FAILING TO THROW HIS MIND BACK INTO THE PAST
THE RECEPTION OF DAVID HUME'S *HISTORY OF ENGLAND*
IN EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH HISTORIOGRAPHY

by

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ABSTRACT

From narrow partisan attacks on his political and religious views to more sophisticated discussions of his mode of historical writing, British writers in the first half of the nineteenth-century responded in various ways to David Hume's *History of England*.

The response to Hume's history represented both continuity and change. Nineteenth-century writers introduced a new dimension to the discourse on Hume's history while continuing the political and religious controversies that began with the publication of Hume's work in 1754.

Nineteenth-century Whigs continued to question Hume's account of the political struggle in England during the seventeenth century while maintaining that Hume was a mere royal apologist. Critics of Hume's religious views persisted in reproaching Hume for his impiety and continued to object to his alleged unfair treatment of religious groups in history. Nineteenth-century criticism of Hume's history added attacks on Hume's historical method and his narrative style to these political and religious challenges. Hume's historical method was criticized for being ahistorical and anachronistic; Hume was cited for writing "conjectural" rather than "authentic" history. Hume's narrative style was reproached for lacking vividness and for being too remote and distant. This paper investigates the meanings of these various criticisms and argues that they represented a new mode of historical consciousness that emerged at the beginning of the nineteenth-century.

Hume's history was an important influence on the thinking of British writers in the first half of the nineteenth-century. This paper contends that an examination of the response to Hume's history provides an important way of understanding the historical consciousness of that period.
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INTRODUCTION

David Hume's *History of England*\(^1\) was first published in 1754. Up until the publication of Thomas Macaulay's history in 1848 it was the most widely read and influential history of England. For almost 100 years Hume's history informed and dominated the debate over England's past. In his book *A Liberal Descent*, J. W. Burrow wrote that:

Hume was a felt presence for every subsequent historian of England and of seventeenth-century England in particular up to and including Macaulay. He was important both in what they absorbed and what they consciously and strenuously rejected.\(^2\)

This paper identifies and reviews the variety of critical responses to Hume's history in early nineteenth-century Britain. Responses to Hume's history not only reveal specific political and religious concerns, they also provide a way of observing an emerging historical consciousness - one that attempted to combine advances in rational or philosophical insight with more authentic and lively historical descriptions. Discussion of Hume's history served as a point of departure for writers to define and articulate their own historical vision. This paper argues that these views represented a new historical sensibility that reflected a desire to replace Hume's vision with a one more vivid, particularistic and authentic.

Nineteenth-century criticism of Hume represented a continuation of political and religious controversies inspired by Hume's work. Nineteenth-century Whigs, for example, inherited a tradition of challenging Hume's political interpretations. From the time of its publication in the eighteenth century, Whigs identified Hume's history as a threat to their understanding of a proud and continuous heritage of constitutional liberty. Nineteenth century Whigs thought that an understanding of history mattered in
contemporary political debate. They continued to maintain that Hume's defense of the Stuarts and his attack on the Parliamentary rebels of the seventeenth century constituted historical heresy and a threat to their political values.

Nineteenth century writers also continued the attack on Hume's account of religion that had begun in the eighteenth century. Adding to criticism of Hume's impiety and his unfair judgements of Protestants and Catholics, nineteenth-century writers censored Hume for failing to try to understand and appreciate the role that religion played in individual and collective life.

More interesting, perhaps, is the emergence in the nineteenth-century of new historiographical critiques that challenged both Hume's method of understanding the past and the narrative style which he used to depict it. The more sophisticated critiques of Hume combined political and religious disagreements with a broader and deeper historiographical challenge to Hume's work.

Early nineteenth-century writers identified Hume with the relatively new category of "philosophical historian." Hume was credited with going beyond mere chronicle or political narrative and expanding the horizons of historical discourse. Even his harshest critics such as Macaulay and John Stuart Mill conceded that Hume's efforts reflected a new design that attempted to incorporate a deeper and broader comprehension of historical data. Instead of focusing exclusively on the acts of kings and their close associates or merely examining formal changes in the English constitution, Hume was looking at sociological and economic forces that influenced political events.

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* Nineteenth-century writers discussed in this paper did not use the term "philosophical historian" to mean "philosopher of history" in the modern Hegelian sense. The term "philosophical historian" merely referred to the use of reason and philosophical insight in the writing of history.
However, characterizing Hume as a philosophical historian also served as a point of departure for new critiques of Hume that were emerging in the first half of the nineteenth-century. Critics first expressed the concern that Hume misused reason to distort or obscure the historical record. Instead of dealing with evidence in a disinterested and impartial manner, Hume was alleged to have employed his reasoning skills to engage in "advocacy history".

Further criticism of Hume's history went on to challenge Hume's method of understanding the past and his narrative style. Hume's historical method was depicted as too rational, as "conjectural history" rather than "authentic history." Critics thought that Hume relied too much on his own intellectual insight rather than paying attention to the historical record. This criticism led to the charge that Hume's historical descriptions were ahistorical and anachronistic. They did not use the phrase, but we will consistently see nineteenth-century critics accuse Hume of the fallacy of presentism. Hume was seen to impose his own eighteenth-century views on historical subjects.

Critics of Hume's narrative found it too cold and aloof. Early nineteenth century writers expressed a desire for a more vivid and intimate history. This desire reflected the wish for both a more edifying and entertaining historical account that would be able to capture the reader's imagination. Macaulay and Mill pointed to the examples of historical novels, historical dramas, and memoirs as genres that historians should emulate to create more dramatic and interesting histories. Providing particularistic detail and evoking the emotions and thoughts of historical subjects, creating a narrative that suggested the immediacy of history, were considered essential to eliciting sympathy.
and identification from the reader. Hume's historical descriptions were characterized as too distant and remote to evoke sympathy and identification.

Admiration for fictional representations of the past did not mean that nineteenth-century critics of Hume were willing to sacrifice the truth. In fact, it should be pointed out that criticism of Hume's narrative was linked to the criticism of his method of studying the past. The call for a compelling narrative was accompanied by a demand that historians vigorously inspect original documents. Hume was consistently reproached for relying on previous compilers rather than inspecting original sources. The absence of original research prevented Hume from getting a feel for the past and limited his historical imagination. This in turn undermined his ability to create more vivid historical descriptions.

Political, religious, methodological, and aesthetic criticisms represent the four main features of British writers' responses to Hume's history in the first half of the nineteenth century. In practice, of course, the four types of criticisms do not appear as separate and distinct. For example, the nineteenth-century criticism of Hume's religious views were, as I have already suggested, increasingly connected with a methodological challenge. In another example, we will see that Macaulay's call for a "new history", reflected a political, methodological and an aesthetic challenge to Hume's history. Instead of being autonomous, this paper will show the four criticisms of Hume's history were, on many occasions, closely related and often exercised reciprocal effects on one another.†

† It is important to note that while the four criticisms were related and reciprocal they were not necessarily determinate. For example, aesthetic agreement did not mean political agreement. It is one of the curious elements of this story that Walter Scott, a leading Tory partisan and founder of The Quarterly Re-
I. THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY RESPONSE

The eighteenth century response to Hume’s history introduced political and religious themes that we will encounter again the first half of the nineteenth century.

In 1756, the Reverend Daniel MacQueen published his *Letters on Mr. Hume’s History*. MacQueen credited Hume with a lively genius and thought the history was animated and entertaining. MacQueen, however, took issue with Hume’s lack of religious piety and the consequent misrepresentation of Protestantism in history.

Shall I speak of impiety covered with a thin veil? of an attempt, a weak and foolish one indeed, to resolve all piety into superstition or enthusiasm, that its may be thus exposed to reproach and ridicule.¹

MacQueen noted that Hume labeled as “superstitious” actions and beliefs connected with Catholicism; “enthusiasm” or “fanaticism” were the terms employed by Hume to describe the ideas and behavior of the Protestant reformers. MacQueen, a devout Protestant, did not object to Hume’s use of the term superstition to describe Catholic activities. In fact, he went one step further than Hume and argued that the term enthusiasm also applied to the Roman church. For example, MacQueen cited the Spanish inquisition as evidence of excessive zealousness. On the other hand, MacQueen rejected Hume’s use of the term fanaticism to describe Protestant reformers. Where Hume merely saw irrational belief and behavior, MacQueen observed admirable and courageous piety and resolve.²

On the political crisis of the seventeenth-century, MacQueen wrote that Hume’s account tended to favor royal prerogative in general and the Stuarts in particular.

¹ view, was cited by Whig and Radical political opponents as a writer whose aesthetic sensibilities were worthy of admiration and emulation.
However, MacQueen, unlike many nineteenth-century writers, observed Hume’s efforts to provide a balanced picture. MacQueen, for example, found in Hume some evidence of sympathy for liberty, constitutional continuity, and criticism of the Stuarts. MacQueen’s own political sympathies were clearly Whig and he therefore remained dissatisfied with Hume’s political account.

The whole history of England demonstrates that it was never an absolute, but mixed monarchy; and that the royal authority was indeed more or less limited; but still limited in all ages. It follows, therefore, that the principles of arbitrary government, which were openly espoused and put in practice by Charles and his father, were perfectly inconsistent with the English constitution, and with its most sacred and fundamental laws. Nay, this writer upon some occasions seems inclined to allow that they were so: at other times he endeavors to spread a thick mist over the subject.

In 1778, Joseph Towers published his observations on *Mr. Hume’s History of England* covering the same political and religious topics and sharing similar views as MacQueen. Towers noted that Hume was less motivated by any royalist sympathies than by a desire to play the devil’s advocate. For Towers, Hume’s contrarian disposition led to a Stuart apology rather than a royalist defense.

When Mr. Hume comes down to a lower period, to the history of the princes of the house of Tudor, he is not equally chargeable with extenuating their tyranny. On the contrary, his representation of it is, in some respects, much exaggerated; his design in which manifestly was, to make their conduct serve as a apology for the princes of the House of Stuart.

Towers insisted that constitutional precedent was on the side of the Parliamentary rebels. He rejected Hume’s effort to characterize the Tudors as absolute rulers, while maintaining that during the Tudor period “the people thought they had rights and privileges by the ancient constitution.” Therefore, for Towers, Parliamentary op-
ponents of Charles I were fighting to protect pre-existing rights while the Stuarts were trying to introduce a new form of despotism.

Towers and MacQueen introduced the important political and religious themes that we will encounter in the nineteenth-century. It is important to note that although they both commented favorably on Hume’s literary talent and his speculative insight, neither engaged in a fundamental assessment of Hume’s historical method or narrative style.

II. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE: FOX, JEFFREY, MACKINTOSH

The common denominator for Whig historiography was the belief that Hume’s account of the seventeenth-century was seriously flawed by a tendency to defend royal prerogative at the expense of the public interest and constitutional liberties. In addition to a political critique of Hume, we see emerging in the writings of Jeffrey and Mackintosh a broader historiographical challenge against Hume’s history that included a methodological and an aesthetic critique.

In retirement, the Whig politician and statesman Charles Fox embarked on various literary pursuits, including a history of England. Hume’s history was a significant point of departure for Fox. In Fox, we see a narrowly expressed Whig critique of Hume. Fox also represents the first of many writers we will consider who explicitly attacked Hume on his perceived failings, but failed to sufficiently give Hume credit for his important contributions to their own thinking.
Lord Holland, who took responsibility for compiling and finishing Fox’s work wrote in the introduction that Fox was motivated to write a history in part to refute Hume.

According to his first crude conceptions of the work, it would, as far as I recollect have begun at the Revolution; but he altered his mind, after a careful perusal of the latter part of Hume’s history. An apprehension of the false impressions which that great historian’s partiality, might have left on the mind of his readers, induced him to go back to the accession of King James the Second, and even to prefix an Introductory Chapter, on the character and leading events, of the time proceeding.9

Holland’s introduction also contained letters written by Fox which further revealed Fox’s response to Hume’s history. For example, in a correspondence with Malcolm Laing, an author of a history of Scotland, Fox identified Hume’s royalist sympathies and expressed disappointment that Hume, the philosopher, would subscribe to such a position.

In general, I think you treat him (Hume) too tenderly. He was an excellent man, and of great powers of mind, but his partiality to kings and princes is intolerable. Nay, it is, in my opinion, quite ridiculous, and is more like the foolish admiration which women and children sometimes have for kings, than the opinion right or wrong, of a philosopher.10

Holland also included a recollection of a conversation he had with Fox regarding Hume’s mode of writing history. According to Holland, Fox conceived that his job as historian required the “telling the story of those times in simple and forcible language.” Fox has considered including in his history an historiographical discussion on the views and sources of other writers of the same period. Fox decided against this inquiry because he could not reconcile his role as storyteller with a more analytical approach.

In speaking of the writers of the period, he lamented that he had not devised a method of interweaving any account of them or their works, much less any criticism on their style, into his His-
On my suggesting the example of Hume and Voltaire, who had discussed such topics at some length, either at the end of each reign, or in a separate chapter, he observed, with much commendation of their execution of it, that such a contrivance might be a good mode of writing critical essays, but that it was, in his opinion, incompatible with the nature of his undertaking, which if it ceased to be a narrative, ceased to be a history.11

Fox's introductory chapter, the one that he wrote with Hume in mind covers the period from Henry VII to the accession of Charles II. Fox did not challenge Hume on the tyranny of the Tudors nor did he question Hume's claim that the first forty years of Stuart rule were characterized by prosperity and progress. In fact, much of Fox's account in the introduction reflects the influence of Hume. For example, Fox followed Hume's idea that a new plan of liberty was emerging in the first half of the seventeenth-century. Fox, like Hume, wrote that a newly ascendant middle class, the result of economic and sociological factors, was responsible for a new attitude towards the crown that took form in an increasing assertive House of Commons. Hume used this evidence to suggest a possible defense for the Stuarts. According to Hume, the Stuarts continued to exercise royal prerogative in the usual manner while it was the parliamentary opposition that threatened the status quo. On this last point, Fox disagreed with Hume. Fox defended what he saw as the popular opposition to royal authority.12

The commencement of this period is marked by the exertions of the people, through their representations in the House of Commons, not only justifiable in their principle, but directed to the properest objects, and in a manner most judicious.13

Francis Jeffrey, the first editor of the Edinburgh Review and its most prolific contributor, welcomed Fox's history. If Hume's history was seen as providing intellectual ammunition for the oppressors of liberty, Fox's history was an antidote, "likely to put an end to a system of timidity so apt to graduate into servility."14
Jeffrey continued: Hume was "chiefly responsible for the prevalence of this Epicurean and ignoble strain of sentiment in this country." Employing a utilitarian calculus, Jeffrey objected to Hume's preference for the one over the enjoyment of thousands. Jeffrey professed an admiration for Hume's philosophical thought and, like Fox, claimed to be all the more perplexed by Hume's royalist sympathies.

Few things seem more unaccountable and indeed absurd than that Hume should have taken part with high church and high monarchy men ... But that he should have sided with the Tudors and the Stuarts against the people seems quite inconsistent with all the great traits of his character.

If Jeffrey shared Fox's political repugnance to Hume, he disagreed with Fox regarding the role of an historian. Despite his admiration for Fox's political objectives, he found Fox's history a disappointment. Jeffrey didn't reject the importance of narrative, but he critically noted that Fox limited his purview exclusively to political events. For Jeffrey, Hume was superior because he understood that politics could not be explained without a detailed examination of manners, literature and commerce.

Expressing an historicist sensibility, Jeffrey thought that Fox was unable to tell the story of a particular time because he was insensitive to the spirit of a particular time. According to Jeffrey, Fox did not provide intelligible motives; he did not assess causes or the character of the population. For Jeffrey, "merely to narrate the occurrence to which it gave life is to recite a history of action without intelligible motives and effects without assignable causes."

Even before Macaulay's call for a social history (to be discussed later) Jeffrey was calling for a historical discourse that would include manners, education, prevailing occupations, religious tastes, distribution of wealth, and the state of prejudice and
opinion. Hume's various appendices represented an important start. Yet Jeffrey thought that the story had not yet been intelligibly told for want of some such analysis of "national feelings."  

Jeffrey would have another opportunity to more fully critique the legacy of Hume's history and expand on his own conception of historical writing, when he reviewed George Brodie's attack on Hume's history in 1824.  

Like Fox's history, Jeffrey welcomed Brodie's history as a Whig corrective of many misrepresentations and errors of Hume. According to Jeffrey, Brodie served as a much called for "censor of Mr. Hume." Like John Stuart Mill, who reviewed Brodie's history for *Westminster Review*, Jeffrey thought that Brodie, although incredibly scrupulous and thorough, was limited in imagination and literary craft.  

In his review of Brodie, Jeffrey repeated his assertions that Hume's history served as intellectual cover for the opponents of liberty.

The true source of practical Toryism or in other words, of personal servility to the Government, is no doubt self-interest, or a strong desire for unearned emoluments and undeserved distinctions - but the great support of speculative servility and sincere Tory opinions - to which we are liberal enough to allow an actual existence, has of late years been found chiefly in Hume's history.  

Jeffrey attributed Hume's success in creating an indelible impression on the reading public to Hume's remarkable literary talent. For Jeffrey, the specific positive qualities contained in Hume's history included "the excellence of the writing, the acuteness of the observations and the apparent fairness of the deductions." Jeffrey emphasized that Hume's impact on public opinion should not be underestimated.

We are aware that to many practical politicians it may appear fantastic and even ridiculous to ascribe such effects to a book - and especially to a book in four quarto volumes, published near
seventy years ago: but when it is considered how universally, and at how early an age, it has been read, especially during the latter half of that period – how pleasant it is to be read, and how easy to understand and remember – how much clear, in short, and concise and comprehensive it is than any other history of equal extent – how reasonable and sagacious are the greatest part of the observations it contains, – how plausible the most erroneous of its conclusions – our readers will cease perhaps to wonder at the influence we have ventured to ascribe to it...

Jeffrey, in striking a balanced attitude, did observe that Hume, the person, was not without virtue. For example, Jeffrey allowed that Hume was not a mercenary, nor was he politically self-serving. Jeffrey also claimed to admire Hume’s independence of mind. It was this same critical stance, this skepticism, that explained Hume’s unexpected political apology for the Stuarts. According to Jeffrey, Hume’s Tory partialities were due to his profound antipathy toward religious enthusiasm and intolerance. According to Jeffrey, Hume’s critical stance towards the Puritans forced Hume to develop a historical scheme that opposed their politics. Echoing Towers, Jeffrey also wrote that Hume’s intellectual independence was accompanied by contrarian impulse and an intellectual vanity. Since the Whig orthodoxy was the dominant belief system of his day, Hume was also motivated by the desire to overturn it not by any sincere and objective pursuit of the truth, but for personal and psychological reasons.

We see every day, that the existence of the slightest controversy, an inclination towards the most paltry theory, makes the most honest and candid individuals incapable of seeing what is before them, or describing truly what they see.

Jeffrey, therefore, rejected Hume’s claims to impartiality and disinterest. Anticipating Macaulay’s characterization of Hume as mere advocate, Jeffrey suggested that, despite Hume’s commitment to a rational method, he was incapable of overcoming his prejudices. Jeffrey blamed Hume’s shortcoming on the power of prejudice, but he also
suggested another reason for Hume’s lack of accuracy. In addition to vanity and a contrarian impulse, Hume was too impatient, too indolent to critically examine sources impartially or to make the effort to uncover other competing sources.26

In his review of Brodie’s history, Jeffrey returned to the theme that credited Hume with expanding the discourse of historical writing. Hume may not have been sufficiently vigorous in his examination of sources, but in many ways, his mode of writing history represented a significant advance.

Following the ‘Scottish’ conjectural or developmental scheme that Macaulay would further elaborate on, Jeffrey posited that as a society progressed a new type of historical consciousness emerged. Mere narrative was superceded by philosophical history. Where narrative history or Chronicle “merely provides a clear statement of facts, arranged in a lucid order, and interspersed perhaps with a few moral reflections or the most striking occurrences,” the new type of history would expand historical discourse, providing both opportunities and perils for the historian.27

The other plan is far more comprehensive and ambitious – professing not only to make a selection of the facts most worthy to be recorded, by abridging some and dwelling at length on others, but is to pass an authoritative judgement on the wisdom or folly the merit or demerit of all the acts and actors with which it is conversant – to trace memorable events back to their causes, and forward to their consequences – to furnish in short not only a true account of the facts as they occurred, but a satisfactory theory of their connection and mutual dependence, and thus to teach to teach for more of their true character and value than was probably known to those who produced them.28

Jeffrey placed Hume’s history in this new category of historical writing. Hume, according to Jeffrey, had tried to derive larger propositions from specific events. Hume tried to deduce patterns from discrete events in order to obtain larger lessons of policy
and morality. Jeffrey noted that this new mode of history was potentially more dangerous to the reading public than the more modest and circumscribed political narratives.

However superior in dignity and attractive this way of writing history may appear it is obvious that it is attended with infinitely greater hazards, both to the writer and the reader; affords scope and temptation to all kind of erroneous impressions. 29

Jeffrey did not deny that a narrative history may also contain errors, misrepresentations, and prejudice. However, he suggested that the stakes were greater with the new theoretical or philosophical history. It is one thing to distort the memory of a king; it is another to mislead the public regarding the broader theme of its constitutional inheritance. In a poorly executed theoretical history the historian will perhaps unconsciously, be careless and negligent in investigating the details which tend to discredit the theories to which he is partial, and collect with malicious industry all the scattered intimations which seem to support them. In this way he will often give what are truly exceptions to the general rule, as illustrations of its actual tendency; or misrepresent the whole scanty facts which the most anxious research could discover in favor of his conclusions, as instances taken carelessly and at random from an immediate multitude of still stronger examples. 30

Since Hume came to the table with powerful prejudices, he was unable, according to Jeffrey, to effectively execute this new type of history. For Jeffrey, Hume was a cautionary tale of the dangers of philosophical history, not merely because of his prejudices, but also because he engaged in “conjectural” rather than “authentic” history. According to Jeffrey, Hume consistently created fictional representations of the opinions of conflicting parties.

The object of the author [Hume] being chiefly to give his readers a clear idea of the scenes he described he seems to have thought that the conduct of the actors would best be understood by ascribing to them views and motives which upon reflection appeared to himself most natural in their situation. 31
Jeffrey stated that this approach may have been both reasonable and effective. Furthermore, Hume’s accounts were not without plausibility. But in imposing his own views, Hume “undoubtedly violated the truth of history – and exposed himself to the influence of the most delusive partialities.”

Jeffrey found that this was the danger of a philosopher engaged in historical writing. Hume was merely repeating a method he had employed in his philosophical essays. “Such a hypothetical integration of the opinions likely to prevail in any particular circumstances, seems at all times to have been a favorable exercise of his ingenuity.”

Hume’s characterization of conversations and his summary of the behavior of conflicting parties were mere conjectural views of the parties involved. For Jeffrey, this was not real history. An inspection of sources, Jeffrey believed, would reveal huge discrepancies between Hume’s account and the evidence.

Like Fox, Sir James Mackintosh was also an experienced Whig political statesman. Both were preoccupied with the merits and defects of the English constitution, as well as prominent characters and events in seventeenth-century English history. Mackintosh, however, was considered the far superior scholar and literary talent.

Mackintosh’s aesthetic and methodological critique was accompanied by a Whig political challenge. Mackintosh cited Hume’s contrarianism and his sojourn in France as factors that made Hume insensitive to the unique and special qualities of English liberties:

led him to prefer the faultless elegance of our neighbours to the unequal grandeur of English genius, and produced the singular phenomenon of a history of England adverse to our peculiar na-
tional feelings, and calculated not so much to preserve the vigour, as to repress the excesses, of that love of liberty which distinguishes the History of England, from that of other nations of Europe.\textsuperscript{35}

In his Memoirs, Mackintosh expressed admiration for Hume’s character.

His temper was calm, not to say cold; but though none of his feelings were ardent he was free from the slightest tincture of malignity or meanness; his conduct was uniformly excellent.\textsuperscript{36}

Mackintosh’s preliminary remarks on Hume’s history were also full of praise.

Mackintosh thought Hume’s history was of significant merit and importance.

His greatest work, and that which naturally claims most attention, was his *History of England* which notwithstanding great defects, will probably be at last placed at the head of historical compositions.

No other narrative seems to unite, in the same degree, the two qualities of being instructive and affecting. No historian approached him in the union of the talent of painting pathetic scenes with that of exhibiting comprehensive views of human affairs. His practices in abstract speculation had strengthened, without biasing, his intellect; and that most subtle metaphysician of his age was, as an historian, the furthest from over-refined.\textsuperscript{37}

What set Hume’s history apart was not merely Hume’s narrative, but Hume’s capacity to combine narrative with penetrating insights. Hume was both philosopher and dramatist. Mackintosh also valued Hume’s capacity to abridge his insights.

The general observations seem always to be required by his subject; the most profound ideas are clothed with a transparent simplicity; and when he exercises his power of compression, he attains his object without any departure from the inimitable ease and nature of his style.\textsuperscript{38}

Elaborating on his comment that Hume’s history contained great defects, Mackintosh echoed Jeffrey’s critique that Hume engaged in conjectural rather than authentic history. Hume relied too often on the work of previous compilers. He substituted perspicacity for legwork. “It is not to be denied that he has sometimes trusted to his acuteness to supply the place of industry in the investigation of evidence.”\textsuperscript{39}
Like Jeffrey, Mackintosh accused Hume of being too "rational." Instead of paying attention to and trying to discover what historical actors really thought and did, Hume tended to substitute his own plausible or rational scenarios. According to Mackintosh, Hume's rationalism got in the way of good history. Hume failed to see the past for what it really was:

He was too habitually a speculator, and too little of an antiquary, to have a great power of throwing back his mind into former ages, and of clothing his persons and events in their moral dress; his personages are too modern and argumentative - if we must not say too rational.40

Mackintosh further defined the desirable aims of the writing of history in a review of Simonde de Simondi's *History of France*.41 Mackintosh found Simondi's method superior to Hume because Simondi went to original sources and avoided relying on second hand compilers. As a result, Simondi's history was more accurate and authentic. Implicitly rebuking Hume, Mackintosh observed:

The genius of history is nourished by the study of original narrators and by critical examination of the minute circumstances of facts. Ingenious speculation and ostentatious ornament are miserable substitutes for these historical virtues.42

To obtain the desired representation there must be original research.

But these are only to be found in the dramatic narrative of the eyewitness or the contemporary, who had always seen the manners, which he paints and had generally felt some degree of the passions which actuated his heroes.43

The last phrase is very important; Mackintosh identified the need to determine the mindset and context of historical thought and action. Hume was again criticized for being insufficiently attentive to historical detail. The "narrative of ancient events by a mere modern thinker must always be uninteresting because he never can paint, or even conceive, the feeling from which this events arose."44
Mackintosh also had Hume in mind when he criticized the substitution of second-hand sources for original research.

There are few countries in which the truth of history has suffered more than in England, from the indolence with which almost everyone of our modern historians has taken the basis of his narrative from his predecessors.

Mackintosh linked Hume's improper method to a shortcoming in narrative style. The use of original sources was seen as the foundation for creating a more particularistic and immediate source of history. Like good fiction, a vivid history facilitated the moral aims of history.

It is on the sympathy which History excites that it moral effect depends. The moral improvement to be derived from all narrative, whether it be historical or what is called fictitious is in proportion to the degree in which it exercises and thereby strengthens the social feelings and moral principles of the readers. 45

Here, Mackintosh's use of the term sympathy reflects less of an interest in what the twentieth-century historicist Herbert Butterfield called the "difference of the past," than in creating in the reader the capacity for empathy and identification. 46 Mackintosh subscribed to the idea that the use of original sources will make the narrative more compelling and more morally uplifting. Hume's inability to throw his mind back into the past diminished the quality of his narrative.

[The historian] can improve his readers only by interesting them; and he can interest them only by that animated representation of men and actions which inspire feeling almost as strong as those which are excited by present realities. Delight and improvement must therefore be produced by the very same means; and if the history of former ages be delightful only when it has the picturesque particularity of original writers, it must depend also in it part on the study of the same writers for the attainment of its highest purposes. 47
Despite his call for a history that would elicit sympathy and identification, Mackintosh was also sensitive to the idea that each historical era is different. He implicitly cautioned against a presentist fallacy.

As long as the events reserve the color of the age in which they passed, the statesman is in no danger of being so misled by history as to consider the precedents of a remote antiquity as to fit slavishly adopted in a totally dissimilar condition of society. ¹⁸

Mackintosh argued against a modern speculator (Hume) who would impose his values and theories on the historical past. Historical facts were misinterpreted if used exclusively for present purposes.

They are seen through a different medium; and being combined with modern passions and prejudices, are indeed no longer the same facts. From such materials the philosopher can form no true judgement of the spirit and character of former times. No inferences from them can afford a solid foundation for a theory of the nature and progress of society. ⁴⁹

III. THE APPRENTICE AT LINCOLN CATHEDRAL: MACAULAY

In Thomas Babington Macaulay’s writings we see a political critique combined with a call for new, more imaginative and authentic history; in Macaulay’s discussion of an ideal history we see a largely implicit rather than explicit critique of Hume’s method and aesthetic.

Politically, Macaulay argued that Hume was less pro-royalty than he was an apologist for the Stuarts. Macaulay, like Towers, took issue with Hume’s efforts to equate Tudor policy with that of the Stuarts. Following Whig orthodoxy, Macaulay insisted that the Stuarts were intent on undermining England’s pre-existing political liberties and privileges. Macaulay defended the activities of the Stuart opponents.
Macaulay maintained that current political liberties were the direct result of their activities.

At the age of fourteen, Macaulay had already expressed a written opinion of Hume's history. In a letter to his mother, Macaulay noted that England should be grateful to Hume for his history.

Till the appearance of Hume's history it was her (England's) reproach that the best account of her kingdom was written by a foreigner Rapin.50

Macaulay commended Hume's elegance and expressed the conviction that Hume's history was superior in authenticity to the "Classical Models."51

Macaulay came from a strongly Evangelical family. In the same letter he forcefully criticized Hume for his stance on religion. Despite the history's virtues, the work was "disgraced by the utter want of religious principle."52

Anticipating a theme we will see expressed later by Palgrave, Carlyle and Mill, Macaulay wrote that Hume's inability to appreciate a religious sensibility interfered with his ability to represent the past.

This is a disadvantage, I think, not only because it tends to misrepresent those subjects in comparison of which history is unimportant, but as it takes away from the interest of the work ... Hume discards or omits everything about religion, except a very little which he distorts and misrepresents. I think that history should not only be pleasant and authentic as critics say, but that the historian should not be entirely cold and incredulous upon the most important topic in every point of view that ever occupied the attention of men.53

At 14, Macaulay already thought Hume too skeptical and too cautious; Hume's cavalier attitude towards religious feeling precluded a truer and more authentic historical understanding. It also rendered Hume's narrative less compelling.
In an essay on the poet John Milton for the *Edinburgh Review*, Macaulay attributed Hume's Stuart apology to Hume's antipathy towards religion, specifically Hume's dislike of the Puritans. Macaulay used the term "advocate" to depict Hume's representation of events.

Hume, from whose fascinating narrative the great mass of the reading public are still contented to take their opinions hated religion so much, that he hated liberty for having been allied with religion and has pleaded the cause of tyranny with the dexterity of an advocate, while affecting the impartiality of a judge.34

Macaulay expressed amazement at Hume's attempted defense of Charles I. For Macaulay, character could not be separated from actions taken while governing.

For ourselves, we own that we do not understand the common phrase a good man but a bad king ... We cannot, in estimating the character of an individual leave out of our consideration his conduct in the most important of all human relations; and if, in that relation, we find him to have been selfish, cruel, and deceitful, we shall take the liberty to call him a bad man, in spite of his temperance at table, and all his regularity at chapel.35

Macaulay, like Towers, addressed Hume's contextual argument (i.e., that the Stuart's policies were no different in quality that their Tudor predecessors). "This point Hume has labored, with an art which is as discreditable in a historical work as it would be admirable in a forensic address." Macaulay argued that there were important differences between the Tudor Regime and Charles'.

The answer [to Hume] is short, clear and decisive. Charles had assented to the Petition of Right. He had renounced the oppressive powers said to have been exercised by his predecessors, and he had renounced them for money. He was not entitled to set up his antiquated claim against his own recent release.36

Writing thirty-two years after the Reign of Terror in France Macaulay still affirmed the necessity of violent upheaval in the seventeenth century. If Hume was going
to defend the Stuarts by contextualizing royal behaviour, Macaulay would return the favour in defense of revolution.

We deplore the outrages which accompany revolutions. But the more violent the outrages, the more assured we feel that a revolution was necessary.

Macaulay added:

The violence of these outrages will always be proportioned to the ferocity and ignorance of the people: and the ferocity and ignorance of the people will be proportioned to the oppression and degradation under which they have been accustomed to live. Thus it was in our civil war. The rulers in the church and state reaped only that which they had sown ... If they were assailed with blind fury it was because they had executed an equally blind submission.57

The Milton piece was published in 1825, three years later, in an article entitled “The Romance of History,” Macaulay engaged in a sweeping historiographical essay. He pointed to recent innovations in the apprehension of the moral sciences as contributing to modern historical discourse. The ancients were equal to the moderns in logic and imagination. However, modern political, economic, and legal thought surpassed the understanding of the classical period. The ancients could make particular observation but they were incapable of making meaningful abstractions of generalizations. The fall of Rome made Europe less monolithic; it introduced diversity which made analysis by comparison possible. According to Macaulay, comparison was the prerequisite for a more analytical and speculative history. The modern historian was provided with a new perspective.58

By observing the manners of surrounding nations, by studying their literature, by comparing it with that of his own country and of the ancient republics, he is enabled to correct those errors into which the most acute men must fall when they reason from a single species to a genus. He learns to distinguish what is local from what is universal; what is transitory from what is eternal; to dis-
criminate between exceptions and rules; to trace the operation of disturbing causes; to separate those general principles which are always true and everywhere applicable from the accidental circumstances with which, in every community, they are blended, and with which, in an isolated community, they are confounded by the most philosophical mind.  

Modern historians possessed new capabilities that made their histories “unequalled in depth and precision of reason” in comparison to their ancient predecessors.  

Modern historians, however, had succumbed to many pitfalls in Macaulay’s opinion. For example, Macaulay thought that modern historians were misled by reason itself. A commitment to a particular theory led an historian to try too hard, employing reason, to fit facts to theory. This procedure had blinded some modern historians to historical evidence; it lead them to stray from the truth.  

The best historians of later times have been seduced from truth, not by their imagination, but by their reason. They far excel their predecessors in the art of deducing general principles from facts. But unhappily they have fallen into the error of distorting factors to suite general principles. They arrive at a theory from looking at some of the phenomena, and the remaining phenomena they strain or curtail to suit the theory.  

Commitment to a pre-existing or too hastily developed theory led to selective interpretation, omissions and exclusions of competing views and contradictory evidence. This propensity for selective interpretation Macaulay characterized as advocacy history.  

Macaulay never showed how Hume was “seduced by reason” to take up the Stuart’s cause. Nevertheless, Hume clearly represented an example of advocacy history. Macaulay accused Hume of employing sophisticated reasoning to distort the historical record.  

Without positively asserting much more that he can prove, he gives prominence to all the circumstances which support his case;
he glides lightly over those which are unfavorable to it; his own witnesses are applauded and encouraged; the statements which seem to throw discredit on them are controverted, the contradictions into which they fell are explained away; a clear and connected abstract of their evidence is given. Everything that is offered on the other side is scrutinized with the utmost severity; every suspicious circumstance is a ground for comment and invective; what cannot be denied is extenuated, or passed by without notice; concessions even are sometimes made: but this insidious candour only increases the effect of the vast mass of sophistry.62

Advocacy history was like modern litigation to Macaulay. It may lead to the emergence of the truth, assuming there were always advocates on both sides of an issue, but it alienated the reading public. For example, Macaulay observed that Brodie's history — another example of advocacy history, may disprove Hume, but "in the midst of these disputes, history proper, if we may use the term, is disappearing."63

According to Macaulay, an ideal history would contain a commanding and disinterested overview with an affecting narrative. Advocacy history left Macaulay cold, not only because it was inherently partial, but because too often the art of good storytelling was ignored.4

While our historians are practicing all the arts of controversy, they miserably neglect the art of narrative, the art of interesting the affectations, and presenting pictures to the imagination.64

Macaulay cited for emulation historical novels, memoirs and biography. The novelist Sir Walter Scott was cited as a noteworthy example. These different genres provided superior narratives because they contained efforts to explore individual character, emotions, motivations, and personality.65

† It should be noted that Macaulay never explicitly claimed that Hume sacrificed narrative in writing "advocacy history".
In the case of biography and memoir, Macaulay contended that these examples proved that interesting reflections were not necessarily mutually exclusive with truth. Fiction did not have to be the only venue for particularistic and imaginative writing.

Macaulay advocated changing historical discourse in other areas as well. He wrote that the objective of history should be to capture “the vast and complex system of society, of the fine shades of national character, of the practical operation of government and laws.”

Macaulay ambitiously called for a more inclusive social history. An historian wishing “to understand the condition of mankind in former ages” must grapple with new horizons of information. The historian must learn to appreciate and understand the common man.

He must see ordinary men as they appear in their ordinary business and in their ordinary pleasures. He must mingle in the crowds of the exchange and the coffee house. He must obtain admittance to the convivial table and the domestic hearth. He must bear with vulgar expressions. He must not shrink from exploring even the retreats of misery.”

Macaulay’s ideal required both a change in historical scope and aesthetic. Macaulay valued immediacy and vivid detail. The historian should approach his subject like an artist. The quote below expresses Macaulay’s romantic ideal. Hume’s history is implicitly found wanting.

Men will not merely be described, but will be made intimately known to us. The changes of manner will be indicated, not merely by a few general phrases or a few extracts from statistical documents, but by appropriate images presented in every line.

Romantic history involved the use of images. Romantic history aspired to an intimate connection to the past. Understanding in the Romantic mode required both a rational and emotional apprehension. History was not merely an analytical or specula-
tive enterprise; it was an art form that should satisfy the intellect and inspire the imagination. This was how history could meet its moral and pedagogical objectives. "Many truths, too would be learned, which can be learned in no other manner."  

At the end of his essay, Macaulay recounted the story of Lincoln Cathedral: a young apprentice, using materials discarded by the master, created a new work far surpassing anything created previously by the master. Macaulay noted that Walter Scott had already used much material discarded by historians to enliven his historical romances. Macaulay wrote (perhaps setting a standard in advance for his own history): "But a truly great historian would reclaim those materials which the novelist has appropriated."  

Macaulay did not give Hume credit for meeting the criteria of greatness; Hume's history was too limited, it was incomplete.

The history of the government, and the history of the people, would be exhibited in that mode which alone they can be exhibited justly, in inseparable conjunction and intermixture. We should not then have to look for the wars and votes of the Puritans in Clarendon, and for their phraseology in Old Mortality; for one half of King James in Hume and for the other half in the Fortunes of Nigel.

In 1849, James Moncreiff, a Whig lawyer and future Lord Advocate of Scotland, writing for the Edinburgh Review, thought that Macaulay had succeeded in creating a more vivid and realistic history. Reviewing Macaulay's The History of England From the Accession of James the Second, Moncreiff wrote:

Even on the most beaten ground his power of picturesques description brings out lights and shadows — views alike of distances and roadside flowers, never seen, or remarked or recollected before.
Macaulay's book was considered a success because it succeeded in combining the Whig political interpretation of history with a compelling narrative. After 100 years, Hume's dominant influence was over. The "false glare" that he created was now removed.

We certainly regard this work as the first successful attempt to tell with truth, accuracy, and effect, the story of these important times: so to tell it, we mean as to place it permanently in its true light, and to remove it from that false glare which has so long rested on it.  

Moncreiff, reflecting the Romantic ideal, thought that a historian should aim to create a living picture of times he is trying to represent. This should "reflect not isolated facts but the general manners, habits, principles, as well as actions of men that lived and flourished in them."  

Overlooking any possible contribution by Hume, Moncreiff credited Macaulay with expanding historical discourse by including descriptions of the "manners and custom, and general conditions, both social and political, of the English" Macaulay, according to Moncrieff, had "made a courageous and very successful endeavor to lead history into a deeper and wider channel."

IV. THE WHIG PROFESSOR: WILLIAM SMYTH

Professor William Smyth, unlike Moncrieff, would credit Hume with meaningful contributions to modern historiography. Smyth, a lecturer in Modern European History at Cambridge from 1807 to 1847, provided a relatively balanced, if still stinging, Whig political critique of Hume. In addition, Smyth, in considering Hume's historical method, generated criticisms similar to Jeffrey and Mackintosh. In his lectures, pub-
lished posthumously in 1848, Smyth identified Hume and Rapin, the early eighteenth-century French historian, as the two leading guides to understanding the "related histories of England’s monarchs, barons, and other remarkable men and the future and fortune of the constitution." 76

Smyth found Hume’s history to contain many valuable and penetrating insights. Smyth made special mention of Hume’s contribution to political economy that could be found in the appendices of the Hume’s history. Smyth argued that Hume’s analysis went beyond mere surface facts, to provide a new and deeper understanding. 77

Nevertheless, Smyth devoted considerable time to correcting what he thought were Hume’s historical misrepresentations and errors. He urged his students to read Hume with great caution.

and we are thus taught to be more than ever suspicious of the historian’s particular prejudices. And on the whole, this instance will show that you must not take it for granted that Mr. Hume accurately represents even the very authorities he quotes: so irresistible in these cases is the influence of the sentiments of the mind over operations of the understandings. 78

Smyth, a political Whig, thought Hume’s account of the seventeenth century was prejudiced and incomplete. Smyth insisted on a political continuity from the past to the present.

Mr. Hume tells the story of England without giving sufficient praise to those patriots who preserved and transmitted those general habits of thinking on political subjects which have always distinguished this country, and to which alone every Englishmen owes, at this day, all that makes his life a blessing and his existence honourable. 79

Smyth contended that, given England’s “mixed government,” (its constitutional monarchy), historians would necessarily fall into one of two camps – they would eventually subscribe to a pro-monarchy or pro-popular position. Smyth, unlike Towers
and Macaulay, alleged that Hume was an outright royal apologist, not merely an advocate for the Stuarts. Smyth thought there were two reasons Hume advanced the royal position. First, Smyth, like Jeffrey, suspected Hume was in part animated by contrarianism. Since at the time Hume wrote his history the Whig orthodoxy of Rapin reigned, Hume, following his contrarian impulses, decided to write an alternative historical view. Second, Smyth thought Hume was temperamentally opposed to political instability and operated on the mistaken assumption that “popular privileges will always lead to disorder, and render the government insecure.”

Smyth rejected Hume’s argument that the fight for liberty was a relatively recent development. Smyth insisted that the struggles of the seventeenth-century could be traced to a more remote period in time. “The great leading idea which should be formed of our constitutional history is that there has always been a constant struggle between prerogative and privilege.”

Attending to Hume’s method, Smyth attacked Hume for employing anachronisms in his historical representations.

He ascribes to the personages of history, as they pass before him, the views and opinions of later eras and those sentiments and reasonings, for instance, which his own enlightened and powerful mind was enabled to form, not those which either really were or could be formed by men thinking and acting many centuries before.

Smyth did not articulate the strictly historicist argument that the past should be understood for itself. But he was moving in that direction when he wrote “the proper instruction of history, much of which lies in the comparison of one age to another.” That very comparison dictated a more historicist approach than Hume offered.
For example, Smyth cited Hume's representation of a speech by the Bishop of Carlisle in the fourteenth-century. Smyth granted that Hume's description and reasoning was both beautiful and marvelous. But Hume's account did not accurately reflect what the Bishop said and why he said it.

How worthy of the generalizing mind of the philosopher of the eighteenth-century – how little likely to have been addressed by a warm hearted ecclesiastic to the disorderly barons of the fourteenth.84

Unlike the other critics of Hume, Smyth did observe when Hume wrote authentic history. Smyth pointed to Hume's description of a speech given by Henry IV. Smyth's comments reflect the historicist spirit that was emerging in the early nineteenth-century. Smyth indicated that he wanted more evocative detail and less imposition of modern values.

The words extracted were certainly very remarkable and very descriptive of the scene and the age, but it is relics of this kind, that an historian should produce and make the subject of philosophic meditation of his reader, not offer modern views and sentiments of his own.85

Authenticity was, therefore, crucial to Smyth. Hume was commended when his account was seen as reflecting what really happened. Realism was preferred to mere speculation.

A few barbarous words or any distinct fact, that can be shown to be authentic, are worth volumes of reasonings and conjectures of a thinking mind; or rather it is on such facts that the student must in the first place alone depend when he collects materials for his instruction, and he must never lose sight of them, when he comes afterwards to build up his political reasonings and conclusions.86
V. THE IMPORTANCE OF REVELATION: SIR FRANCES PALGRAVE

Sir Francis Palgrave attacked Hume’s history from a religious perspective. In contrast to MacQueen’s eighteenth-century religious criticism of Hume, Palgrave’s discussion reflects the growing concerns in the nineteenth-century with historical realism and authenticity. He shared with his Whig contemporaries the belief that Hume could not throw his mind back into the past.

Palgrave wrote two scathing critiques of Hume for the *Quarterly Review*. In the first article, published in 1826, Palgrave expressed an historicist perspective when he wrote that Hume failed to manifest a sensitivity to different periods within the Middle Ages. "All minor distinctions amongst them are lost in conformity. Hume offered a curious exemplification of the deceptions thus produced by the aerial perspective of the mind."87

Hume’s approach prevented him from paying attention to the particulars. Palgrave thought that Hume’s religious antipathy was at the core of an inability to grasp an era dominated by a religious sensibility. However, Hume’s “aerial perspective” also contributed to his inability to capture the spirit of the medieval period.

In his second article, published in 1844, entitled *Hume’s Influence on History*, Palgrave continued his attack on Hume. Generally, he found Hume the historian superficial and lazy. Hume did not do sufficient leg work; he failed to track down original sources and was too content with questionable secondary sources. As a result, Hume “could never remove himself out of the eighteenth-century.”88

Palgrave insisted on “bringing intellect into continual subjection to revelation.”89 These were his first principles. From a historiographical perspective, he contended that
we could not understand many great historical figures unless we understand the religious convictions that animated their actions. Palgrave maintained that Hume consistently distorted the historical record to obscure this point.

For example, Palgrave pointed to Hume’s account of Prince Alfred, who lived in the ninth century. Palgrave argued that the evidence, as revealed in original sources, showed that Alfred’s religious beliefs and devotion were central to his character and his policies. But Hume “has concealed every passage, every fact, every incident, every transaction, displaying that active belief in Christianity, which governed the whole tenor and course of Alfred’s life.”90

Palgrave also discussed Hume’s representation of Charles I. For Palgrave, Hume again diminished the role that religion played in a king’s life. Furthermore, Palgrave thought that Hume’s removal of the role of religion undercut the entire basis for royal political authority.

Hume has been and is still valued by many, as a defender of monarchical principles; but his support kills the roots of loyalty. By advocating the duty of obedience to the Sovereign, simply with reference to human relations, he deprived allegiances of the only sure foundation upon which it can rest.91

VI. THOMAS CARLYLE AND JOHN STUART MILL

Thomas Carlyle continued Palgrave’s attack against Hume on the issue of religion. Like Palgrave and Macaulay, Carlyle insisted that a historian could not access an understanding of the interior lives of men without paying attention to their religious beliefs. Carlyle called for more attention to be paid to ecclesiastical history. This would provide a point of departure for understanding the “moral well-being” and “true good”
of individuals in history. What was most important was not the form of government a person lived under, but the church and the moral environment created by religious leadership. For Carlyle, the historian, looking to identify causal factors in history, could not ignore moral and ethical reasons. Carlyle thought that an understanding of ecclesiastical history was far more important than political or constitutional history.\(^{92}\) Carlyle argued that church history provided access to understanding something deeper than mere constitutional history. “Political history only described the walls of the house a man lived in. A History of the church provided an understanding of interior forces; the invisible forces that mattered more than the visible.”\(^{93}\)

In his Hero lectures, Carlyle did not mention Hume by name, but clearly Hume is an intended target of Carlyle’s diatribe against eighteenth-century historiography of the great events of the seventeenth century. An absence of soul prevented a proper understanding of the Puritans and Cromwell. Formalism and Skepticism led to the inappropriate label of superstition for the defenders of liberty and revolt. For Carlyle, it was a “vulpine intellect,” a “dilettantism,” an insincerity, along with skepticism that precluded an appreciation of “sincerity when they see it.”\(^{94}\)

In 1826, in the *Westminster Review*, John Stuart Mill, wrote a review article of “Mignet’s French Revolution” which also served as an historiographical essay resembling Macaulay’s *History as Romance* published two years later. Mill observed that there were two modes of writing history. The old mode was characterized by a vivid conception, the evoking of intense emotions. Mill cited the ancient historians Livy and Thucydides as master storytellers possessing great narrative talents.\(^{95}\)
Modern history, in contrast, was characterized by a narrative subservient to philosophy. The new priority was on the illustration of the laws of human nature. Mill observed that there was an intermediary style that tried to unite the two modes of historical representation. Mill, however found that practitioners of this mode, including Hume, tended to provide narrative amusement at the expense of penetrating insight. Important analysis was avoided or banished to an appendix.96

The common reader is thus provided with such instruction, or supposed instruction as his habits of mind render him capable of receiving, and is possessed with a high idea of the powers of the writer, who can communicate wisdom in so easy and entertaining a form. Of the popularity which may be acquired by this mode of writing history, the success of Hume is a striking example.97

Mill granted that Hume’s grasp of narrative was superior to other historians. However, Mill questioned Hume’s reputation for perspicacity. In fact, Mill suggested a mutually exclusive relationship between meaningful insight and popularity.

He has also obtained credit for the profundity of his reflections. That his reputation for this quality is so widely diffused, is of itself a sufficient proof that it is undeserved. Had his reflections been really profound, we may venture to affirm that they would have been less popular. By a profound reflection, it is meant a reflection, the truth of which is not obvious at first sight, and to a cursory reader, but which in proportion as a man grows wiser, and takes a deeper insight into things, forces itself upon his assent.98

Writing almost 75 years after Hume’s history was published, Mill agreed with other critics who maintained that Hume’s powerful narrative had a nefarious impact on public opinion. Writing about deceptions and falsehoods found in many histories written by Frenchmen, Mill observed that there was a saving grace; the histories were so boring and dull that nobody read them. The potential harm of historical misrepren-
sentation was nullified by a lack of audience. Mill regretted that this was not the case in England. Hume is clearly the target of the following:

We have in our own history a standing example of how deep a root party lies may take in the public mind, when a writer, in whom the arts of the most consummate advocate are combined with all the graces of style, employs his skill in giving them the color of truth.  

It is instructive to note that when Mill complimented Mignet, one of the positive features he identified was Mignet's alleged non-partisanship.

It is most fortunate, therefore, that the first readable history of France should be the production of a writer who is of no party, except that of human nature; who has no purpose to serve except that of the truth, and whose only bias is towards the happiness of mankind.  

Two years earlier, in 1824, Mill wrote another review for the Westminster Review in which he devoted consideration to Hume's alleged defense of the Stuarts in the seventeenth-century. Mill was a Radical, not a Whig. But he shared the Whigs' dissatisfaction with the political interpretations contained in Hume's history. Taking advantage of the opportunity to review Brodie's history to provide his own analysis of the seventeenth-century rebellion and its aftermath, Mill identified Hume as the foil for which a new understanding must be generated.  

Mill's detailed discussion of Hume was a scathing indictment. Hume's history was described as a mere romance written in defense of the Stuarts. Hume, according to Mill, was more interested in exciting the emotions than provoking understanding. From a utilitarian perspective, Hume's history was a vulgar disgrace.

Romance is always dangerous, but when romance assumes the garb of history, it is doubly pernicious. To say nothing of its other evils, on which this is no place to expatiate, it infallibly allies itself with the sinister interests of the few. When events come to be looked at, not as they effect the great interests of mankind, but as
they bear upon the pleasures and pains of an individual; a habit is engendered of considering the pleasures and pains of an individual as of more importance than the great interests of mankind.\textsuperscript{102}

It is within this framework that Mill repeated the charge that Hume was a disingenuous advocate. His language closely resembled Macaulay's diatribe against Hume.

Many of the most material facts, facts upon which the most important of the subsequent transactions hinged, and which even the party writers of the day never attempted to deny, Hume totally omits to mention; others which are so notorious that they cannot be safely be passed over in silence, he either affects to disbelieve, or mentioning no evidence, indirectly gives it to be understood that there was none. The direct lies are not a few; the lies insinuated are innumerable.\textsuperscript{103}

Mill challenged Hume on many of the same substantive points made by the Whigs. One argument that was novel with Mill and reflected his Radical political affiliation was his questioning of the significance of the historical debate in the first place.

Regarding the Tory vs. Whig debate over the constitutional legacy that the Stuarts inherited, Mill wrote:

\begin{quote}
It is of little consequence whether misgovernment was of an ancient or of a modern date in Great Britain; in either case, resistance to it was equally a duty; the opposition to that resistance, equally a crime; and it is a strange doctrine, that we are not entitled to good government, unless we can prove that our ancestors enjoyed it.\textsuperscript{104}
\end{quote}

Unlike his Whig contemporaries, Mill did not seem to possess a Burkean concern with precedent. Yet, Mill almost immediately backpedaled from this assertion of principle and did offer this disclaimer:

\begin{quote}
although, as mankind, educated as they hitherto been, are governed by custom and precedent much more than reason, it was perfectly natural that each party at the time should endeavor to throw the reproach of innovation upon its opponents.\textsuperscript{105}
\end{quote}
Despite Hume’s literary talent, Mill expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of Hume’s historical representations. Hume failed to capture the spirit of individuals living in the past. Mill’s critique here was both methodological and aesthetic.\(^5\)

In his essay on Carlyle’s *French Revolution* Mill argued that Hume fell far short of the new standard set by Carlyle. According to Mill, Hume failed to evoke the immediacy of historical actors.

If there be a person who reading the histories of Hume, Robertson, and Gibbon (works of extraordinary talent, and the works of great writers) has never felt that this after all, is not history — and that the lives and deeds of his fellow-creatures must be placed before him in quite another manner, if he is to know them, or feel them to be real beings, who were once alive, beings of his own flesh and blood, not mere shadows and dim abstractions; such a person, for whom plausible talk about a thing does as well as an image of the things itself, feels no need of a book like Mr. Carlyle’s.\(^{106}\)

Like Macaulay, Mill observed that other genres such as historical plays and romances were satisfying a need not met by modern historians. Macaulay writing in 1828 had thought that the ideal history, combining novelistic characterization with scrupulous attention to fact, remained to be written. In 1837, Mill thought that Carlyle had met the ideal.

Mr. Carlyle has been the first to show that all which is done for history by the best historical plays may be done in a strictly true narrative ... in which every incident rests on irrefutable authority; may be done by means merely of an apt selection and a judicious grouping of authentic facts.\(^{107}\)

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\(^5\) It could also be argued that his call – like Macaulay’s – for a more inclusive social history contained an additional, albeit implicit, attack on Hume’s politics. This new political attack went beyond the old Whig/Tory clash over the legacy of the seventeenth century and suggested a new, more populist sensibility.
For Mill, Carlyle was the Shakespeare of historical prose. The ordinary dramatist presented his characters as “logical abstractions.” Shakespeare made them real, he made them come to life.

This quality, so often pointed out as distinctive of Shakespeare’s plays distinguishes Mr. Carlyle’s history. Never before did we take up a book calling itself by its name, a book treating of past times, and professing to be true, and find ourselves actually among human beings. We at once felt, that what had hitherto been to us mere abstractions, had become realities.\textsuperscript{108}

In contrast, Hume’s historical figures were mere “algebraical symbols.”\textsuperscript{109} Mill also repeated the charge that Hume failed to throw his mind into the past. Hume didn’t capture the spirit of an age. He failed to appreciate human aspirations. He substituted reason for authenticity.

Furthermore, where religious critics noted Hume’s insensitivity to religious belief and the role it played in individual and collective life, Mill emphasized Hume’s failure to evoke the spirit of everyday life as lived by the common man. His comments below closely resemble Macaulay’s call for a new, more inclusive, social history. They also reflect the preference for authenticity over speculation that we have seen discussed by other writers in this paper.

Does Hume throw his own mind into the mind of an Anglo-Saxon, or an Anglo-Norman? Does any reader feel, after reading Hume’s History, that he can now picture to himself what human life was, among the Anglo-Saxons? how an Anglo-Saxon would have acted in any supposable case? what were his joys, his sorrows, his hopes and fears, his ideas and opinions on any of the great and small matters of human interest? Would not the sight, if it could be had, of a single table or pair of shoes made by an Anglo-Saxon, tell us, directly and by inference, more of his whole way of life, more of how men thought and acted among Anglo-Saxons, then Hume, with all his narrative skill, has contrived to tell us from all his materials?\textsuperscript{110}
Curiously, because religious devotion is not something one associates with Mill, we also see an echoing of Palgrave’s and Carlyle’s criticism of Hume on religion in Mill’s essay on Michelet’s *History of France*, written for the *Edinburgh Review* in 1844. Palgrave and Carlyle attacked Hume for his atheism and skepticism. They also argued that, regardless of one’s beliefs, the history of religion and its institutions were too important to ignore. Mill picked up on the latter point in a discussion of recent French historians. He commented favorably on the fact that even non-believing historians felt it necessary to pay attention to the importance of religion.\textsuperscript{111}

The present French thinkers, whether receiving Christianity or not as a divine revelation, in no way feel themselves called upon to be unjust to it as a fact in history. There are men who, not disguising their own belief, have written deeper and finer things in vindication of what religion has done for mankind than have sufficed to found the reputation of some of its most admired defenders.\textsuperscript{112}

Mill could not depart this subject without throwing an additional jab at Hume. In France, the unbelievers had abandoned their vitriolic antipathy towards Catholicism that had marked the thought of Voltaire.

If they have any prejudice on the subject, it is in favor of the priesthood. They leave the opinions of David Hume on ecclesiastical history to the exclusive patronage (we are sorry to say) of Protestant writers in Great Britain.\textsuperscript{113}

**CONCLUSION**

Hume’s literary and analytical achievement represented a point of departure for nineteenth-century discussion of the proper aims, methods, and narrative style of history. Hume suggested the possibility that a history could combine comprehensive analysis with compelling narrative. However Hume’s history was considered to fall short of the ideal set by his nineteenth-century critics.
The early nineteenth century British writers discussed in this paper generally conceded that Hume possessed both analytic and literary talent. However, they contested his political and religious interpretations. Furthermore, the distinct sensibility that was thought to inform his history was rejected and repudiated.

The objectionable sensibility included, in the eyes of his early nineteenth century critics, a certain aloofness, an inability to sufficiently empathize or identify with historical actors. Because he could not “throw his mind back to the past,” Hume could not appreciate the true motivations, the feelings and emotions that animated historic action. Hume was too rational, he was too removed and distant. What Hayden White characterized as Hume’s “Enlightenment Irony”, early nineteenth-century writers in England described as Hume’s propensity to theorize instead of investigate the past.114

For Hume’s critics, theory was not to be abandoned but combined with close attention to the particularities of the past. They thought that historical investigation must begin with an historian immersing himself in original sources to get a feel for the spirit of past ages. It was an article of faith for these nineteenth-century writers that an immersion in original source was the prerequisite for acquiring an empathy for the past which in turn was the essential ingredient in creating more vivid and compelling narratives.

The emerging historical consciousness that we have seen manifested in the reception of Hume’s history in the first half of the nineteenth-century would be echoed in historicist writings in the twentieth-century. For example, in his book The Whig Interpretation of History, Herbert Butterfield wrote that a historicist outlook was predicated on
the assumption that the past was fundamentally different from the present. Butterfield’s comments reflect a similar sensibility to the nineteenth century a criticism of Hume’s “conjectural history.” However, if Butterfield agreed with the emerging nineteenth-century historicism, he also rejected many of the Whig’s claims to attach a continuity between past and present for present political purposes.115

Articulating the fully developed twentieth-century historicist critique of Hume was the German historian Fredriche Meinecke. In his book Historism, Meinecke expressed an historical understanding that reflected and elaborated on nineteenth century concerns. Meinecke wrote: “The essence of historicism is the substitution of a process of individualizing observation for a generalizing view of human forces.”116

Meinecke also did not suggest abandoning the search for general laws in history. Echoing the writers discussed in this paper, Meinecke wrote that the desire to theorize must be accompanied by a “feeling for the individual.”117 Meinecke criticized Hume for his tendency to generalize rather than pay attention to the particular. Hume showed insufficient feeling for the hidden tendencies and movement of individual and collective life. Meinecke thought that Hume never successfully grasped the problem of individuality in history.118

When nineteenth-century critics claimed that Hume’s method was conjectural or anachronistic they hinted at the idea, without being explicit, that Hume failed to recognize that human nature is historically variable. Meinecke would make this point explicit.

Meinecke wrote that Hume’s commitment to general laws and his subscription to the idea that human nature is constant over time, precluded a deeper understanding
of the inner forces of history that manifested themselves through individual conscience. Meinecke, citing Dilthey, observed that Hume was in this regard, a mere positivist; Hume was tone deaf and oblivious to the “changing subjectivity of individuals in history.”

Meinecke, however, unlike his nineteenth-century predecessors was more willing to explicitly recognize Hume’s contribution to this new concern with historical subjectivity. While Macaulay and Mill cited the novelist Walter Scott as a key influence, Meinecke saw the manners, commerce and literature in Hume’s appendices as an important foundation for his own historicism.

Furthermore, Meinecke turned nineteenth-century political criticism of Hume on its head. Where Whig historians attacked Hume for his Tory sympathies and his tendency to impose his eighteenth-century values on history, Meinecke saw another way in which Hume had contributed to an historicist outlook. Meinecke wrote that Hume tried to understand the Tudors and Stuarts by the standard of their own time. By contextualizing their actions within the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century instead of imposing his own eighteenth-century standards, Hume had created another important historicist inroad.
ENDNOTES


4 MacQueen, 36-63.

5 MacQueen, 252.


7 Towers, 53.


9 L. Holland, introduction to Fox’s *History*, iv-v.

10 Holland, xiii.

11 Holland, xxiii-xxiv.


13 Fox, 4.


15 Id.

16 Id.

17 Jeffrey, 283.

18 Jeffrey, 284.

19 Id.


21 Jeffrey on “Brodie,” 92.

22 Jeffrey on “Brodie,” 93.

23 Jeffrey on “Brodie,” 93-944.

24 Jeffrey on “Brodie,” 94.

25 Jeffrey on “Brodie,” 95.

26 Jeffrey on “Brodie,” 94.

27 Jeffrey on “Brodie,” 95.

28 Id.

29 Jeffrey on “Brodie,” 96.

30 Jeffrey on “Brodie,” 96-97.
31 Jeffrey on “Brodie,” 97.
32 Id.
33 Id.
34 Id.
36 J. Mackintosh, Memoirs, 167.
37 Mackintosh, 168.
38 Mackintosh, 169.
39 Id.
40 Id.
42 Mackintosh on “Sismondi,” 491.
43 Mackintosh on “Sismondi,” 492.
44 Id.
45 Mackintosh on “Sismondi,” 493.
48 Id.
49 Id.
51 Id.
53 Id.
56 Id.
60 Id.
61 “History,” 151.
63 "History," 154.
64 Id.
65 "History," 154-158. See also Macaulay, "Hallam's Constitutional History," in Works, 162-163.
66 "History," 156.
67 "History", 160.
68 "History," 158.
69 "History," 160.
70 "History," 158.
71 Id.
73 Moncrieff, 256.
74 Moncrieff, 252.
75 Moncrieff, 253.
77 Smyth, 173-174.
78 Smyth, 133.
79 Smyth, 141.
80 Smyth, 122, 143.
81 Smyth, 124.
82 Smyth, 133.
83 Id.
84 Smyth, 135.
85 Smyth, 138.
86 Id.
87 F. Palgrave, "Anglo-Saxon History," The Quarterly Review, (34), 1826, 244.
88 F. Palgrave, "Hume and His Influence on History," The Quarterly Review, (90), 1844, 559.
89 Palgrave, "Hume's Influence," 571.
90 Id.
91 Palgrave, "Hume's Influence," 572.
93 Carlyle, "On History," 100.


97 Id.

98 Id.


100 Id.


105 Id.


107 Id.


109 Id.

110 Id.


112 Mill, “Michelet’s History,” 220.

113 Id.


115 Butterfield, 10-11.


117 Id.

118 Meinecke, 178-179.

119 Meinecke, 162.

120 Meinecke, 178.
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