to the intrusion into their households of political economists intent upon demonstrating the implications of Malthus’s *Essay* for their long-term welfare, he argues that the Christian evangelist ‘might step into almost every dwelling-place – and engage the inmates in conversations of piety – and leave, at least, the sensations of cordiality and gratitude behind him’ (Chalmers I 12). Chalmers’s project was fundamentally pedagogic in character: it sought to instruct the poor as to how to best serve their own spiritual and material welfare through a newly professionalised clergy, who in turn would be instructed on how to spread the evangelical message to the poor. Chalmers’s decision to characterise his community pedagogues as ‘labourers’ however, signals the adherence of his scheme to an economic model in which education was understood as the production of Christian morals in its recipients. Alex Dick notes that while Coleridge would have had little tolerance for Chalmers’s Malthusianism, there

⁵⁰ Brown, *Godly Commonwealth*, p.61.

is nonetheless some affinity between his deployment of ‘Christian labourers’ in Glasgow, and the role Coleridge envisions in his 1830 treatise *On the Constitution of the Church and State*, for a national clerisy, charged with, ‘the harmonious development of those qualities and faculties that characterise our humanity.’⁵¹

A central tenet of Chalmers’s socio-economic thought and a point of crucial distinction between him and Richmond, was that systems of compulsory poor relief constituted a profound social evil. Chalmers believed that compulsory poor relief undermined the providential incentive to labour provided by the discomforts of poverty and in so doing sapped the natural industriousness of the lower classes. Furthermore, by using the wealth of the community to unnecessarily support the idle poor, legal relief removed the preventive check against their proliferation, leading slowly to the collapse of subsistence warned of by Malthus.⁵² Systems of compulsory welfare or assessed relief erode social paternalism and breed class resentment, Chalmers asserted, by replacing the voluntary ‘kindness and the watchfulness of private charity’ with obligation.⁵³ Chalmers’s solution to the problem of urban poverty then, was to import rural Scotland’s traditional system of assessment and support, by which the raising and allocation of relief funds was coordinated between local landowners the local parish’s Kirk-session. Chalmers believed that this approach would foster the dynamic of benevolent paternalism and social obedience which he associated with the rural Scotland of the past in the modern city by introducing an element of moral oversight.

Beginning in 1819, Chalmers assumed organisational control over the parish of St John’s in Glasgow with the material aim of eliminating assessment based relief and with it pauperism, and the longer term hope of recreating the communitarian ethos of an idealised Scottish rurality within a densely populated manufacturing district. Chalmers’s biographer Stewart J. Brown draws on the earlier research of R A Cage and E O A Checkland, to

⁵¹ See Alex Dick, *Romanticism and the Gold Standard: Money Literature, and Economic Debate in Britain 1790-1830* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.83. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *On the Constitution of the Church and State, According to the Idea of Each, with Aids Toward a Right Judgement of the Late Catholic Bill* (London:1830), p.43.

⁵² See Thomas Chalmers, ‘Minutes of the Evidence taken before the Committee appointed by the House of Commons, to inquire into the State of Mendicity and Vagrancy in the Metropolis and its Neighbourhood’, *Edinburgh Review*, 28.55 (March 1817), pp1-31.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p.8.

detail the extensive social and administrative reorganisation that this project involved.⁵⁴ A crucial element of the moral feasibility of the St John's experiment, rested on Chalmers's decision to continue the support of elderly paupers who had previously claimed relief from non-parochially administered sources, with the assumption that they would gradually die off. Recipients of poor relief would be supported by voluntary church door contributions, restoring virtue and agency to the act of benevolence and encouraging a sense of communal responsibility between providers and recipients of charity. Simultaneously, the door-to-door moral oversight and evangelism of parochial deacons – later alluded to as ministerial 'friends' in Chalmers's *Christian and Civic Economy* – would instil habits of moral restraint in parishioners, reducing pre and extra-marital sex and premature marriage, and stemming excess population growth (I 26).

The provision of schooling was a key element of the St John's scheme. Writing on behalf of the newly formed St John's Committee of Education in 1819, Chalmers authored a pamphlet of *Considerations on the System of Parochial Schools in Scotland, and on the Advantage of Establishing Them in Large Towns*. Chalmers's arguments in that volume both repeat view expressed by James Currie in his 1800 'Life of Burns', and anticipate his own crediting of parish schools in *The Christian and Civic Economy of Large Towns*, with having 'stamped a great civic and economic superiority of character on the peasantry of **Scotland**' (Chalmers I 22). While Chalmers perceives such institutions to have not been used to their fullest potential as instruments of popular amelioration, he asserts that '[s]uch a machinery, with its numerous rills of distribution, is well adapted to the object of propagating the dominant spirit of the times through the nation at large' (Chalmers I 23). Chalmers's moral reformism is couched here in a distinctly contemporary language of 'the Spirit of the Age'. If that 'spirit' could be suffused with the evangelical message of the Christian Gospel, a comprehensive system of parish schools extended to the towns would become an instrument of social transformation. In the St John's scheme, Chalmers projected that with a dramatic fall in the rate of pauperism, voluntary contributions to congregational collections could then be directed into a relief fund to cushion the effect on

⁵⁴ R.A. Cage and E.O.A. Checkland, 'Thomas Chalmers and urban poverty: the St. John's parish experiment in Glasgow, 1819-1837', *The philosophical journal : transactions of the Royal Philosophical Society of Glasgow*, 13.1 (1976).

the community of inevitable convulsions in the wider market, and towards the acquisition of new parish churches and schools.⁵⁵

Adults as well as children were to be the recipients of education, but Chalmers was only concerned with that of the former insofar as it related to the inculcation of piety and moral restraint. In *The Christian and Civic Economy*, Chalmers asserts that the relationship between the urban minister and his congregation should aspire to ‘assimilate’ the intimate ‘moral regimen’ and benevolent paternalism of the rural Scottish parishes of the past (I 126). Chalmers perceived that: ‘the difference, in point of moral and religious habit, between a town and country population, to be more due to the difference, in point of adequacy, between the established provision of instruction, for the one and the other, than to any other cause which can be assigned for it’ (I 24). In essence, the high population density of urban as compared to rural parishes renders the local minister ineffectual in his offices of religious instruction and moral oversight, leading to a decline in the morals of the lower classes that live there. Chalmers acknowledges the obvious impracticality of a single Minister and Kirk being required to attend to the morals of every parishioner in the Bridgeton and Calton districts of Glasgow, the population of which he puts at upwards of 29,000 when citing them as examples in *The Christian and Civic Economy* (I 114). Accordingly, Chalmers proposes that the urban minister split his parish ‘into small manageable districts [...] assigning one or more of his friends, in some capacity or other, to each of them’, in order to diffuse the morality of the gospel and ‘superintendence’ of the Church as broadly as possible (I 26). This recommendation not only retrenches the exemplary function of the rural parish within Chalmers’s scheme for the amelioration of urban labouring-class life, but again signals the elemental role of education and instruction within his project as a whole.

Beyond the ages of primary education, the combating of ‘a low and grovelling taste among the people’ would not involve intellectual improvement of the type practised by Charles Campbell, but the inculcation of moral values via the reading of the New Testament (Chalmers I 8). However, Chalmers never equated educational improvement with social promotion, seeking the establishment of parochial schools in urban communities not to provide labourers with, ‘the means of abandoning their status, but to

⁵⁵ See Brown, *Godly Commonwealth*, pp.129-42.

furnish them with the means of morally and intellectually exalting it.’⁵⁶ In a sermon preached at his St John’s parish in 1820, Chalmers speculated that the elimination of pauperism and inculcation of habits of industry would lead to an amelioration of the conditions of labouring-class life, that would eventually allow it to ‘be dignified both by leisure and by literature’.⁵⁷

Richmond would have modified this argument by placing the economic alleviation of the labouring classes as a first and necessary step towards their moral and intellectual elevation. Perhaps because he did not share the nascent bourgeois perspective of Chalmers and Malthus, Richmond was less interested in ensuring that the poor learned the necessity of hard work. Moreover, Richmond’s Godwinian outlook, in which his hopes for the future of society were invested in ‘the progress of rational liberty’, rather than the moral restraint attendant upon the evangelical ethos, was in some ways diametrically opposed to that of Chalmers and Malthus (*Narrative* 121, 124, 189). Yet his intervention in the labouring-class politics of post-Waterloo Glasgow was based on the same supervisory principles as those behind Chalmers’s system of proselytizing ‘Christian labourers.’

The timing of Chalmers’s St John’s project suggests an origin which it shares with Richmond’s infiltration, as an urgent attempt to impose order and morality in the face of political ferment within Glasgow’s impoverished manufacturing population. Moreover, where Chalmers writes of the need to inculcate a judgement and morality which will prevent the poor from succumbing in the case of sexual desire to, ‘the present ascendancy of a blind and uncalculating impulse’, Richmond presents the rhetorical choice of: ‘whether man should be placed under the government of his moral and intellectual faculties, or left the slave of his mere animal appetites and physical propensities.’ To secure the ascendancy of the intellect and reason over the passions operates for both Chalmers and Richmond as, simultaneously, a literal imperative in relation to the individual body, and a metaphor in relation to the body politic. While a fully elaborated system of education might provide the poor with the means to rescue themselves from their own impulses and the exhortations of political fanatics at some point in the future, in response to immediate contingency, both Chalmers and Richmond turn to interventional surveillance and oversight – by spies or clergymen – as a substitute for moral or intellectual improvement.

⁵⁶ Brown, *Godly Commonwealth* p.138

⁵⁷ *Ibid*

5.5 The legacy of Burns and the pursuit of intellectual improvement

Set against the changing functions of popular enlightenment partly elucidated in Richmond's *Narrative*, and Chalmers's project, Campbell's *Memoirs* become evidence of the inadequacy of an eighteenth-century model of intellectual enlightenment to the ameliorative role – and biological instrumentalism – now prescribed to the education of the labouring classes in the name of a newly invented economics of scarcity. But on a more basic level, it is also clear that the differences in Campbell's approach to popular enlightenment from Richmond's arise in no small part from his very different reading habits while an operative labourer. Campbell expresses his contempt for 'the herd of bipeds, whose whole range of intellect is circumscribed to the science of profit and loss, and the mere mechanical operations of life and nature', implying that he regarded the genre of political economy as inadequate to the task of intellectual cultivation that his model of self-improvement entailed, and would have had little truck with attempts to habituate the lower classes to their role in the economic order through instruction (*Memoirs* 8). Campbell's reading preferences are perhaps more reflective of Richmond's peers in the combination of 1812, whose disinterest in economic theory rendered his own grasp of it a distinguishing quality, than they are of those of Richmond himself.

By his own account, Campbell's pursuit of intellectual improvement was nonetheless significantly shaped by the economic conditions in which it took place. In his *Memoirs*, Campbell writes that having entered a cotton mill in Johnstone as an apprentice spinner, a role in which, as his family's primary source of economic support, he earned a wage of eight to ten shillings per week:

all the means of instruction I ever possessed resulted from my own exertion. I early imbibed a taste for reading, and the first trifling sum that lay in my hands, as a redundancy over the immediate exigencies of the family, was laid out as subscription-money at a circulating library in the neighbouring town. After the toils of the day were past, the little I could snatch from sleep was devoted to the perusal of such books as the library could supply. Often have I trudged, in the dark winter nights, a distance of several miles, through wind and rain, to get my books exchanged. I read much of History, Biography, Voyages, Travel, almost all the old

Dramatic Poets, of whom I was passionately fond, and the majority of the English Classics.

Campbell's account of his reading habits places the emphasis on canonical literature and factual accounts of history, travel and prominent lives that might provide labourers with moral exemplars, if not practical knowledge. Campbell only specifies that he frequented 'a circulating library in the neighbouring town', making George Caldwell's establishment in Paisley a likely candidate. The extant catalogue of Caldwell's library in Paisley dates from 1789, several years before Campbell was born, but Caldwell's library continued to operate into the nineteenth century, and as it remained open until ten in the evening, it would have facilitated the late night treks recalled by Campbell.⁵⁸ While it certainly would have provided the 'History, Biography, Voyages, Travel' and 'English classics' acknowledged in Campbell's *Memoirs*, the largest category in Caldwell's library by far was that of 'Novels and Romances'.⁵⁹ Such works may have had more influence upon Campbell than he directly acknowledges, as for example in the play upon the trope of unreliable narrator that is effected through his dependence on the account of his trial to fill the gaps left in his own recollections by discontinuities of consciousness. Additionally Manley records the existence of a 'Subscription Library for the working classes at Bridge of Johnstone by 1796', as well as of numerous other circulating and subscription libraries, in the area during the period contemporary with Campbell's employment there as a spinner.⁶⁰ Manley also notes the presence of a working-class subscription library in Pollokshaws by the end of the 1790s, suggesting one potential source for the knowledge of political economy acquired by Richmond.⁶¹ Campbell may also have had some indirect access to the subscription based Paisley Library Society and the plebeian Paisley Trades Library. The 1831 catalogue of the latter shows that it held works by William Cobbet and Thomas Paine, as well as William Godwin's *Political Justice*: if Campbell did not frequent the Paisley Trades Library, much of its stock appears at least germane to the concerns of Richmond's *Narrative*.⁶²

⁵⁸ Paisley Central Library, Local Studies, 017/PA/PC5218/PAM, *A Catalogue of the Paisley Circulating Library* (Paisley 1789), iv.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.16.

⁶⁰ Manley, pp.214-218.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.218.

⁶² See Paisley Central Library, Local Studies, 017/PA/PC146, *Catalogue of Books of the Paisley Library Society* (Paisley: Robert Stewart 1858) and 017/PA/PC754, *Catalogue of Books in the Paisley Trades Library with the Regulations of the Society* (Paisley: 1831), p.24.

It was perhaps through his membership of a circulating library that Campbell became aware of Robert Burns's pursuit of literary self-improvement, as well as his poetic works. Burns's influence upon labouring-class poets and song writers in the last decade of the eighteenth century and the first of the nineteenth is evident in the autobiographical writing of James Hogg, and as Campbell notes, in the culture of artisanal poetry and song which flourished in early nineteenth-century Renfrewshire, for whose proponents Burns's use of vernacular Scots was a formative influence (*Memoirs* 11). This culture of poetry and song, which centred upon Paisley and its environs, was arguably an effect of the combination of relative prosperity, vocational autonomy and status enjoyed by weavers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These advantages were rarely shared by cotton spinners like Campbell.

Tom Leonard's 1990 collection *Radical Renfrew*, collates the work of dozens of poets from diverse social backgrounds, as well as Leonard's own research into the networks of libraries and intellectual societies that underwrote their work. *Radical Renfrew* is indicative of the robust culture of labouring-class reading and writing that spanned Campbell's lifetime, and which produced the poets Robert Tannahill and Alexander Wilson among others, the former of whom Campbell claims to have known (*Memoirs* 11). In contrast, a much earlier collection of the area's poetry and song, William Motherwell's 1819 *The Harp of Renfrewshire*, includes a preface which attempts to situate the editor's contemporaries within a local tradition of minstrelsy reaching back to the sixteenth century. This strategy reflects Motherwell's reactionary politics, as well as partly anticipating Robert Southey's 1831 essay 'On the Lives and Works of Our Uneducated Poets', which explores a tradition of unschooled lower-class poetry with roots in the medieval period, to the exclusion of a more contemporary and potentially contentious scene of intellectually grounded labouring-class writing.⁶³ In contrast, Campbell's *Memoirs* attest to the possibility that Burns's poetry and, by a less direct route of influence his life, may have inspired a latent interest in the possibilities of literary recreation, or provided a point of co-identification for those already invested in an existing culture of labouring-class enlightenment.

⁶³ Jon Jones, *Attempts in Verse, With Some Account of the Writer, Written by Himself: and An Introductory Essay on the Lives and Works of Our Uneducated Poets, By Robert Southey, Esq. Poet Laureate* (London: 1831) pp.1-170.

There are several clues in Campbell's *Memoirs* that suggest that Campbell became familiar with Burns's biography via the textual intermediary of the 'Life of Burns' which prefaces James Currie's popular 1800 edition of the poet's *Works*. Writing of the period around 1810, at which time he was still a cotton spinner in Johnstone, Campbell recalls:

I now became a member of a society whose real object was to debate on literary subjects. It consisted of twelve members; we met once a week, and on winding up the debate, a question was voted for the subject of the ensuing meeting. Matters of a religious and political nature were absolutely excluded. The presidentship went by rotation; and our meetings, after the question was disposed of, broke with some amusing story, or song from the chair. The society consisted chiefly of artisans and mechanics, such as had a taste for reading and literary pursuits; and some of its members have since attained to situations of profit and respectability both at home and abroad. [...] Our regulations were nearly similar to those of the Mauchlin [sic] club, on which the name of Burns has conferred immortality. The members, however, were not obliged, like those of the bachelor's club, to live in single blessedness. (*Memoirs* 7)

This passage suggests the crucial significance of Robert Burns to subsequent generations of labouring-class readers and writers, as a specific model of intellectual sociability and intellectual improvement. It could be argued of course, that Campbell, in a similar style to James Hogg, is attempting in his *Memoirs* to retrospectively align the details of his life with those of Burns's, in aid of a strategy of literary self-legitimation. Yet, if the similarities between Campbell's pursuit of intellectual improvement and that of Burns are primarily the effect of an authorial strategy imposed by the former after the fact, they remain significant as indicators of Burns's lingering influence over labouring-class Scottish writers in the early nineteenth century. It is after all, Burns's engagement with a culture of intellectual improvement and the cultivation of sentimental capital, not his access to lyrical spontaneity or local tradition, which Campbell, as an industrial rather than agricultural labourer chooses to identify with.

The above passage, with its specific, if compound reference to the Tarbolton Bachelor's Club and Mauchline Conversation Club and their strict rules concerning the

rotation of leadership and selection of subject matter, suggests not only that Burns's own model of intellectual sociability formed a specific point of reference for Campbell and his fellow labourers, but that they attached great symbolic importance to apparently mundane details of procedure and organisation when attempting to emulate that model.⁶⁴

Campbell's example suggests both that Currie's edition of Burns may have promulgated rules and regulations that readers could seize upon and use as the basis for their own literary associations, and that the members of these associations saw their adherence to practises sanctioned by Burns as a mark of their own intellectual, and even authorial legitimacy.

Such legitimacy was desirable because as Campbell's account of his membership of a literary club composed 'of artisans and mechanics' attests, such organisations could easily become objects of controversy rather than approval. Campbell recalls of his time as an intellectually active spinner during the Napoleonic Wars that, '[n]o poor devil was ever more tortured, or persecuted, for his attachment to books than I was. Every cross accident – every misfortune that chequered my early life, was ascribed to my love of books...' In a similar vein Campbell writes of the literary circle which he formed with his friends in Johnstone that: '[b]eing the only thing of the kind that was ever instituted in the village, it experienced a good deal of opposition at its first outset' (*Memoirs* 8).

Campbell asserts of his own society that, 'the frequent exercise of intellect to which it gave rise, formed of themselves a kind of bulwark that excluded meaner pursuits,' and that, 'as we met in a public house above once or twice a-year, it led to no habits of irregularity or dissipation'. On the other hand, he acknowledges the convivial element to his associational activities, describing the customary anniversary of the society's foundation as an evening of 'relaxation, not of debate; of rational though somewhat uproarious enjoyment,' which celebrated 'Nature and Art' but also the 'ties of close-friendship' (*Memoirs* 8-9). Campbell represents the function of his literary society as manifold: not only did it provide opportunities for intellectual cultivation, but it allowed the performance of a labouring-class identity in which recreation was cast as the pastoral, impulsive antithesis of work or production. In turn this formulation reflected an oppositional construction of the relationship between 'rational relaxation' and the demands of labour, but it also necessitated an emphasis on the orderly and polite nature of

⁶⁴ Campbell's apparent conflation here of the Tarbolton Bachelor's Club and Mauchline Conversation Club, is likely due to his having written the *Memoirs* in prison, without access to the text of Currie's 'Life'.

labouring-class intellectual association – an assertion of its members’ capacity for ‘self-regulation’ through taste – if such activities were to avoid dismissal as scenes of riot, dissipation and drunken debauchery (*Memoirs* 10).⁶⁵

While Campbell and his peers sought to follow Burns’s example in their pursuit of intellectual improvement however, their efforts to do so were affected by their very different vocational circumstances. In his brief treatment of Campbell’s *Memoirs* in his history of the Scottish cotton industry, Antony Cooke suggests that for Campbell and his contemporaries, spinning was an employment of childhood or adolescence and that for many, including Campbell, the ‘way out was to become an active self-improver’.⁶⁶ Though not in reference to their author, Campbell’s *Memoirs* do indeed attest to the capacity of labouring-class intellectual life to facilitate the escape of its adherents from unskilled and badly waged vocations such as spinning. Campbell reports that many of his peers used their informal intellectual activities as a foundation for academic careers, with some of the members of the literary club of which Campbell was a member having: ‘since attained to situations of profit and respectability both at home and abroad.’ At the time of writing, Campbell claims that one of his former associates: ‘is at present a Lecturer on Philosophy, and Editor of a respectable Medical Journal’ (*Memoirs* 7). What Campbell’s *Memoirs* partly evince then, is that in the absence of the prospect of improving vocational efficacy to one’s own advantage within a particular trade – a path available to both Burns and Hogg as a tenant farmer and a shepherd respectively in an age of agricultural improvement, but denied to manufacturing operatives of the following generation – not only did the scope of labouring-class education become increasingly circumscribed, but the notion of intellectual cultivation inherited by Campbell was gradually displaced by an emphasis upon labouring-class intellectual improvement, first and foremost as a way of escaping a low social station.

The apogee of this movement would come several decades after the appearance of Campbell’s *Memoirs*, in the form of the *Self-Help* ideology promulgated in the 1859 book of the Scottish writer Samuel Smiles. In the Romantic era however, accounts of labouring-class self-improvement were more likely to be received as dangerous invasions of the polite public sphere, than met with condescending approval as manifestations of an orderly

⁶⁵ Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.80.

⁶⁶ Cooke, p.152.

social mobility.⁶⁷ Paul Keen draws attention to both the extrinsic and innate political dimensions of the reformist autobiographies and autodidact narratives of authors such as the former shoemaker James Lackington and the London Corresponding Society member and tailor Francis Place. Keen observes that: ‘suffering from enormous disadvantages, with little opportunity or obvious incentive to develop their reading skills, these self-taught authors implied that their achievements ought to be regarded as heroic rather than threatening [...] they also suggested, this heroism made them more, rather than less, qualified to become members of the reading public’.⁶⁸ Not only did these writers seek to demonstrate to middle-class readers the desirability of artisanal and labouring-class intellectual improvement and the right of all ranks to participation in the polite public sphere, they simultaneously sought to imply the need for social and political reform, by recounting the obstacles which they themselves had conquered in order to make their addresses to the reading public. As Keen shows, this often involved the portrayal of the demands of a manual trade as an adverse force which the determined autodidact had to struggle to overcome, whether by seizing opportunities to study while walking to and from work or reading by moonlight after a day of hard labour.⁶⁹ Campbell’s assertion that he depended entirely upon his ‘own exertion’ to secure an education, demonstrates the emphasis that he too places in his *Memoirs* upon the trials that he faced in his pursuit of knowledge, and the determination with which he overcame them. By casting himself as a type of sentimental hero, defying both the weather and conventional imperatives of material aspiration in pursuit of an intangible form of improvement, Campbell contributes to a sense that the sphere of leisurely cultivation and reflection must be forcefully claimed from the demands of labour.

Richardson argues that the appearance of something resembling an emergent ‘proto-Victorian, self-help ideology’ in the heroic tenor of the memoirs of reformist autodidacts, tends to be mitigated by the way in which the author’s, ‘self-education functions synecdochically to convey a widespread progress in manners and political knowledge’.⁷⁰ Such writers sought to portray not only their own self-actuated intellectual improvement through reading, but to set their own narratives against the background of a

⁶⁷ See Alan Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994), p.232.

⁶⁸ Paul Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s: Print Culture and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.143.

⁶⁹ See Keen, p.144

⁷⁰ Richardson, p.241.

universally advantageous expansion of the reading public. This of course implied a broader faith in the connection between improvement in the form of economic progress, and improvement in its many other forms as the march of intellect, the diffusion of knowledge and the bettering of the condition of the labouring classes. Campbell's situation as a prisoner recovering from a bout of insanity, who had until recently been employed in the same trade in which he had begun his working life as an adolescent, precludes him from making any great claims for the practical advantages of intellectual improvement, either in terms of the progress of society as a whole or in that of the labouring individual.

Campbell's failure appears all the more acute in the context of what Keen describes as 'the performative nature' of much labouring-class autobiography.⁷¹ Intellectual improvement could be a statement of conformity to polite 'Enlightenment' values and political expectations. Moreover, to provide a narrative account of one's pursuit of knowledge in a context of economic adversity was to demonstrate character and self-possession, or propriety, a strategy of self and class-legitimation that seems to be spectacularly reversed in Campbell's lapse into insanity. In this sense, Campbell's *Memoirs* illustrate a particular moment in the transition from a socially-embedded eighteenth-century model of character and improvement, to an individualistic Victorian notion of the heroic autodidact, which as Seigel notes, flaunted the problematic of will and determinism through the epithet of "self-made man".⁷² This shift, I would argue, is simultaneously focused and distorted by the effect of Campbell's compromised authorial position as a victim of temporary insanity.

5.6 'Pleasures of the Imagination': the Addisonian imperative in nineteenth-century Renfrewshire

It should be emphasised that Campbell's acknowledgement of the virtuous, even character-forming effects of pitting one's 'own exertion' against the forces of economic hardship in the pursuit of knowledge is not necessarily the same thing as Malthus's conviction that: '[t]he sorrows and distresses of life form another class of excitements, which seem to be necessary, to soften and humanize the heart, to awaken social sympathy, to generate all the Christian virtues, and to afford scope for the ample exertion of

⁷¹ Keen, p.143.

⁷² Seigel p.254.

benevolence' (Malthus 372). It is possible to see how this formulation, in its linking of economic adversity to individual triumph and determination, might have been amenable to the autobiography of self-improvement and its nineteenth-century scion in self-help ideology. However, while Malthus's description of economic hardships as 'another class of excitements' implicitly compares them to the pleasures of the recreational sphere, Campbell's experience of labouring-class life seems to mandate the pursuit of knowledge, not even necessarily as a form of improvement, but as a rectilinear trajectory of escape from the contingencies of economic life.

On a first reading, Campbell's assertion that the, 'taste for knowledge and science is of such noble origin, as to confer a kind of lustre on its humblest possessor', might read as a statement in favour of the diffusion of knowledge in general and of the march of intellect as a function of improvement more broadly. A closer interpretation reveals that it is the 'taste for knowledge' rather than knowledge itself that is valued; improvement is not the object that Campbell extolls so much as pleasure. Indeed, while Campbell's *Memoirs* offer both an account of the literary culture prevalent among his peers and emphasise the inherent challenges that their vocational and social status presented to their pursuit of knowledge, there is perhaps a sense that it is the pursuit itself, rather than any advantage associated with the attainment of knowledge, that he is attempting to glorify. Campbell writes of his literary cohort in Johnstone that: 'to men toiling in the humblest walks of life, the approaches to knowledge were no doubt circuitous, and in many instances, the want of time, of books, and legitimate guides, left them like way-fairers stormstead [sic]; still, however, they had the mountain of knowledge in view, and the distance seemed only to heighten the sublimity' (*Memoirs* 8-9). Campbell's emphasis here upon the apparent rather than the certain, the sublime rather than the useful, and the attempted rather than the fulfilled, might suggest that he valued the aesthetic spectacle of the labourer's pursuit of learning in adversity, over any practical benefit that might proceed from success in the undertaking. Campbell appears to construct the acquisition of literary knowledge as an alternative form of accumulation to that entailed by the economic independence which he has failed to acquire. Knowledge and imaginative stimulation are pursued for their own sake.

In his *Memoirs*, Campbell casts broad ranging recreational reading, which might encompass philosophical texts as well as works of science and poetry as a source of

intellectual elevation, and presents the acquisition of knowledge as a form of aesthetic enjoyment:

Perhaps he is solving a problem of Euclid, or soaring with Newton amidst the planetary world, and endeavouring to discover the nature and properties of that invisible attraction by which the Almighty mind has subjected inanimate matter to laws that resemble operations of intelligence; or descending from the harmony of the spheres, he contemplates the principle of animal life, and explores the intricate labyrinths of physiological phenomena. If tired or disappointed in his physical researches, he has the mighty and sublime region of mind to revel in. Pursuing the footsteps of Locke and Reid, he traces the origin of his own ideas, feeling, and passions; or tired with the labour of tracing effects to their first causes, and baffled in his attempts at analysing the complex machinery of the soul, he unbends the wing of his imagination, and solaces his weary mind in the delightful gardens of the classic muse. Poetry and music have a wild charm over the heart: like moonlight, they cast a pleasing disguise over the realities of nature, and soften, by their mellow tints and colourings, those asperities of misluck and cankered occurrences, [sic] that usually irritate a feeling mind in their plain pose and matter of fact appearance. (*Memoirs* 9)

Campbell's reference in his *Memoirs* to the labouring-class reader who, '[p]ursuing the footsteps of Locke and Reid [...] traces the origin of his own ideas, feeling, and passions' could be interpreted as a Burnsian moment, one which reflects the poet's apparent comparative reading of the two philosophers in his 1786 'Letter to James Tennant, Glenconner' of Adam Smith's 1759 *Theory of Moral Sentiments* with Reid's 1764 *Inquiry* (K90). However, Campbell's prose poem on recreational learning is strongly redolent of Joseph Addison's famous 1712 series of essays on 'The Pleasures of the Imagination', which were originally written for *The Spectator* but broadly anthologised in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁷³ There, Addison makes the case for the acquisition and contemplation of various forms of knowledge as a source of polite aesthetic enjoyment, particularly those that give rise to optical or mental images. Addison distinguishes

⁷³ See Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community 1762 to 1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011)p.7.

between ‘primary pleasures of the imagination’, produced by the direct apprehension of visible external phenomena, and ‘secondary pleasures of the imagination’, which stem from the recollection of visual experiences, or from the contemplation of ‘agreeable visions’ assembled in the mind by the work of imaginative agency upon memory or written description.⁷⁴

Addison also distinguishes the aesthetic ‘pleasures of the fancy’ and imagination from those of ‘the understanding’, which he associates with the acquisition of forms of knowledge that might be described as practical, scientific, systematic, or in the parlance of later eighteenth-century writers, useful.⁷⁵ The latter forms of pleasure, Addison writes: ‘are indeed more preferable because they are founded on some new Knowledge or Improvement in the Mind of Man; yet it must be confest that those of the Imagination are as great and as transporting as the other.’⁷⁶ Addison’s equivocal tone and faltering syntax are striking given his eighteenth-century reputation for perspicuity of style, and suggest his reluctance to recommend affect as a criterion of literary or philosophical value. On this level, Addison can be seen to prefigure the later eighteenth and nineteenth-century interest in, and anxiety towards, ‘the unworlding possibilities of transport’ that were seen to be presented by imagination and sensibility.⁷⁷ In his ‘Life of Burns’, Currie had of course ascribed his subject with an ‘inordinate sensibility’, which could only have been mitigated by the ‘regular and constant occupation’, of schooling or employment (Currie I 238-239). Campbell’s pursuit of knowledge becomes entangled here with all the various perils that an overheated sensibility presents to ‘a feeling mind’.

Tellingly, Addison further qualifies his categorisation of the differing advantages of the pleasures respectively associated with understanding and fancy, and asserts that the former present their own set of dangers to the intellectual constitution, because their contents must be, ‘worked out by dint of thinking, and attended with too violent a labour of the brain.’⁷⁸ In contrast, the aesthetic pleasures of fancy, possess the capacity to relax and restore: ‘[d]elightful scenes, whether in nature, painting, or poetry, have a kindly influence on the body as well as the mind, and not only serve to clear and brighten the imagination, but are able to disperse grief and melancholy, and to set the animal spirits in

⁷⁴ Joseph Addison, ‘On the Pleasure of the Imagination’, *The Spectator*, 411 (21 June 1712), pp.1-2.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p.1

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Mee, *Enthusiasm*, p.53.

⁷⁸ *The Spectator*, 411 (21 June 1712), p.2.

pleasing and agreeable motions.’⁷⁹ Addison here lays down the distinction between the alternatively ‘unbending’ and improving capacities of different forms of literary recreation, which would be followed by Burns in his 1782, ‘History of the rise, proceedings, and regulations of the Bachelor’s Club’.

Although he writes over a century later, Campbell closely follows Addison’s formulation of the differing varieties of recreational learning, attesting perhaps to the high regard in which labouring-class readers continued to hold *The Spectator* and its contributors into the nineteenth century. Campbell appears to closely mirror Addison’s language and argument when he refers to the capacity of music and poetry to provide a relief from the more intellectually rigorous, ‘labour of tracing effects to their first causes,’ as well as to ‘cast a pleasing disguise over the realities of nature, and soften, by their mellow tints and colourings, those asperities of misluck and cankered occurrences [sic] that usually irritate a feeling mind’. In further contrast with the Malthusian position, Campbell characterises the disappointments of the economic sphere as banal rather than salutary.

For Campbell, Addison’s essays on the ‘Pleasures of the Imagination’ seem to have mandated the pursuit of knowledge as a source of intellectual and moral improvement, but also of delight as a worthy end in itself. For Campbell as for Addison, such enjoyment could be both immediate and abiding: knowledge could be acquired and added to a reserve of aesthetic ‘delight’ that might be accessed in the imagination long after the original apprehension of its contents. Campbell’s appropriation of Addisonian imaginative pleasure is complemented in his *Memoirs* by another passage in which he writes: ‘I laid in a considerable stock of miscellaneous knowledge while yet very young, and the contemplation of the time thus spent has ever been a source of unfeigned satisfaction’ (*Memoirs* 7). Elements of Addison’s formula are present in Campbell’s account of his own retention of knowledge as fuel for later flights of imaginative and contemplative transport. Through the labour of the imagination, elements of previously acquired knowledge are crafted into images to be examined and consumed by the mind’s eye. As Kevis Goodman notes, an economic metaphor operates in Addison’s account of the simultaneously productive and consumptive power of mind.⁸⁰ In his more explicitly economic metaphor of laying a ‘stock’ of knowledge from which to draw in the future

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ See Kevis Goodman, *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism: Poetry and the Mediation of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.12, pp.35-36.

however, Campbell invites direct comparison between the acquisition of knowledge and the accumulation of capital, a comparison which he elaborates upon elsewhere in his *Memoirs*. Contrasting the intellectual self-improver with the devotee of material wealth, Campbell writes:

[t]he highest enjoyment that the latter can attain to is vested in the power of fortune, and may perish in an hour, but the treasures of knowledge are of an unfading nature, and their value becomes rather enhanced than diminished by adversity. Thus the votary of intellectual delight can never be rendered absolutely destitute by the operations of chance; for even when fortune and friends forsake him, he has still something left in the treasures of his mind, to console himself either in sorrow or solitude. (*Memoirs* 9-10)

Campbell maintains the distinction between a useful education adapted to the imperatives of the economic status quo and an eccentric acquiescence to sentimental enthusiasm, but inverts its consequences. Campbell draws here on his own experience of the fragile promises of improvement: his failure to reify any of his educational attainments as economic advantage is taken as evidence that wealth itself is chimerical, and taste, knowledge and Addisonian ‘intellectual delight’ ends in themselves. This reading of the ‘Pleasures of the Imagination’ is in fact partly suggested in the essays themselves, where Addison asserts that imagination allows its possessor to experience a ‘greater satisfaction in the prospect of fields and meadows, than another does in the possession [...] It gives him indeed a kind of property in everything he sees’.⁸¹ As Addison’s example of a picturesque landscape suggests, in its original context, this imaginative prerogative may have functioned as an assertion of the superior claim to civic virtue of an urbane middling rank, against that of the landed aristocracy: a conversion of cultural into social capital.

However the apparent unavailability of Campbell’s interpretation of imaginative delight to reification by any system of value external to its own, renders it dangerously close to a form of pure consolation, which in fact reaffirms the economic value that it ostensibly rejects, by defining itself as merely its hollow isomorph. While Burns’s self-advancement through the pursuit of intellectual improvement is undercut by a sentimental deviance similar to that which Campbell expresses when he recalls listening to his ‘heart’

⁸¹ *The Spectator*, 411 (21 June 1712), p.2.

and absconding from his apprenticeship, Campbell goes beyond Burns's critique of the imperative to labour through the valorisation of whimsy, to propose a model of 'rational relaxation' that seems merely de-anchored from, or inimical to, any moral or critical purpose. This situation is perhaps exacerbated by Campbell's stated failure as a poet: beyond his *Memoirs*, there is little that Campbell can claim as the product of his application in a counter-economic realm of literary play. The strategy of inversion that characterises Campbell's model of Addisonian imaginative pleasure thus becomes difficult to distinguish from the formula used to define the alienation of the insane intellect: a formula which Campbell himself was held to by medical and legal discourse. In his pursuit of self-improvement, Campbell might be seen to have succumbed to the effects of what Addison described as the 'too violent a labour of the brain' entailed by the more intense 'Pleasures of the Imagination'.

5.7 Aftermath

In the preface to the second edition of his *Memoirs*, printed two months after the appearance of the first in February 1828, Campbell refers to 'the rapid sale and favourable reception of the first impression,' and writes that the 'demand for more copies has been so urgent, that I have reason to conclude a *new edition* has met with ample encouragement'.⁸² There was certainly an appetite for such material. During the eighteenth century, criminal narratives in particular had developed from their origins as publicised accounts of capital penalties carried out in London's notorious Newgate prison, to comprise a popular literary genre in their own right. In the introduction to his edited collection of *Criminal Biographies of the Eighteenth Century*, Philip Rawlings suggests that the tenor of criminal biographies solicited a middle-class readership: 'much of the literature portrays crime as originating in the lack of self-discipline and idleness of the labouring people, and implicitly asserts that the resolution of these problems lies [...] in the imposition by middling-class employers of a rigorous discipline at the workplace.'⁸³ Criminal narratives could function then as a vehicle through which an emerging capitalist class could assert their political and moral authority in the public sphere, while indirectly advocating reform: both of the political order and of the condition and habits of the labouring classes through

⁸² Campbell, 'Preface to the 2nd Edition', in *Memoirs*.

⁸³ Philip Rawlings, *Drunks, Whores and Idle Apprentices: Criminal Biographies of the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Routledge 1992), pp.3-4.

disciplinary strategies of pedagogy and employment. As a text that bears a resemblance to the criminal narratives discussed by Rawlings, Campbell's *Memoirs* may have been subject to many of the same exemplary and disciplinary functions that such works served. In particular, as a result of its author's inefaceable relationship to medico-legal authority and process, and perhaps regardless of any authorial intention, Campbell's *Memoirs* stand as an exemplary account of the dangers associated with the wrong type of labouring-class education.

During the trial, Dr Corkindale remarked that: 'the act of Campbell resembled very much that of Hatfield [sic], who fired at the late King; which Lord Erskine defined to be "the immediate, unqualified offspring of a diseased delusion operating on the faculties with respect to one object, without obviously impairing the intellect on other topics at the same time."' (*Memoirs* 48) James Hadfield was a former soldier who had attempted to assassinate George III in a theatre in 1800, in the belief that doing so would fulfil his own messianic destiny and precipitate a millennial event. Through the efforts of his defence lawyer Thomas Erskine, Hadfield was ruled to have been insane and was spared execution, despite having apparently attempted to commit the most serious of capital crimes.⁸⁴

Of particular relevance to Corkindale's assessment of Campbell, was the ascription to Hadfield of an insanity that manifested itself as monomania; he was capable of lucidity and reason regarding most things, but not the particular object of his delusion. Corkindale's assertion that in Campbell's case as in Hadfield's, insanity had only affected his thoughts and actions in relation to his particular delusion, seems to imply a strict compartmentalisation of mind. In his 1832 *Principles of the Criminal Law of Scotland* the advocate Archibald Alison asserts that a madman is distinguishable from a criminal by 'an alienation of reason' or 'state of mental alienation which renders him not criminally answerable for his actions [...] a mad person may be perfectly aware that murder is a crime, and will admit that, if pressed on the subject; but still he may conceive that a homicide he had committed, was nowise blameable, because the deceased had engaged in a conspiracy with others against his own life'.⁸⁵ Alison further codifies the association of

⁸⁴ See *Attempt on the Life of the King. The Trial of James Hadfield for High Treason. In the Court of the King's Bench, On Thursday, June 26* (London: 1800) and See Richard Moran, 'The Modern Foundation for the Insanity Defense: The Cases of James Hadfield (1800) and Daniel McNaughtan (1843),' *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 477 (1985), 31-42.

⁸⁵ Alison, pp.645-646.

madness with a topos of alienation alluded to by Corkindale: that of the mad person's faculties from one another, and of their mind as a whole from reality. Campbell's mental insularity, his recourse to imaginative transport and pleasure as a relief from the demands of labour, seems to share many of the qualities of the alienation of reason identified as madness by Corkindale and Alison. Campbell's imprisonment in Glasgow jail is merely the institutional actualisation of his mental condition: a privation of liberty to match the privation of agency which had facilitated his murder of McVicar.

Corkindale's citing of the Hadfield case during Campbell's trial is also significant for what it suggests about the relationship of both Campbell's insanity and subsequent advocacy of intellectual improvement to changing notions of subjectivity. For Neil Ramsey, the Hadfield case enacted a reframing of sovereignty and nation during a period of war and political crisis, through the sentimentalisation of the monarch's paternal relationship to the returned soldier. Ramsey also points out that through the publication of Erskine's speeches and trial reports, 'the case circulated through a print and visual culture that asked the audience to scrutinise [Hadfield's] character and interpret his bodily deformities, ultimately inviting them to identify with the rational analysis of the trial rather than be awed by Hadfield's execution as a sublime display of kingly power.'⁸⁶ Hadfield's trial and its consumption by a reading public mark an important point in the emergence of a pathologized notion of criminality then, and in the transformation of the criminal – or indeed madman – from an object of punishment to an object of legal-scientific analysis and examination. Here as Ramsey implies, is an instance of what Michel Foucault describes in his famous study of the emergence of modern systems of penality and social control, *Discipline and Punish*, as the 'inversion of visibility' which occurs as '[t]he scarcely sustainable visibility of the monarch is turned into the unavoidable visibility of the subjects.'⁸⁷

For Foucault, this does not correspond to a process of political liberation, but is characteristic of the new technologies of social control that he argues emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This 'inversion of visibility' denotes the historical point at which, rather than existing in a congealed form in the institutional limbs

⁸⁶ Neil Ramsey, 'Reframing Regicide: Symbolic Politics and the Sentimental Trial of James Hadfield (1800)', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 36 no. 3 (2013), 317-334. p.331.

⁸⁷ Ramsey, p.329; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. By Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p.189.

of government and the force they directly exerted, sovereign power began to minutely percolate through social routines; normative and corrective practises; the proliferation of surveillance, management and supervision; and the accumulation and construction of certain types of knowledge and discursive formations.⁸⁸ For Foucault, one effect of this ‘micro-physics of power’ is the production of the modern human subject as a transposable reality that is an object of discipline, punishment, surveillance and knowledge, and in this way acts as a ‘technology of power over the body’.⁸⁹ The work of this ‘technology of power’ is not confined to the punishment of the criminal or the treatment of the mad, but is perhaps at its most visible in these spheres of operation. Foucault’s discussion of the technologies of ‘power over the body’ elaborated within, but not confined to, the realm of criminal punishment, have important implications I would argue, for the transmutation of labouring-class intellectual improvement into a form of disciplinarity; a process triangulated by Richmond’s *Narrative*, Campbell’s *Memoirs* and Thomas Chalmers’s response to Malthus’s economic pessimism.

Campbell’s authorial position within his *Memoirs* perpetuates the state of alienation ascribed to his intellect and reason by the medico-legal verdict: the subject of his insanity remains a discrete element of the text that Campbell’s subjective narrator cannot approach, and which must be delegated to the appended account of his trial. Campbell’s *Memoirs* and trial illustrate a convergence of the eighteenth-century criminal narrative with what Foucault describes as a disciplinary technique of ‘individualizing knowledge’ that links the surveillance of the subject with the power of confession and the treatment of criminality and abnormality.⁹⁰ The apparently ineffectual nature of the pursuit of knowledge as advocated by Campbell is on one level an effect imposed upon his *Memoirs* through the cordoning off of his intellect by a medico-legal discourse of insanity, which deprives the form of improvement which he describes of its intended object. The contradiction of Campbell’s defence of labouring-class reading in the face of his own fall into insanity due to a ‘diseased’ intellect perhaps illustrates the incompatibility of his Addisonian model of improvement with the disciplinary approach epitomised by Currie’s ‘Life of Burns’. This disparity might partly be framed in terms of an epistemic shift from the empirical, associative model of mind espoused by Hume and Smith, to the volitional understanding of the self advanced by Thomas Reid, and espoused by Currie and Dugald

⁸⁸ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.189

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.26.

⁹⁰ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.126.

Stewart. Campbell's Addisonian notion of cultivation, in which knowledge is accumulated in lieu of social or financial capital, leaves the will untouched as a counterpart to a sensibility or capacity for feeling that is endowed by nature rather produced or trained by improvement. The faculties which medico-juridical discourse compartmentalised in order to explain Campbell's insanity would perhaps eventually be articulated and consolidated by disciplinary power, into a surveyed and trained subjectivity. Campbell's compromised self, marks out the negative space into which an alternative notion of improvement and of the subject – Owen's notion of character or Malthus's economic soul – might be inscribed. Indeed, in their attempts to interpose between the actions and passions of both the individual and political body with spies and 'Christian Labourers', I would argue that Alexander Richmond and Thomas Chalmers actualise the developing links between a new model of labouring-class amelioration and the disciplinary power described by Foucault.

Campbell's improvisation on Addison's 'Pleasures of the Imagination' in early industrial Scotland enacts a return to the eighteenth-century point of origin for polite intellectual improvement. But it also reveals a model of cultivation which had lost its mandate as a form of self-regulation, and whose cultural authority had been usurped by developing Romantic ideas of 'literariness'. Jon Mee argues that for Wordsworth and Coleridge, such notions partly implied a tincturing of Addisonian politeness with the 'unworlding effects' of poetic enthusiasm.⁹¹ Campbell's *Memoirs* end up discursively positioning themselves as a cautionary illustration of what results when this balance is attempted by a layperson rather than a consecrated member of the literary field.

Mee notes that '[f]or someone such as Coleridge, this problem came to mean that literariness had to find institutional guardians of the sort provided for in his idea of a clerisy.'⁹² Of the writers discussed in the above chapters, it is perhaps Gilbert Burns who comes closest to naming the Romantic value of literature as the guarantor of a higher human nature against the urges of economisation and commoditisation – though the work which Coleridge would imagine for a national clerisy, and Chalmers for his 'Christian labourers', Gilbert ascribes to parish school teachers and librarians. In contrast Robert Burns's deference to 'fancy's *meteor-ray*' in 'The Vision', sited his poetic legitimacy in the erratic flow of a sentimental enthusiasm moderated only by taste, and partly identifiable by its dangerous potential to extinguish selfhood in the vicissitudes of either

⁹¹ Mee, *Enthusiasm*, p.296.

⁹² *Ibid.*

the bodily or the social passions. But his involvement in libraries and literary clubs suggests his conviction that this was a salutary power to be disseminated among his labouring peers and subordinates rather than guarded from them. On the other hand, while James Hogg's singularity, underwritten by his exceptional vocational status, allowed him more room for manoeuvre than his labouring contemporaries when it came to the indulgence of the fancy or the imagination, his visionary capacity was never configured as the fruit of improvement, or attributed to the endowments of taste or intellect. As Hogg himself wrote in a bitter addition to his 'Memoir of the Author's Life' in 1832: [t]he walks of learning are occupied by a powerful aristocracy, who deem that province their own peculiar right [...] view an intruder, from the humble and despised ranks of the community, with a jealous and indignant eye, and impede his progress by every means in their power.⁹³

If the Romantic idea of literariness harboured disciplinary affinities, it did not amount to what Foucault calls a 'technology of power over the body'. For Richmond and Chalmers, seeking in their different ways to ameliorate an urban labouring class by securing the ascendancy of the reason or the will over the bodily passions, recreational reading did not appear, as it had for Burns, as a way of mitigating the debasement caused by the division of labour. If the play between inspiration, regulation, discipline, modern selfhood, and the emergence of literariness has proved to be a productive field of inquiry in the study of Romantic poetics, I would posit that it might also be fruitfully explored in relation to the cultural politics of labouring-class intellectual improvement over the long eighteenth century.

⁹³ Hogg, *Altrive Tales*, p.46.

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