

PRESENT AS PAST: FORMS OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORY IN BRITAIN, 1750-
1835

by

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Abstract

This study is concerned with identifying and tracking, across a set of disparate genres and forms of writing, a shared preoccupation with the representation of the historical present. This element of eighteenth and early nineteenth-century British historiography has not been recognized by intellectual historians, even though it ran parallel to and intersected with other forms of historical-mindedness that privileged more remote periods of the past. In various forms of writing – the novel, conventional history, anecdotal biography, the periodical register, “present states”, antiquarian surveys, and the early social science of statistics – there appears to be an historiographical re-orientation towards representing contemporaneity.

This trans-generic assemblage of authors and texts does not directly fit within the available frameworks which have characterized the history of British historical thought and writing during the period from 1750 to the end of the 1830s. Yet they share something in common, and once these connections are established, seemingly disparate texts such as Tobias Smollett’s *Continuation of the Complete History of England* (1760-5) and Sir John Sinclair’s *Statistical Account of Scotland* (1791-9) appear as a part of a wider historiographical spectrum. Central to all of the genres outlined in this study is a sustained comparison between past and present, as well as a frequent prospective look towards the future. Rather than a shift to the remote past that many historians have argued took place after 1750, a re-configured tradition of contemporary history became an important part of the British historiographical landscape. In this modification of the Thucydidean classical model, contemporary history became a mode of social and cultural description that stretched beyond the neoclassical politico-military narrative. Moreover, in mapping the broad contours of contemporary history during this period, a set of writings not normally seen as historiographical have been re-positioned within this framework. Seen from this new perspective, such texts and projects should be seen as equally important for our understanding of the wider historical sense of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Britain as they are to understanding other emerging human and social sciences.

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INTRODUCTION:

THE STRANGE DEATH OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORY? NARRATIVES AND SURVEYS, c1750-1835

In writing the history of the present times, Dr. Smollett has encountered difficulties which will vanish before a future historian; but he hath likewise experienced very peculiar advantages....Our author sympathizes with the distress, and exults in the prosperity of his country, with heart-felt emotions that must appear counterfeit, should they be expressed by a writer of the future age.

Critical Review 12 (1761)

[The] object is, to lay the foundation of a great, methodical, and complete survey of Scotland, and perhaps of England, which I hope will be undertaken by the government at the commencement of the ensuing century. If periodical surveys are afterwards taken, every 50 or 100 years, they will furnish the best means of ascertaining the progress of national improvement.

Sir John Sinclair, *Statistical Account of Scotland* (1792)

This study is concerned with an important aspect of the intellectual and cultural history of eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Britain. This was a period marked by considerable social, political, economic and cultural change, and the stress marks of such a rapid transformation were often reflected in its cultural productions and intellectual history. In this project, I am particularly concerned with a cultural episode that can be tracked across a set of disparate genres and forms of writing. These texts are linked by a shared preoccupation to represent the historical present, or

the “history of the times”. This historiographical impulse has not been recognized by intellectual historians, even though it ran parallel to – and intersected with – other forms of historical-mindedness, including those that privileged more remote periods of the past. In all of the forms of writing examined below – the novel, conventional history, anecdotal biography, the periodical register, “present states”, and the early British social science of statistics – there appears to be an historiographical re-orientation towards representing contemporaneity. This trans-generic assemblage of authors and texts does not directly fit within the available frameworks which have characterized the history of British historical thought and writing during the period from 1750 to the end of the 1830s. Yet they share something in common, and once these connections are established, seemingly disparate texts such as Tobias Smollett’s *Continuation of the Complete History of England* (1760-5) and Sir John Sinclair’s *Statistical Account of Scotland* (1791-9) appear to be part of a wider historiographical horizon.

Other periods and national contexts, of course, have traditions of contemporary history. Moreover, the comparative register of past and present (and future) is a feature that is central to all historical thinking and writing. As a universal element and function of historical writing, Marc Bloch referred to this as the “solidarity of the ages”.¹ But this study is concerned with its particular shape in eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century Britain, a cultural episode in which the narrating and mapping of the historical present appears to have a unique set of expressions. Indeed, the two epigraphs included above broadly represent two different yet related ways of providing a picture of contemporaneity: its narrative forms and its non-narrative, or “survey” forms. In looking at these genres, this study aims to place the representation of contemporaneity

¹ Quoted in David Allan, “‘This Inquisitive Age’: Past and Present in the Scottish Enlightenment”, *Scottish Historical Review* 76 (1997), 70.

within a broader sense of British historiographical thought and practice during this period. As Judith Shklar has noted in relation to Jean d'Alembert and the French *Encyclopedie*, "the critique of traditional history did not preclude the creation of a new kind of history, new in its subject matter, in its greater reliability and, above all, new in its aims. Contemporary history thus became very important. It would secure for future generations history worth knowing."² A similar recognition of the important place of contemporary history in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Britain should be established, particularly as it seems to have been recently revived as an integral part of a later twentieth-century historical sense. As Peter Mandler has pointed out, the 1960s and 1970s set off an explosion of contemporary history that has continued to this day, helped along tremendously by film, video and other new archival modes.³

From the narrative conceit of sentient matter in Smollett's *History of an Atom* – a "novelized history" of the Seven Years' War and Hanoverian history – through to the tireless information gathering by Sir John Sinclair and his predecessors, there is a continuous concern for the development of new modes of social apprehension and the identification of perspectives for such social observation. Of utmost importance to all the genres outlined in this study is a sustained comparison between past and present, as well as a frequent prospective look towards the future.

I begin with an examination of Tobias Smollett's activities as a trans-generic contemporary historian, beginning with his *History and Adventures of an Atom* (1769) before moving on to a comparison of this neglected text with his (equally overlooked) conventional histories. I begin with the novel as a genre of contemporary history because of its more recent

² "Jean d'Alembert and the Rehabilitation of History", *JHI* (1981): 645.

development in the eighteenth century, as well as its hybrid nature. Indeed, as a multi-generic form, the novel offered historical writers such as Smollett a unique vehicle in which to construct narratives of contemporary history, and the *Atom* is a rich example that has been too long overlooked by literary and intellectual historians. In advancing a reading of Smollett's *History of an Atom* as "novelized history", rather than the category of the historical novel, I wish to point out that the British "historical novel", associated with Walter Scott and the early nineteenth-century, concerns itself with a present-minded picture of a different, more temporally remote past. My engagement with literary scholarship also relies upon a particular use of genre theory. It assumes that genres are not self-contained, autonomous entities governed by an internal and resolutely enforced set of rules. This realization is fundamental to understanding all the texts in this study, but particularly contemporary history in its most purely literary and historiographical forms. Moreover, genres should not be seen as existing independent of each other; genres, within and across conventional "periods" of literary history, interact and combine with each other. Ralph Cohen has instructively pointed out that genres do not need to have permanent stability; quite the contrary, they are shifting, tenuous categories, lacking a monolithic specificity.⁴

After a discussion of the novel and the anecdotal or biographical memoir as narrative modes of contemporary history that comprise the first two chapters, Chapter Three examines the treatment of the historical present in its conventional historiographical form. From roughly 1750 to 1830, the writing of contemporary history in its conventional narrative shape was an important part of the historiographical landscape. In making this claim, it is necessary to read the literatures

³ Peter Mandler, *History and National Life* (Profile Books, 2002), 98.

⁴ See Ralph Cohen, "Genre Theory, Literary History, and Historical Change", in *Theoretical Issues in Literary History*, edited by David Perkins (Harvard, 1991).

of the history of modern British historiography, as well as others, against the grain. Discussions of eighteenth-century British historical thought and writing often take an organic view of the development of the “modern” historical discipline as their vantage point. By so doing, they attempt to bring into sharper relief what they consider to be the contours of a nascent modern historiography. In this view, one such common notion of an emerging modern historical sense asserts that there was a shift towards the remote past in British historiography during this period.

Indeed, Philip Hicks has posited the centrality of neoclassical history for the early eighteenth-century. This Thucydidean and Clarendonian tradition, focusing as it did on the politico-military action of the recent past as the primary subject matter of history, is seen to culminate in David Hume’s *History of England* in the 1750s (albeit by incorporating cultural history into the appendices). This Thucydidean tradition is supposed to have ended at this point.⁵ Such an assessment, however, fails to point out that far from being eclipsed by new historiographical genres by mid-century, the Thucydidean tradition of contemporary history was transformed in the conventional historiography of Smollett and others who followed. The description of the social and cultural realms now pushed its way alongside the political and military narrative, as will be shown below.

Histories of historiography during this period, however, continue to ignore this parallel strand of historical activity. Accordingly, in Donald Kelley’s recent overview of the history of historical thought, an account of “British Initiatives” in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries focuses on the conjectural reconstruction of the remote past, a development that was clearly one of the richest historiographical legacies of the period. Equally, Kelley directs our attention

towards the study of the remote past and its institutions, whether Greek, Roman, or Anglo-Saxon.⁶ Such a view overlooks the extent to which contemporary history was a parallel enterprise to conjectural history, as it described another and more direct path to the present and to the future. Similarly, in his recent examination of the mid to late eighteenth-century historiographical context in which Edward Gibbon wrote his Roman history, John Pocock focuses to a large extent on those historians which wrote the kinds of cosmopolitan, polished historical narratives that focused on the more remote past: David Hume, William Robertson, Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith and John Millar.⁷ John Millar, however, did write contemporary history: the fourth and final volume of the 1803 edition of his *Historical View of the English Government*, edited by John Craig, is a collection of essays on various strands of the social, literary, and economic history of Britain from 1688 to the immediate present.

More pointedly, others have argued that British historiography after the mid-eighteenth-century is marked by a sharp turn to the remote past, exemplified in Hume as well as Gibbon.⁸ Ten years ago, David Wootton's search for the parameters of the modern historical sense brought him to those two historians, in particular their turn to more remote periods of the past. As a consequence, according to him, the "great tradition of contemporary history ends with Clarendon."⁹ In this context, Adam Smith's defense of the Thucydidean model in his Glasgow lectures on rhetoric and belles letters appears as a paradoxical fossil, the last vestiges of an

⁵ Philip Hicks, *Neoclassical History and English Culture* (St. Martin's Press, 1996).

⁶ Kelley, *The Fortunes of History* (Yale, 2003), 81-112.

⁷ Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*. Vol 2 (Cambridge: 1999). In his analysis of Hume's *Essays*, Pocock adopts a rather different sense of "contemporary history". See 177-98.

⁸ Peter Ghosh, "Macaulay and the Heritage of the Enlightenment", *English Historical Review* 446 (1997), 358-95; David Wootton, "Narrative, Irony, and Faith in Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*", *History and Theory* (1994).

historiographical paradigm that had run its course. This study attempts to gather some of the generic scatterlings that comprise the important and overlooked afterlife of contemporary history in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In positing the transformation of the Thucydidean classical model after the 1750s, this study also urges a revision of Arnaldo Momigliano's thesis that two separate historiographical strands – the Thucydidean political narrative and antiquarianism – characterized the eighteenth century until Edward Gibbon's synthesis in the late 1770s.¹⁰ Such a view overlooks many of the texts and traditions of contemporary history that are described below.

Assertions such as Wootton's, which look forward to some aspects of later historical writing, have not taken a wholly accurate measure of the historiographical topography of Britain from the 1750s to the first decades of the nineteenth century. A more broadly conceived remapping of the historical culture of this period reveals that the turn to the remote past, whether in the shapes of philosophical and conjectural history, the antiquarian enterprise, or Gibbon's monumentalized fusion of both, has been overstated. Two recent historians of British historiography have been instructive in forming the view advanced in this study. Mark Salber Phillips and David Allan have, in different ways, highlighted both innovation and continuity within the genres and forms of historical thought and writing during this period. Both have

⁹ Wootton, 80. See also Hicks, *passim*.

¹⁰ See especially, "Historiography on Written Tradition and Historiography on Oral Tradition", *Studies in Historiography* (London: Nicolson, 1966); "The Herodotean and the Thucydidean Tradition", *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1990). For an important revision of the Momigliano thesis, see Mark Salber Phillips, "Reconsiderations on History and Antiquarianism: Arnaldo Momigliano and the Historiography of Eighteenth-Century Britain", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58 (1996): 297-316.

persuasively directed our attention to a wider range of historical genres and authors during this period, both within a Scottish as well as more broadly British context.¹¹

This study intends to broaden those horizons in its own fashion, by focusing attention on the special qualities and attractions of the historical present, and the various historiographical and hybridized genres that responded to this fascination. As the epigraphic passage from the *Critical Review* attests, the contemporary historian's lack of perspective and distance was offset by a recognition of its advantages, not the least of which was the increased sympathy that attended such contemporary illustrations. As such, the historiographical phenomenon of contemporary history described in this chapter forms a valuable part of the wider cultural episode that I am trying to track across a set of different forms of writing between 1750 and the 1830s. In terms of conventional narrative historiography, this preoccupation with representing the present begins to wane somewhat in the 1830s. In some ways, versions of the historical present that are rendered immediate while given narrative closure (such as Smollett's *Continuation*), are now being supplemented by narratives that strive to make more remote periods of the British past seem more immediate. In addition, an explosion of more widely available news media begins to satisfy the cultural need for consumption of what was seen as the "here and now". Moreover, the historiographical ambition of "contemporary history" recedes somewhat in the aftermath of increasing professionalization and the prioritization of perspective that characterizes nineteenth-

¹¹ Mark Salber Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740-1820* (Princeton, 2000); David Allan, *Virtue, Learning and the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh, 1993). Phillips' work has done much to enlarge an understanding of the historiographical landscape of eighteenth-century Britain, in particular the description of the social field as a descriptive site. Allan, while concerned solely with the Scottish context, and in particular its humanist and Calvinist traditions, has also noted the pressures being exerted during this period on the "orthodox narrative history", albeit more in ideological rather than generic terms. See Allan, 164.

century historicism. In other ways, however, the tradition can be seen as continuing into the late 1830s and beyond.

Finally, Chapter Four examines a cluster of “survey” genres that appeared in different shapes from the 1730s through to the 1830s. Seeming disparate, these works all evince a shared preoccupation with recording and preserving an accurate picture of the historical present, as well as a prospective look to the future. Most of these texts have been read in relation to the emerging social sciences of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – in particular, historical geography, sociology and political economy. Others have been discussed only as antiquarian researches concerned only with the remote past. My purpose in this chapter is to re-position these texts and their authors within a broadly historiographical phenomenon that took the mapping of the present – in counterpoise to the past and future – as its methodological and ideological focus. Seen from this new perspective, then, these texts can be re-situated as examples of the contemporary historiographical “episode” from the 1750s to the 1830s. In addition, they should be seen as equally important for our understanding of the wider historical sense of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Britain as they are to understanding other emerging human and social sciences.

In advancing such an interpretation, once again one needs to run against the grain of the available historical frameworks. In the field of British statistics, Mary Poovey’s recent analysis fails to recognize that, alongside the other preoccupations of the early statistical movement, there was an important historiographical dimension.¹² From our post nineteenth-century perspective,

¹² Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact* (Chicago, 1998); Philip Abrams, *The Origins of British Sociology, 1834-1914* (Chicago, 1968); Michael Cullen, *The Statistical Movement in Early Victorian Britain* (NY: Harvester Press, 1975).

the theory of the present is sociological; these earlier projects, however, helped to form an enumerative episode that aimed to empirically engage the present while assuming rapid historical change. Likewise, while historians of geography have provided very valuable genealogies of such survey traditions, they have also not expanded their analysis to include its historiographical dimensions.¹³ Chapter Four, then, pays particular attention to the statistical survey movement in Scotland during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Sir John Sinclair's *Statistical Account* (1791-9) emerged as a sophisticated register of past, present and future to a greater extent than its predecessors, and this historiographical nature marks it as a form of contemporary history, and not just an episode in the history of demography, political economy and other social sciences. Sinclair's project provided a kind of contemporary history founded upon different notions about the subjects of history that were then becoming more relevant to the British state at the close of the eighteenth century. These new subjects and materials grew out of Sinclair's earlier contemporary histories of British commercial history, during a period when the young field of statistics was beginning to be articulated (but still as an amorphous genre whose fluidity proved very useful for this new kind of contemporary historiographical analysis).

In this sense, then, the re-positioning of texts and writers in this study aims to show that there was no 'strange death' of contemporary history in Britain during this period.¹⁴ Rather, the period evinces a cultural fascination with different forms of received and amended traditions of contemporary history from 1750 to the late 1830s, when it recedes in the light of historicism and

¹³ See especially Charles Withers, *Geography, Science and National Identity: A Historical Geography of Geographical Knowledge in Scotland, 1520-1914* (Cambridge UP, 2001); Robert Mayhew, *Enlightenment Geography* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2000); David Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition* (Blackwell, 1992).

¹⁴ I have deliberately borrowed this phrase from Marinell Ash, *The Strange Death of Scottish History* (Ramsay Head Press, 1980).

other forms of perspectivalism, only to re-emerge as an interesting historiographical form in the second half of the twentieth century. By the 1830's this unstable blend of antiquarianism, present-mindedness and a desire to understand the present moment as part of a historical continuum disperses into its constituent components under the pressures of democratic reform, mass literacy, urbanization, disciplinary specialization, generic change, and an historicist shift in the temporal understanding of what constituted the historical field.

CHAPTER ONE

THE "HISTORY OF AN ATOM": TOBIAS SMOLLETT, THE NOVEL, AND CONTEMPORARY HISTORY

Tobias Smollett, Historian and Novelist

"With the single exception of [Samuel Johnson], there was from 1745 to 1771 no literary personality as independent, colourful, and versatile as Dr. Tobias Smollett." So wrote Lewis Knapp in 1949.¹⁵ Yet, despite the recognition of this versatility by literary and intellectual historians, scholarly attention to Smollett has continued to be restricted to a handful of canonized

¹⁵ *Tobias Smollett: Doctor of Men and Manners* (New York, 1963), vii. Knapp's is still the standard biography, and is the main source of the biographical information that follows. A new biography has recently appeared, but does not add any original research: Jeremy Lewis, *Tobias Smollett* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2003).

novels, in particular *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*, written just before his death in 1771.¹⁶ Smollett did much more than write novels, however: his activities included reviewing, historiography, translation, travel writing, drama, and political pamphleteering. Most of this “other” activity took place from 1756-69, a middle career that has often been stigmatized as the writer’s “fallow” period, in between the production of his better known novels and a period in which he engaged in a number of supposedly “hack” projects.¹⁷ Only recently has this situation begun to be remedied in a pioneering study of Smollett’s journalistic career.¹⁸

The first part of this study is concerned with two works of Smollett’s which have been virtually ignored by intellectual and literary historians, particularly in the degree to which they comprise two important examples of contemporary history in eighteenth-century Britain. These are his *Continuation of the Complete History of England* (1760-65), and his second to last novel, *The History and Adventures of an Atom* (1769). In the majority of cases, scholarly attention to Smollett’s historical writings has been almost exclusively in relation to David Hume’s *History of England* (1754-62), in part because later editions of the *Continuation* were sometimes appended to or advertised as a continuation of Hume’s volumes, the narrative of which ends with the Glorious Revolution in 1688. On the contrary, Smollett stands out as a particularly important early modern British historian when his writings are considered as important narratives of the contemporary history of his period, a role that Hume and others self-consciously chose to avoid. By the early 1760s, Smollett was recognized as the foremost practitioner of this ‘new-old’ genre

¹⁶ Although even in this respect he has not always been seen as significant. Ian Watt noted that “Smollett has many merits as a social reporter and as a humourist, but the manifest flaws in the central situations and the general structure of all of his novels except *Humphry Clinker* (1771) prevent him from playing a very important role in the main tradition of the novel.” *The Rise of the Novel* (Harmondsworth, 1963), 302.

¹⁷ Louis L. Martz, *The Later Career of Tobias Smollett* (New Haven, 1942).

that re-worked the classical, Thucydidean tradition of contemporary history into a reinvigorated form, interacting and combining with other genres in which Smollett had previously engaged, particularly fiction and political journalism. The resulting hybrid established a template of narrative contemporary history which was viewed as a more fluid, appropriate and interesting vehicle for casting contemporaneity into historiographical form.

The History and Adventures of an Atom, on the other hand, has been treated as a bibliographical oddity. The novel is ostensibly an account of events in Japan one thousand years earlier, reported by a sentient and talking atom to a London haberdasher whose body it inhabits. Astute readers quickly noticed, however, that the novel (whose anonymous author was also soon guessed at) was really a “secret” narrative of contemporary British history from about 1753 to the time of its publication in 1769. Issues of canonicity are not a major concern in this study, but the resistance to the *Atom* is interesting. For a time, this may have been due to the obscurity and density of its historical allusion; as one historian has remarked: “To understand who are meant by the strange names in the book requires a key; yet what is the use of a key for a door no one wishes to open?”¹⁹ In 1942, Louis Martz included a chapter on the *Atom* in his examination of Smollett's later career, but seemed to regard it as a bump on the road en route to *Humphry Clinker*.²⁰ My intention in the pages to follow is, however, not to rescue an eighteenth-century text from the condescension of posterity. But I do hope to demonstrate that the *Atom* weaves together a complex web of satiric traditions and genres in its satirical narrative of contemporary British history during the Seven Years' War. In this sense, Smollett's overlooked novel can be

¹⁸ James G. Basker, *Tobias Smollett: Critic and Journalist* (Cranbury, NJ, 1988).

¹⁹ Henry Grey Graham, *Eighteenth-Century Scottish Men of Letters* (1901), 316.

read as a quite impressively crafted hybrid historical text, placed at a remove from conventional historical writing, but a powerful example of one form of contemporary historical writing during the period under consideration. It will be shown that behind the Japanese veil the novel provides a secret narrative of British political history from 1753-1768. Later in this study, I will go on to examine Smollett's *Continuation*, which can be seen as a more polite and restrained version of the same historical narrative provided in the *Atom*. In these two different genres and with these two different forms of writing, Smollett helped to refashioned these two important narrative genres of contemporary history. Indeed, it will be shown throughout that Smollett had a hand in many forms of contemporary history during his lifetime, and, along with other figures such as Sir John Sinclair, Thomas Somerville and William Smellie, operates as a multi-generic "bridging" figure that contributes to the cultural episode in British intellectual history that is being discussed in this study.

Moreover, Smollett's texts, linked by their concern to narrate a sense of the historical present, evince his preoccupation not just with the neoclassical and Thucydidean political subject matter. They do relate the political and military narrative, but in a much less formal manner, borrowing generic elements of novelization and anecdotalism, and expanding the narrative into the social and cultural fields. This is done as part of the narrative itself, and not in the form of appendices utilized so notably by David Hume in his *History of England*.²¹ As noted in the Introduction, this was an important transformation of the Thucydidean tradition of contemporary

²⁰ Martz, 90. As he writes, "to-day the labor of historical reconstruction robs the satire of its wit; little vitality remains to excuse the noisome indecencies and pedantic digressions; the abuse so common in the political quarrels of Smollett's day seems now the work of an unbalanced brain."

²¹ See for example Hume's final chapter of the Stuart volumes, in which he ends the narrative by discussing developments in commerce, manners and the arts and sciences. *History of England*, Vol 6 (Liberty Fund, 1983), 535-45.

history, as the military and political field was being expanded to include a much wider social and cultural horizon. Far from being a “hack” period, then, the 1760s saw Smollett establish himself as the foremost contemporary historian of Hanoverian politics and culture, as well an important voice in the construction of an eighteenth-century British identity, particularly in his consistent promotion of British interests over purely English or, even more narrowly, Hanoverian dynastic interests.

Born in Dumbartonshire, Smollett attended Glasgow University before apprenticing to a local surgeon. His apprenticeship was not scheduled to end until 1741, but in the middle of 1739 he left to pursue a career in the London theatre. He was unable to stage his tragedy, *The Regicide*, and from 1740 to 1744 he served as a surgeon's mate before establishing a medical practice in London. In 1746, in the aftermath of the Duke of Cumberland's brutal suppression of the Jacobite rebels at Culloden, Smollett wrote a verse ballad entitled “The Tears of Scotland” which was a minor success. But it was with his first novel, *The Adventures of Roderick Random*, that Smollett attained a measure of literary celebrity. After the publication of *Random* in 1748, Smollett began to work on translations of both Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and Alain LeSage's *Gil Blas*. His second novel appeared in 1751: *Peregrine Pickle* satirized a number of London notables such as the actor David Garrick, the painter William Hogarth, and the novelist Henry Fielding. *Ferdinand Count Fathom* followed in 1753, but was not a commercial success. Other activities around this time included a “History of Germany”, a work that was included in the *Universal History*, a vast encyclopedic venture published by Samuel Richardson and which Smollett co-edited at one point.²²

²² See *The Letters of Tobias Smollett*. Edited Lewis M. Knapp (Oxford, 1970), 32, 78, 92.

The part of Smollett's career that is most relevant to this study begins in 1756, when Smollett founded the *Critical Review* with three other associates: Archibald Hamilton, Dr. John Armstrong, and the Reverend Thomas Francklin. As will be discussed later, this literary journal, which Smollett edited until mid-1763, was only part of a larger scheme for an Academy of Arts and Letters which never materialized. In 1757, the first three volumes of Smollett's *Complete History of England* were published, followed by the fourth volume in the next year. Smollett started yet another periodical in 1760, the *British Magazine*, which ended in 1763 but not before Smollett published the first full-length serialized novel in its pages, *The Life and Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves*. The *Continuation of the Complete History of England* appeared in five volumes from 1760-65, followed by *Travels through France and Italy* in 1766. Smollett then essayed the historical and geographical grammar genre with the eight-volume *Present State of All Nations*, published over two years in 1768-69. I will return to the relations between many of these texts at later points. In finishing this brief chronology of Smollett's life and works, many observers might forgive the leap ahead to *Humphry Clinker* in 1771. In between, however, was a curious book about a talking atom that I maintain was a carefully constructed "novelized" contemporary history of Britain during the Seven Years' War. This will be brought into even sharper relief once it is read against the *Continuation of the Complete History of England* in the chapter to follow.

The History and Adventures of an Atom (1769)

The History and Adventures of an Atom was published on All Fools' Day in 1769. The work was anonymous, but it was not long before Tobias Smollett was recognized as the author.

Only recently, however, has its attribution been determined beyond doubt.²³ The April 1 publication date was probably not orchestrated, but it was fitting in the sense that the *Atom* certainly ranks as one of the most bizarre books published in eighteenth-century Britain. Upon closer inspection, however, the *Atom* emerges as an interesting form of novelized historiography (I use this term self-consciously, avoiding the category "historical novel" which is, in many respects, a different form of writing, and one which I see as a departure from the sort of novelistic contemporary histories of which Smollett's was a classic example). On one level, the novel is a (hidden) political narrative of British politics from 1753-1768. In this sense, it is a less restrained rewriting of Smollett's earlier contemporary histories. These latter volumes appeared from 1760-65, and their relationship to the *Atom* will be examined in the next chapter. On another level, the text is a revealing creative amalgam of a number of eighteenth-century satirical traditions and genres.

Anyone who has perused a few pages of Smollett's *Atom* will probably agree that it seems to be, at least on the first reading, an esoteric and obscure work of fiction. This is not only apparent from its subject matter, but from its almost incessant barrage of allusion, whether learned and erudite, or scatological and bawdy. However, this would not have been the case for the audience(s) that Smollett was writing for in the 1760s. On the first and broadest level, Smollett's 'nasty little book' (to use the language of its denigrators) was written for an eighteenth-century British reading public that would recognize its thinly-disguised mocking of public figures. On another level, Smollett structured and filled his work with rich veins of satiric and erudite references. In trying to accomplish both of these aims, he drew upon a number of

²³ Robert Adams Day, "The Authorship of the *Atom*," *Philological Quarterly* 59 (1980): 187-193.

literary traditions and genres. The number and complexity of these intellectual, cultural, and political registers render them difficult to organize into coherent groups, but the broad outlines of three main traditions can be discerned. In the interests of clarity we can identify these as follows: Menippean satire, particularly in its early eighteenth-century “Augustan” form; the picaresque; and three subgenres of the eighteenth-century novel, namely the Oriental tale, the spy novel or secret history, and the novel narrated by a non-human character. Many of these threads overlap and blend with one another as well as with other traditions in the *Atom*.

Menippean Satire

The works of Menippus (3rd century B.C.) have not survived, but the satiric tradition associated with his name certainly did. The tradition survived through the works of two Greek writers in the 2nd century: Lucian and Apuleius. The tradition of Menippean satire is especially significant in the sense that it is typically a prose form of satire, and hence it is often associated with the prose satire of early eighteenth-century Britain and the Augustan wits, particularly Jonathan Swift.²⁴ The chief targets of its satire are intellectual debates and follies, and thus such works are often characterised by seemingly erudite digressions on esoteric subjects. It is this tradition - of repeated digression and intellectual gamesmanship - which plays such an important part in the satiric project of the *Atom*. However, perhaps the most obvious feature of Menippean satire which is noticeable in the *Atom* is its scatological preoccupation.

The scatological thread connects the *Atom* with Swift and the tradition of Augustan prose satire as well. This is not the only connection, however. Smollett clearly identified with Augustan critical principles during his career as editor of the *Critical Review* from 1756 to 1763.²⁵ That is to say, he shared their Horatian or "Neoclassical" dictums concerning decorum, propriety, and respect for the prescriptive rules of literature. Indeed, as we will see later, Smollett took very seriously his reputation as an arbiter of literary taste in mid-eighteenth-century Britain. What is significant to note is the Augustan satirist's concern with mocking not only politics and war but contemporary scholarship and artistic taste. These are the two targets of the *Atom*. Politics and the Seven Years' War are satirized within the book's "secret" political narrative of events from 1754 to 1768. The latter target - contemporary intellectual debate and learning in eighteenth-century Britain - is satirized through the use of a number of substantial digressions from the main political narrative.

The Picaresque

The picaresque romance had a formative influence on the European novel.²⁶ Smollett was extremely interested in this form of prose writing - witness his decision to translate Cervantes's

²⁴ Northrop Frye has stated that "no one will challenge the statement that the literary ancestry of *Gulliver's Travels* ... runs through Rabelais and Erasmus to Lucian." *The Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, 1957), 308.

²⁵ Basker, 95.

²⁶ Several recent histories of the English novel have traced this influence. See Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (Baltimore, 1987), 212-270; see also J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: the Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth Century English Fiction* (New York, 1990) and Lennard Davis, *Factual Fictions: the Origins of the English Novel* (New York, 1983).

Don Quixote in 1753-54.²⁷ He had experienced some early success while experimenting with the picaresque form in his novels, a sharp contrast from his bitter disappointments while trying to establish a career in the theatre.²⁸ *Peregrine Pickle* (1751), his second novel after the brilliantly successful *Roderick Random* (1748), was quickly translated into French where it was recognized by reviewers as typical of an English picaresque form. The "Avertissement" to the *Histoire et Avantures de Sir Williams Pickle* (1753) told its French readers that the story

[...] following English custom, had as subject-matter adventures in inns, public places and highways; many fights involving fists, feet and sticks, which our French people would find undignified...I feared at first that this would not suit the taste here but I reflected in the end that these pictures were not without merit; that they would at least serve to instruct us in English morals. Now it has everything that we ask for in Novels from London....²⁹

This experimentation with the picaresque is even more evident in Smollett's next novel, *The Adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom* (1753). In the *Monthly Review* that year, Ralph Griffiths saw in the title character an amalgam of picaresque heroes:

[Smollett] seems to have sat down to his work with a fund of ideas gleaned from *Gil Blas*, *Guzman de Alfarache*, *Lazarillo de Tormes*, the *English rogue*, etc. His *Ferdinand Fathom* is a compound of all that is detestable in the heroes of those ludicrous romances...On the whole, the history of count *Fathom* is a work of a mixed character, compounded of various and unequal parts...There are extravagant excursions of the author's fancy, with certain improbable stories [...]³⁰

²⁷ For the controversy over this translation, particularly regarding Smollett's alleged plagiarism of the 1742 Charles Jarvis translation, see Carmine Linslata, *Smollett's Hoax: Don Quixote in English* (Stanford, 1956).

²⁸ Knapp, 73-92.

²⁹ "Avertissement du Libraire", *Histoire et Avantures de Sir Williams Pickle* (Amsterdam and Leipzig, 1753), reprinted in Lionel Kelly, *Tobias Smollett: The Critical Heritage* (Routledge, 1987), 95-97.

³⁰ *Monthly Review* 8 (1753), 203-14. Smollett had reviewed for the *Monthly Review* in 1751-52, but left after a dispute with its editor, Ralph Griffiths. The two would later compete after the establishment of Smollett's rival *Critical Review* in 1756. See Knapp, 134-36. This partly accounts for the negative reviews virtually all of Smollett's works received in the *Monthly* from 1752 until his death in 1771.

Smollett's work has long been associated with the eighteenth century picaresque novel.³¹

In the early pages of *Ferdinand Fathom* it is possible to discern an acknowledgement of Smollett's influences - a miniature *Bildungsroman* - seemingly intended to defend his choice of subject and point out its lineal descent from earlier, more respected traditions. The passage is long but merits quoting at length:

And here it will not be amiss to anticipate the remarks of the reader, who... may possibly exclaim, "Good Heaven! will these authors never reform their imaginations, and lift their ideas from the obscene objects of low life? Must the publick be again disgusted with the groveling adventures of a waggon?..." Have a little patience, gentle, delicate, sublime, critic; you, I doubt not, are one of those consummate connoisseurs, who in their purifications, let humour evaporate, while they endeavour to preserve decorum, and polish wit, until the edge of it is quite wore off...who extol the writings of Petronius Arbiter, read with rapture the amorous sallies of Ovid's pen, and chuckle over the story of Lucian's ass; yet, if a modern author presumes to relate the progress of a simple intrigue, are shocked at the indecency and immorality of the scene: who delight in following Guzman d'Alfarache, thro' all the mazes of squalid beggary; who with pleasure accompany Don Quixote and his squire, in the lowest paths of fortune; who are diverted with the adventures of Scarron's ragged troop of strollers, and highly entertained with the servile situations of Gil Blas; yet, when a character in humble life occasionally occurs in a performance of our own growth, exclaim with an air of disgust, "Was ever any thing so mean! Sure this writer must have been very conversant with the lowest scenes of life:" who, when Swift or Pope represents a coxcomb in the act of swearing, scruple not to laugh at the ridiculous execrations; but in a less reputed author, condemn the use of such profane expletives: who eagerly explore the jakes of Rabelais...yet, in a production of these days, unstamped with such venerable names, will stop their noses with all the signs of loathing and abhorrence, at a bare mention of the china chamber-pot: who applaud Catullus, Juvenal, Persius and Lucan, for their spirit in lashing the greatest names of antiquity; yet, when a British satirist, of this generation, has courage enough to call in question the talents of a Pseudo-patron, in power, accuse him of insolence, rancour, and scurrility [...]³²

³¹ Leslie Stephen, the Victorian historian of eighteenth-century intellectual history, noted Smollett's debt to Alain LeSage and Henry Fielding, although he was "comparatively but a caricaturist." *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*. Volume 2 (London, 1876), 380.

³² *Ferdinand Count Fathom*. Edited Jerry C. Beasley (Athens, GA, 1988), 9-10.

Certainly one of the critics Smollett implicitly refers to in this passage is Samuel Johnson, who three years earlier had censured novels and romances for their corrupting effects on young British readers. Johnson had advised that

the greatest degree of reverence should be paid to youth, and that nothing indecent should be suffered to approach their eyes or ears; [these] are precepts extorted from an ancient writer.³³

The “key” novel and its variants

Clearly then, picaresque, Augustan, and other eighteenth-century interpretations of classical traditions formed a part of Smollett's early experimentation with the novel genre. But the *Atom* does not only exhibit these traditions. In the context of the eighteenth-century novel there were other forms, or subgenres, of the novel whose devices and conventions Smollett availed himself of. One of these - the Oriental tale - exhibited a degree of continuity with older traditions of Romance, while another - the spy novel, or “secret history” - engaged more directly with realistic forms of fiction writing in the middle of the eighteenth century. Finally, a third subgenre - novels narrated by non-human characters - grew out of both of these and yet was unique to the eighteenth century.

The first half of the eighteenth century in Britain exhibited an increasing interest in things - objects, artifacts, fashions - associated with Eastern cultures. Included in this trend was a

³³ *Rambler* 4, 1750, in *Rasselas, Poems, and Selected Prose*. Edited Bertrand H. Bronson (New York, 1952), 69. The ancient authority is Juvenal. Johnson esteemed Juvenalian satire, with its less harsh tones of indignation, over what he saw as less elevated and immoral forms of satire. See Robert DeMaria, *The Life Of Samuel Johnson* (Oxford, 1993), 49-51.

consumer taste for tales which took these exotic locales as their setting.³⁴ To Europeans at this time, "the Orient" meant much more than the Levant and the wider Middle East; as a descriptive term it was readily applied to India, China and Japan (and sometimes even South America).³⁵ As a popular and very marketable type of fiction writing in Britain, it owed much of its inspiration to translations of French productions such as Antoine Galland's *Les Mille et Une Nuits: contes arabes* 1704-17 (translated into English shortly thereafter as *Arabian Nights*, 1706-17), and, while it never became part of what has been described as the mainstream tradition of the English novel in the 1740s, it showed a remarkable resiliency into the 1760s.³⁶ While these Romances and tales tapped into a growing taste for such settings, in many instances there was little concern for verisimilitude among its practitioners. That is to say, such stories often had little to do with their supposedly eastern contents and were much more, if not wholly, concerned with the European contexts of which they were products. It is this self-referential characteristic of the Oriental tale which is of importance to the subsequent satiric strategy of Smollett's *Atom* and which needs to be examined more closely.

Once again, it was the French who furnished examples for the British to emulate. One such writer, Claude-Prosper Jolyot de Crebillon (1674-1762), was jailed for slandering the French monarchy as well as the Jesuits in his ostensibly eastern *Tanzai et Neaderne: Histoire japonaise*, published in 1734. Six years later, *Le Sopha* landed him in trouble for its not so hidden satiric thrusts at Louis XV. The latter work was probably one of the sources George Lyttleton (1709-1773) mined in his 1741 publication *The Court Secret*, wherein Sir Robert

³⁴ For the purely formal qualities of this European genre see Martha Pike Conant, *The Oriental Tale in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1966). For "orientalism" as an ideologically laden discourse see Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1979) and many later elaborations.

³⁵ Said, 116; see also Jerry C. Beasley, *Novels of the 1740s* (Athens, 1982), 31.

Walpole is orientalized and caricatured in the figure of Behemoth, an autocratic and corrupt vizier.³⁷ More immediately along the lines of the later *Atom*, Dr. John Shebbeare (1709-88) wrote an orientalized political novel entitled *The History of the Excellence and Decline of the Constitution, Religion, Laws, Manners, and Genius of the Sumatrans* (1762-63) which made little attempt to disguise its attack on the recently deceased George II or its favourable treatment of Lord Bute, the first minister during the early years of George III's reign.³⁸ As we shall see later, the political narrative Smollett provides in the *Atom*, itself also hidden behind an oriental veil, covers the last few years of George II's reign and the first eight years of George III's reign.³⁹

While the idea for the general Oriental setting of the *Atom* may have arisen from the popularity of such works in the eighteenth-century literary marketplace, the materials which

³⁶ Beasley, 29-30.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 33. Lyttleton was known as much for his political associations with William Pitt as a member of the "Boy Patriot" anti-Walpole circle. He later served as Chancellor of the Exchequer under Newcastle. Smollett was certainly familiar with him, satirizing him in *Peregrine Pickle* (1751).

³⁸ See Robert Adams Day, "Introduction", xlii. Shebbeare had waged a pamphlet war with Smollett in 1757 after the latter had given his *Third Letter to the People of England* an unfavourable review in the *Critical Review*. In *The Occasional Critic, or the Decrees of the Scotch Tribunal in the Critical Review Rejudged...* (1757), Shebbeare had mocked Smollett's use of alliteration in many of his booktitles and in his reviews: "[Smollett's] Wit seems to consist in placing two Words beginning with the same letter, to succeed each other, as *Roderick Random*, *Peregrine Pickle*, *Ferdinand Fathom*, *Pillory Politician*. Nothing so easily imitated, and though I am ashamed of the Thing, lest you should imagine me deficient in that way of being witty, I will show you with what Facility it is to be obtained. For example, *Codsheaded Critics*, *asinine Annalists*, *rascally Reviewers*, *scabby Scotchmen*, all of which are as applicable to you, as *Pillory Politician* is to the author of *The Fourth Letter*" (reprinted in Lionel Kelly, 120). Shebbeare was pilloried briefly for his political pamphleteering. See James R. Foster, "Smollett's Pamphleteering Foe Shebbeare," *PMLA* 57 (1942): 1053-1100.

³⁹ In the *Critical*, Smollett pointed out Shebbeare's hidden agenda. He writes: "Under the name of *Sumatra* is shadowed the political, religious, and civil constitution of Great Britain...." *Critical Review* 13 (1762), 393. The review is favourable, however, as Smollett seems to have forgotten their former quarrel and enjoyed the technique employed: "In these reflections we imagine we can trace the hand of a writer...whom we have formerly censured with freedom, and we now

Smollett used to furnish it differed from others under discussion here. Shebbeare, it is clear, knew next to nothing about the regions of southeast Asia in which he placed the action of the *Sumatrans*;⁴⁰ Smollett, however, gleaned his information concerning the Far East from his activities both as an editor and a reviewer of the Modern Part of the *Universal History* (16 volumes, 1758-1762).⁴¹ Smollett wrote a "History of Germany" for this London-based European production, and along with John Campbell was its main compiler. Campbell (1708-75) was an historian and biographer whose considerable body of work included "The Present State of Europe", originally published as part of Robert Dodsley's *Museum, or Literary and Historical Register* (3 vols, 1746-7), the *Biographica Britannica*, a form of early national biography edited by Andrew Kippis, and the *Political Survey of Britain* (2v 1774). Smollett's debt to the *Universal History* is acknowledged almost immediately in the text of the *Atom*, when the fictional editor of the found manuscript (a frequent authenticating device), in a fit of scrupulous pyrrhonism, declares the Japanese contents of the manuscript to be authentic only after referring to both "Kempfer [sic] and the Universal History".⁴² By 1759, then, Smollett had almost certainly

applaud without reserve, because he has... expressed his sentiments with the zeal and courage of a good citizen, without attempting to acquire popularity by inflammatory declamation." 397.

⁴⁰ Day, "Introduction", xliii.

⁴¹ On the "ancient" and "modern" parts of this work, see Guiseppe Ricuperati, "*Universal History*: storia di un progetto europeo. Impostori, storici ed editori, nella *Ancient Part*," *Studi settecenteschi* 1 (1981): 7-90.

⁴² Louis Martz has correctly pointed out Smollett's use of material from Volume 9 of the Modern Part of the *UH* (1759). However, he makes a point of stating that Smollett did not ever read Engelbrecht Kaempfer's *History of Japan* (1727-28) but merely knew that the compilers of the section on Japan derived most of their information from Kaempfer. See Martz, 94-96. This point has been recently challenged by Takau Shimada, who, on the basis of internal evidence in the *Atom* concerning Japanese religion not expressed in the *UH*, has concluded that Smollett did indeed consult Kaempfer. Moreover, according to Shimada, Kaempfer's influence on Europeans was such that "in later years Montesquieu, Diderot, Kant, and Malthus turned to it when they dealt with Japan. The library of Horace Walpole contained it and the third edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* referred to its account of Japan." Shimada, "Kaempfer's *History of*

hatched the idea of writing a key-novel which substituted Japan and its history for Britain and British contemporary history.

In the *Critical* that year, a review almost certainly written by Smollett appeared shortly after the publication of the ninth volume of the *Universal History* which dealt, in part, with Japan. In this enthusiastic review, Smollett exhibited a particular fascination with a sustained comparison in the *Universal History* between the geographical similarities between the Japanese and British islands. As he states:

The ninth volume opens with the history of Japan, a subject equally curious and important...whether we consider the genius and acquired knowledge of the people, or the nature of their situation, which is, in many respects, analogous to that of Great Britain. Japan, though considerable in riches, arts, and strength, is but small in point of extent. It consists of three larger, and divers smaller islands, on the most eastern verge of Asia ... Our author justly observes, that if England and Scotland were divided from each other by arm of the sea, Japan might be aptly compared to Britain and Ireland, with all their capes, bays, channels, peninsulas, and islands, subjected to the dominion of one monarch.⁴³

Having noted the explicit comparison between the British and Japanese islands, the review goes on to suggest in detail how the comparison could have been carried even further, beyond geographical similarities to the level of national character:

He might have pursued the comparison in divers other particulars. The coasts of

Japan as a most possible source for Smollett's *Atom*, *Notes and Queries*, (March 1986): 70-73. Smollett probably did directly consult Kaempfer, particularly in that he was writing his multi-volume *Present State of all Nations* at roughly the same time as the *Atom*. The eighth and last volume of the *Present State* (London, printed for R. Baldwin, W. Johnston, S. Crowder, and Robinson and Roberts, Paternoster-row, London, 1768-69) deals with the "The Indian and Oriental Islands", including the "Japan Islands", 4-25. As in the *UH* ten years earlier, Japan is contrasted at length with China, which is described in Vol. 8, 46-81. Either way, the invoking of Kaempfer in the publisher's "Advertisement" was designed to give an aura of authenticity to the *Atom*, and was a reference Smollett's more learned readers would have recognized.

⁴³ *Critical Review* 8 (1759), 189. Compare this to Smollett in the *Present State*, where he writes: "Were South and North Britain divided by an arm of the sea, Japan might be most aptly compared to England, Scotland, and Ireland, with their respective smaller islands, peninsulas, bays, channels, &c. all under the same monarch." Vol. 8, 5.

Japan are dangerous and rocky; so are those of Great Britain. The climate of Japan is wet, stormy and variable; so is that of Great Britain... There is, moreover, a resemblance in the genius and disposition of the people: the Japanese, like the English, are brave and warlike, quick in apprehension, solid in understanding, modest, patient, courteous, docile, industrious, studious, just in their dealings, and sincere in their professions. The resemblance will likewise hold in their vices, follies, and foibles. The Japanese are proud, supercilious, passionate, humorous, and addicted to suicide; split into a multitude of religious sects, and so distracted by political factions, that the nation is at last divided between two separate govern-mints.

Perhaps the analogy is still more remarkable... if we consider them both as they are situated with respect to their neighbours. The next continent to Japan is China, which, in divers respects, may be compared to France, that lies nearest to Great Britain. China is more populous, powerful, and extensive, than Japan, which it boasts of having originally settled: its palaces are more grand; its court is more magnificent ... It is the elder in literary, as well as in mechanical arts, the centre of taste, and source of fashion. But what the Chinese have invented, the Japanese have improved ... The Chinese are remarkable for *dissimulation*, *complaisance*, and *effeminacy*: the Japanese are famous for their *integrity*, *plain-dealing*, and *manly vigour*. Finally, they are rivals, consequently jealous of each other.⁴⁴

Many of these points are repeated, almost verbatim, in Smollett's discussion of Japan in the *Present State*. In addition to the geographical comparison already noted, we find in this description that "the Chinese pretend, that the Japan Islands were first peopled by themselves" but it was more likely that, as in Britain, "the original inhabitants were a mixture of different nations ... and this conjecture is confirmed by the great difference observable between the present inhabitants ... notwithstanding their having been so long united under one monarch."⁴⁵ Smollett goes on to note that "with respect to the character of the Japanese, they are generally very active, and of a quick apprehension and good understanding, modest, patient, and courteous, and excelling all the Orientals in docility." In addition, "they are all very industrious and laborious,

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 189-90. For the rivalry between France and Britain as it manifested itself in the eighteenth century, see Linda Colley's *Britons* (New Haven, 1992), esp. 1-54 and *passim*.

⁴⁵ *Present State* Vol. 8, 5.

and much given to study and reading."⁴⁶ And finally, just as in the 1759 review, the account concludes with mention of a few curiosities of Japan, such as its "white ants", the "campfire tree", and the country's fascination with bells.⁴⁷

Even in his other literary periodical, the *British Magazine* (1760-63), Smollett displayed an interest in the oriental tale. Its lead article in January 1760 was "Omar", an oriental tale which has been attributed to Oliver Goldsmith, Smollett's editorial partner in the periodical venture.⁴⁸ Ironically, Goldsmith had intended to leave England and his native Ireland in order to pursue a career as a physician in India; this was, however, before the successful reception of his *Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning*, the first edition of which appeared in 1759, and his success with Smollett in the *British Magazine*.⁴⁹ The tradition of the oriental tale, then, can clearly be seen as contributing to the combinatory generic makeup of Smollett's *Atom*.

The spy novel or secret history subgenre of the eighteenth-century British novel can be seen as having more in common with the main tradition of the novel. One of the features of the British novel in the 1740s was its claim to certain functions previously associated with more

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 24-25; *Critical Review* 8, 193.

⁴⁸ See Basker, 196. Elsewhere, J. Harry Wolf has attributed this as well as a tale set in Greenland to Smollett. Ironically, Wolf muses on the possibility that this latter story, entitled "Igluka and Sibbersik, A Greenland Tale" and included in a collection of tales published in 1764 as *The Orientalist: A Volume of Tales after the Eastern Taste. By the author of Roderick Random, Sir Launcelot Greaves, &c.*, was composed by Smollett during his sojourn in Nice in 1764. Wolf was partly right, in the sense that Smollett had begun to work on an orientalized tale, but we now know this work was the *Atom*. See Wolf, "Tobias Smollett and the 'The Orientalist'," *Notes and Queries*, (December 1968): 456-463.

⁴⁹ In a letter to an Irish friend in 1758, Goldsmith wrote: "I suppose you have heard of my intention of going to the East Indies. The place of my destination is one of the factories on the coast of Coromandel and I go in quality of Physician and Surgeon." *The Collected Letters of Oliver Goldsmith*, Edited Katharine C. Balderston (Cambridge, 1928), 49-50.

truthful and mimetic discourses such as history, biography, and journalism.⁵⁰ In this sense, the private experience recorded in the novels of this decade and after - particularly Smollett's *Roderick Random* and the novels of Fielding and Samuel Richardson - are represented as public history. Within this didactic context, Paul Hunter has asserted,

Even the unceasing search for adventure of Smollett's heroes, the uncontrolled sexual energy of *Tom Jones*, and the intellectual, social, and physical curiosities of ... *Fanny Hill* demonstrate a *kind* of exemplarity, activity that, however much in need of directional correction, is preferable to passivity or stasis. Idleness was something the novel could not afford to represent.⁵¹

Alongside this pseudo historical tradition of the British novel in the eighteenth century, is what has been referred to as the "spy-novel" or secret history.⁵²

In many respects, the situation of the spy novel in eighteenth-century Britain was analogous to the oriental tale. That is, it was popularized by the French and achieved an exotic status among the cultivated British reading public. By 1722, Montesquieu *Persian Letters* had been translated into English and influenced a generation of British writers, culminating in Oliver Goldsmith's serial publication of the "Chinese letters" in the *Public Ledger*, collected and published aggregately in 1762 as *The Citizen of the World*. In works such as these, an alien

⁵⁰ Beasley, 43-45. For the news/novels discourse see Davis, 42-101.

⁵¹ Hunter 1990, 281. One might be initially surprised at Hunter's inclusion of John Cleland's *Fanny Hill* (1748-49) in this context. But Cleland himself seems to have had a didactic purpose in mind when he composed his ending, lost as it might have been amid the novel's sexual explicitness: "You laugh, perhaps, at this tail-piece of morality, extracted from me by the force of truth ... If you do me then justice, you will esteem me perfectly consistent in the incense I burn to Virtue. If I have painted Vice in all its gayest colours, if I have deck'd it with flowers, it has been solely in order to make the worthier, the solemn sacrifice of it, to Virtue." *Fanny Hill, or, The Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (Markham, ON, 1989), 217-18.

⁵² See Beasley, 46-53; see also Annabel Patterson, *Reading Between the Lines* (Wisconsin, 1993). Hunter has suggested that most of Smollett's own novels "are like rambling, indulgent, anecdotes gathered to be told privately to guffawing cronies." Hunter 1990, 239. In the *Atom*, however, this seems to be pushed to the limit; that is to say, the scope of Smollett's satire is so

observer delivers a behind-the-scenes look at a foreign culture, usually in order to mock its political figures. The satire, of course, is self-referential; the alien observer usually operates as an optic through which the author observes and comments upon his own culture or political system.

In Goldsmith's *Citizen*, some of the reportage of his Chinese philosopher-spy resonates with Smollett's perceived affinity between Japan and Britain. The philosopher writes that "The English seem as silent as the Japanese, yet vainer than the inhabitants of Siam. Upon my arrival I attributed that reserve to modesty, which I now find has its origin in pride...Pride seems the source not only of their national vices, but of their national virtues."⁵³ As for the Chinese, the philosopher reports how he is perceived by the residents of London and mocks their narrow, stereotypical preconceptions:

Where-ever I come, I raise either diffidence or astonishment; some fancy me no Chinese, because I am formed more like a man than a monster; and others wonder to find one born five thousand miles from England, endued with common sense. Strange, they say, that a man who has received his education at such a distance from London, should have common sense; to be born out of England, and yet have common sense! impossible! He must be some Englishman in disguise; his very visage has nothing of the true exotic barbarity.⁵⁴

The Chinese philosopher goes on to ridicule a group of self-styled orientalists who attempt to entertain him in a style befitting his ethnic predispositions:

I yesterday received an invitation from a lady of distinction, who it seems had collected all her knowledge of eastern manners from fictions every day propagated here, under the titles of eastern tales, and oriental histories: she received me very politely, but seemed to wonder that I neglected bringing opium and a tobacco box ... I was going to expose [their] mistakes, when it was insisted that I had nothing of the true eastern manner in my delivery ... Oh for an history of

wide that one wonders if any of his contemporaries survived the book unscathed enough to share in Smollett's satisfaction.

⁵³ *Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, Vol. II. Edited Arthur Friedman (Oxford, 1966), 27.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 142.

Aboulfaouris, the grand voyager, of genii, magicians, rocks, bags of bullets,
giants, and enchanter, where all is great, obscure, magnificent, and unintelligible
...⁵⁵

All of this is self-referential, as Goldsmith is poking fun at the very genre to which he was making a contribution. The *Monthly Review* recognized what Goldsmith was doing in the *Citizen*, noting that "this Chinese philosopher has nothing Asiatic about him, and is as errant a European as the Philosopher at Malmesbury; yet he has some excellent remarks upon men, manners, and things - as the phrase goes."⁵⁶ Goldsmith's *Citizen* stands as a high point in the tradition of the spy-novel - that is, the use of an ostensibly alien observer to satirize one's native culture.

The events and personages in some novels of this type, seemingly "foreign" and inaccessible, stand only as keys through which to represent European court intrigues. Unlike some other satirical traditions, the key novel displays little concern for conventional rules; behind the veil of the foreign setting, the author is free to indulge in pernicious gossip and, in many cases, character assassination and outright slander.⁵⁷

An interesting early example of this type of work in Britain - particularly in its similarity to the structure of the *Atom* - is *A Court Intrigue*, which appeared anonymously in 1741.⁵⁸ In this supposedly Greek tale, the "Oraculous Ship" - a metaphor for the State - narrates its own history

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 142-144.

⁵⁶ *Monthly Review* 16 (1762), 477. The *Critical Review* was also positive in its assessment. See *Critical Review* 13 (1762), 397-400.

⁵⁷ Beasley, 53.

⁵⁸ Another early example, less interesting because of its liberal use of historical fact, was a secret history of Charles Edward Stuart which appeared shortly after the battle of Culloden in 1746. *Ascanius; or, the Young Adventurer. A True History*, depicted the Young Pretender as an archetypal villain who embodied the Jacobite threat to the Hanoverian establishment and which stimulated an English xenophobic attitude to the Highland Scots. See Beasley, 71-74.

back to the myth of Jason and the Golden Fleece. Within the narrative, the ship relates how its captain (George II, cloaked by the character of "Hiram"), was steered by his corrupt helmsman Gomorrah (Sir Robert Walpole) towards war with Spain.⁵⁹ What is especially interesting here is the combination of the secret history with a new subgenre of fiction: novels narrated by nonhuman characters. This genre was just beginning to achieve a level of commercial popularity when Smollett was beginning his literary career in London in the early 1740s.

Novels characterized by nonhuman narrators - whether they be adventurous atoms or gold guineas - began to appear in large numbers in Britain around the middle of the eighteenth century. Examples include Francis Coventry's *The History of Pompey the Little*, published in 1751 (the same year as his aforementioned *Essay on the New Species of Writing*) and which relates the picaresque wanderings of a Bolognese lap-dog; Charles Johnstone's *Chrysal; or, the Adventures of a Guinea* (1760); and, of course, Smollett's *History and Adventures of an Atom* in 1769. Smollett was not the only major writer to employ the genre, however; in the second volume of his *Miscellanies* (1743), Fielding included *A Journey from this World to the Next*, in which a transmigrating soul narrates his journey from his material body to the gates of Elysium and his subsequent judgement once arriving. This was a perfect vehicle for Fielding's moral satire, just as it would be later for Smollett's political and intellectual satire.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 57. The reference is to the War of Jenkin's Ear (1739-41), which was a prelude to British involvement in the larger War of the Austrian Succession (1740-48).

⁶⁰ This is, I believe, where the relationship between Fielding's *Journey* and Smollett's *Atom* has been misinterpreted. Toby A. Olshin has considered the two works together on the basis of what he perceives as a Christian humanist message common to not only these two examples of the genre but to Johnstone and Coventry as well. While it is true that a certain preoccupation with metempsychosis and the transmigration of the soul is common to all of the above novels, in the case of the *Atom* its emphasis is only significant in two respects: to establish the speaking ability and authorial omniscience of the atom, and to furnish opportunities for the erudite digressions which are such a fundamental part of the work. The *Atom* is not, then, dominated by a chiefly

In *Pompey*, Coventry chose this genre in order to continue the criticism of the novel form which he had begun in his *Essay on the New Species of Writing* (1751). Not entirely happy with novels that chose to celebrate ignoble and, at times, immoral heroes, when "even the Prisons and Stews are ransacked to find Materials for Novels and Romances", he decided to push the limits of the genre to an almost absurd level, comparing his biography of a lapdog to Conyers Middleton's life of Cicero. Coventry claimed that he, like Middleton, had "deserted the beaten Track of Biographers, and chosen a Subject worthy the Attention of polite and classical Readers.⁶¹ And, following the classical convention of most British historical writing to the 1760s, he concluded the work with a "Character" of his hero:

Having thus traced our hero ... nothing now remains, but to draw his Character, for the Benefit and Information of Posterity. In so doing we imitate the greatest, and most celebrated Historians, Lord *Clarendon*, Dr. Middleton, and others ... Nay, many Biographers go so far as to record the Colour of their Hero's Complexion, the Shade of his Hair ... and other equally important Particulars; which cannot fail to convey the greatest Satisfaction and Improvement to their Readers.⁶²

Coventry's satire, however, was more along the lines of the social satire common to the picaresque mode; as Pompey bounced from owner to owner, he became an observer of all ranks of British society. Smollett's example of the nonhuman subgenre - the *History and Adventures of an Atom* - incorporated some elements of the picaresque (namely, the atom's various transmigrations before ending up in Nathaniel Peacock's body), but in its satirical aims it has more in common with the Augustan and Menippean traditions.

religious theme as Olshin suggests. See "Form and Theme in Novels about Non-Human Characters, a Neglected Sub-Genre," *Genre* 2 (1969): 43-56.

⁶¹ *The History of Pompey the Little*. Edited Robert Adams Day (Oxford, 1974), 5-6.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 201-202.

Martz alludes briefly to many of the influences and sources I have been discussing, but dismisses the work in the end as simply “an amalgam of popular devices” derived from his years of “hack work” and “general reading”, particularly his activities with the *Universal History*.⁶³ It is my contention that, while the *Atom* does derive much of its material content from other genres and intellectual traditions, as well as from Smollett's wildly diverse literary activities from 1756 to 1769, this is precisely what contributes to its richness and depth as a combinatory historical text. The question needs to be pushed further: why does a writer of Smollett's extraordinary abilities and reputation publish such a work, anonymously or not? Ralph Cohen is instructive when he asks a similar question: when “the novel” becomes the “subgenres” of the novel, what are the consequences?⁶⁴ That is to say, what possibilities of historical explanation are produced by not looking at the eighteenth-century novel as a monolithic, stable genre? Furthermore, why does Smollett use the subgenres used earlier by Coventry, Goldsmith, Shebbeare, and Johnstone? What does it allow him to do? Is the *Atom* - a product of his generic experimentation - any less significant than his other, supposedly canonical works? What Smollett actually does in the *Atom* is build upon those earlier activities and generic conventions of the eighteenth century, the result being a remarkable literary alloy which deserves serious attention as a form with which to engage

⁶³ Martz, 93-96. Indeed, it almost seems that Martz, in this section of his book, cannot wait to get to *Humphrey Clinker*, Smollett's last and best known novel. The *Atom* is treated as a grotesque curiosity owing more to Smollett's ill health than to his powers of intellectual invention, but which must be dealt with if the professed aim of the book be fulfilled.

⁶⁴ Cohen, 91. An interesting parallel might be Johnson and his oriental and moral fable, *Rasselas* (1759). The genre had begun to stagnate by the time Johnson employed it; moreover, in his famous *Rambler* 4 essay nine years earlier, Johnson had censured fiction writing for its lack of morality. As Robert DeMaria suggests, “The form of the oriental tale itself had been used so much in Johnson's lifetime that employing it at all was a tacit acknowledgement that the compact between author and reader could include some laughter at the expense of [a genre which had become] a self-conscious archaism that implicitly criticized fictionalizing, while demanding that

with and relate the contemporary history of a tumultuous period in British history during the Seven Years' War.

The *Atom* as a Combinatory Text: Satiric Traditions

In the review of the *Atom* in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, its Japanese contents were noted at length, but there was no mention of the work as a key-novel. Instead, most attention is paid to its scatological preoccupations: "there is a mixture of indelicacy and indecency, which though it cannot gratify the loosest imagination, can scarce fail to disgust the coarsest."⁶⁵ The *Monthly Review* treated it more fully, but the review, by John Hawkesworth, is generally unfavourable. Hawkesworth writes: "There is much spirit, humour and satire in this piece; but there is also much nastiness and obscenity [as well as] many inaccuracies of style and expression; but it would be treating a hasty performance of this kind too severely to point them out."⁶⁶ Given Smollett's previous association, it is not surprising that the review in the *Critical* was enthusiastic, even though his involvement with that periodical was minimal after 1765:

This satire unites the happy extravagance of Rabelais to the splendid humour of Swift. The reader needs to peruse only a few pages to perceive that it alludes to this present age, though, we will not say, to this country...We are unwilling to be more particular in our account of this truly original piece of humour, for reasons that may be easily guessed ...⁶⁷

it justify itself on moral and religious terms." *The Life of Johnson*, 206. This statement could perhaps be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to Smollett and the *Atom*.

⁶⁵ *Gentleman's Magazine* 39 (1769), 200-205.

⁶⁶ *Monthly Review* 40 (1769), 441-55. The review does point out some "inconsistencies", however, such as the atom's claim to have been in the body of a yeoman at Bosworth in 1485 (and therefore in a position to describe Richard III). This claim does not mesh chronologically with the atom's earlier narration of its various transmigrations.

It is underlined here, then, that the book was to be read as a history of contemporary political and socio-cultural history.

The review in the *Critical* invokes Rabelais as a source for this curious satire, but the influence of Apuleius is also noticeable. Smollett seems to acknowledge both Apuleius and Lucian, who also wrote a work similar to the *Golden Ass*, and who is mentioned by Smollett in the passage quoted earlier from *Ferdinand Fathom*.⁶⁸

To begin with, the ass is a motif that resonates throughout the book. This motif varies from describing people as braying like asses,⁶⁹ to more complex allusions to the transformation theme of the *Golden Ass*. Smollett goes to great descriptive lengths when dealing with the Duke of Newcastle's sexual metamorphosis immediately prior to his resignation, a transformation symbolic of his impotence as prime minister. Other minor instances of transformation occur throughout, such as the changing of administrations by the "puppetmaster" Bute behind the scenes from 1763-1768, but as we will see, no metamorphosis was portrayed more dramatically than the policy reversals of William Pitt, the primary target of the book's political satire. Another possible allusion to the *Golden Ass* could be the description of the Mob (in the *Atom*, this epithet usually refers to the House of Commons or, by extension, the enfranchised) as the mythical guard dog Cerberus, diverted by Pitt's eloquent "sops" or pacifiers. In the allegorical central episode of

⁶⁷ *Critical Review* 27 (1769), 362-69.

⁶⁸ Lucian was also a central classical authority for many analyses of eighteenth-century historical method. See Everett Zimmerman, *The Boundaries of Fiction* (Cornell, 1996), 227-28.

⁶⁹ In particular the scene where Pitt is depicted braying like an ass in 1761, just before resigning over the Spanish war issue, 105. For Apuleius as well as, it seems, for Smollett, the ass was the lowest, basest perspective from which to view events. For other examples of the ass, or mule, motif, see 9, 12, 25, 27, 35.

the *Golden Ass*, Psyche gets past Cerberus into the Underworld by throwing him one of her sops.⁷⁰

More directly evident is the influence of Francois Rabelais. The level of scatology of the *Atom* is the primary indicator of Smollett's awareness of his debt to Rabelais, as the review in the *Critical* points out. Examples of scatology in the book are too numerous to catalogue, but one example in particular bears a strong resemblance to an episode in Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1532-34).

In describing the Duke of Newcastle's "itching of the podex", the atom tells Peacock that Fika-kaka (Newcastle) consulted "the celebrated Fan-sey, whose spirit afterwards informed the body of Rabelais." In treating Fika-kaka, Fan-sey

tried the method of gentle friction: for which purpose he used almost the very same substances which were many centuries after applied by Gargantua to his own posteriors; such as a night cap, a pillow-bier, a slipper, a poke, a pannier, a beaver, a hen, a cock, a chicken, a calf-skin, a hare-skin, a pigeon, a cormorant, a lawyer's bag, a lamprey, a coif, a lure, nay even a goose's neck.⁷¹

Comparison with the following passage from Rabelais clearly shows that Smollett was attempting to place himself in a similar tradition of satire:

After that, said Gargantua, I wiped myself with a kerchief, with a pillow, with a slipper, with a game-bag ... Then I wiped myself with a hen, a cock, and a chicken, with a calf's skin, a hare, a pigeon, and a cormorant, with a lawyer's bag, with a penitent's hood, with a coif, with an otter. But to conclude, I say and maintain that there is no arse-wiper like a well-downed goose, if you hold her neck between your legs.⁷²

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 35. Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, trans. Robert Graves (Harmondsworth, 1950), 130.

⁷¹ *Atom*, 15.

⁷² *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Book One, Chapter XIII. trans. J.M. Cohen (Harmondsworth, 1955), 69.

Smollett's *Critical Review* had noted similar Rabelaisian echoes in its reviews of the successive volumes of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, and it has been suggested that Smollett wrote the *Atom* in order to rival that work.⁷³ This may or may not have been one of Smollett's motives for writing the book; however, such an assertion overlooks an earlier and more established satirical tradition, itself combining with Rabelaisian and Menippean forms: Augustan satire.⁷⁴

Much of the grotesque satire of the *Atom* is accomplished by Smollett's use of satiric devices and generic conventions evident in Swift. The Augustans had often experimented with early eighteenth-century generic forms, the most innovative of their experimentations resulting in the mock-epic or alternatively, mock-heroic descriptions of battles such as Swift's *Battle of the Books* and Chapters V-VII of *Gulliver's Travels*. While some of Smollett's earlier novels - *Roderick Random* and *Ferdinand Fathom*, in particular - employ grotesque imagery of war in the tradition of both *Gargantua and Pantagruel* and *Gulliver's Travels*,⁷⁵ this is not Smollett's aim in the *Atom*.

Rather, the main political narrative of the book (the subject of the next chapter) is interrupted at irregular intervals by seemingly irrelevant yet erudite digressions on a variety of topics. In these digressions, which form a fundamental part of the text, Smollett satirizes many different branches of modern learning in much the same way that Swift satirized the defenders of modern scholarship over the ancients in the *Battle of the Books*.⁷⁶

⁷³ *Critical Review* 11 (1761), 315; 13 (1762), 66-68.

⁷⁴ J. Paul Hunter has suggested that Sterne himself should be placed within an earlier, more conservative and Augustan context. See "Response as Reformation: *Tristram Shandy* and the Art of Interruption," *Novel* 4 (1971): 132-46.

⁷⁵ For the grotesque in Smollett's earlier novels see David McNeil, *The Grotesque Depiction of War and the Military in Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (Cranbury, NJ, Associated University Presses, 1990).

⁷⁶ See Joseph M. Levine, *The Battle of the Books* (Ithaca, 1991), 110-20.

Digressions and their Purpose in the *Atom*

Smollett makes frequent use of digressions in the course of the main narrative of the novel. This is done primarily as the use of digressions is an integral part of the tradition of Menippean satire, which it has been shown was the earliest of the many satiric traditions Smollett drew upon in composing the novel. As Northrop Frye has stated, "The Menippean artist, dealing with intellectual themes and attitudes, shows his exuberance in intellectual ways, by piling up an enormous mass of erudition about his theme or in overhauling his pedantic targets with an avalanche of their own jargon."⁷⁷

The digression was also a frequently used satiric device in Augustan satire. In *A Tale of a Tub*, Swift even includes "A Digression in Praise of Digressions" in which "the great modern improvement of digressions" is discussed.⁷⁸ It was also used, along with a number of other devices of mock-scholarship, in many of the novels with nonhuman narrators discussed earlier.⁷⁹ In 1781, while reviewing a short work entitled *The Adventures of a Rupee*, the *Critical Review* pointed out the tendency of novels in this subgenre to use such devices:

⁷⁷ Frye, 311. Interestingly, Frye suggests that a more proper name for the genre, rather than Menippean satire, would be "anatomy", 312. This is interesting because when the atom first appears to Peacock near the beginning of the novel, the terrified haberdasher refers to the voice in his brain as an "atomy", which in the eighteenth century could also mean an anatomical skeleton.

⁷⁸ *Gulliver's Travels and Other Writings*. Edited Louis A. Landa (Boston, 1960), 317.

⁷⁹ Coventry's *Pompey* includes two long digressions: on the soul and on "nothing", 38, 108. In Fielding's *Journey*, the journeying soul lingers in Elysium before its judgement by Minos. While waiting, it is privy to a number of debates between erudite souls on such matters as Homer's birthplace and other pedantic eighteenth-century intellectual disputes. *Miscellanies*. Volume Two. Edited Bertrand A. Goldgar and Hugh Amory (Hanover, NH, Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 37-38.

This mode of making up a book, and styling it the Adventures of a Cat, a Dog, a Monkey, a Hackney-Coach, a Louse, a Shilling, a Rupee, or anything else, is grown so fashionable, that few months pass which do not bring one of them under our inspection. It is indeed a convenient method to writers of the inferior class, of emptying their common-place books, and throwing together all the farrago of public transactions, private characters, old and new stories, every thing, in short, which they can pick up.⁸⁰

This observation on the nonhuman subgenre and its use of widely diverse materials certainly applies to *The History and Adventures of an Atom* published twelve years earlier. Moreover, the review makes instructive references to some of these materials which are drawn upon to create such devices as the digression. One such tradition was the commonplace book, which was part of a Renaissance Humanist tradition of noting things - such as quotations from the authors of antiquity - in personal handbooks to be recalled for use at an opportune point.⁸¹ In 1771, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defined the commonplace book as "a register of what things occur, worthy to be noted, in the course of a man's thinking or study, so disposed, as that, among a number of subjects, any one may be easily found."⁸² Using John Locke's commonplace book as an example, the article goes on to suggest how different bits of knowledge were to be organized under their proper headings.

In his digression on digressions in the *Tale of a Tub*, Swift makes reference to the practice among "modern wits" of compiling such notebooks and then pouring out their contents to fill their works. As Swift observes,

what though his head be empty, provided his commonplace book be full;

⁸⁰ *Critical Review* 52 (1781), 477-78.

⁸¹ Richard Yeo, "Ephraim Chamber's *Cyclopaedia* (1728) and the Tradition of Commonplaces," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 57, No. 1 (1996): 161. See also his *Encyclopedic Visions: Scientific Dictionaries and Enlightenment Culture* (Cambridge, 2001).

⁸² Vol. II, 241.

and if you will bate him but the circumstances of method, and style, and grammar, and invention; allow him but the common privileges of transcribing from others, and digressing from himself, as often he shall see occasion ... Without these allowances, how is it possible we modern wits should ever have an opportunity to introduce our collections, listed under so many thousand heads of a different nature?⁸³

The commonplace book itself, moreover, can be seen as a generic tradition, particularly in its relation to eighteenth-century encyclopedic genres. A continuity exists between the commonplace book and the encyclopedia, for example in the influence which the former had on Ephraim Chamber's *Cyclopaedia*, the first British encyclopedic dictionary of the arts and sciences.⁸⁴ The *Cyclopaedia* was a major source for much of the digressive material in Smollett's *Atom*. Smollett would have examined a number of encyclopedic texts, as well as the scientific and medical publications which contributed to encyclopedic compilations, during his editorship of the *Critical Review*.⁸⁵ Smollett's enthusiastic reception of encyclopedic texts is reflected in the following extract from the *Critical Review*:

There is scarce any branch of knowledge, which in the present age has not been inculcated under the form of a dictionary; and this has become necessary, from the immense extension of all kinds of history and science.⁸⁶

Seen in this context, the frequency of digression in the *Atom* can be accounted for. Yet again, Smollett is attempting to place himself in the Augustan tradition as he, like Swift before him, satirizes the technique of the digression while employing it himself to take satirical and mock-

⁸³ Swift, 320.

⁸⁴ Yeo, 157-175. A similar argument has placed Samuel Johnson's 1755 *Dictionary* within the commonplace tradition. See Paul J. Korshin, "Johnson and the Renaissance Dictionary," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35 (1974): 300-312.

⁸⁵ It has been determined that Smollett wrote thirty per cent of the reviews on science and medicine in the 1756 volumes of the *Critical Review*. See Basker, 118. It should also be remembered that Smollett obtained a medical degree in 1750 and did practice for a short period.

scholarly thrusts at some of the intellectual debates of the contemporary period he was both satirizing and historically narrating.

It has been argued in this chapter that Smollett's *History and Adventures of an Atom* draws upon a variety of satiric genres and traditions to produce an interesting eighteenth-century satirical form of “novelized” contemporary history. Attention to Japanese historical detail is combined with satiric invention to produce a more sophisticated type of key novel, or secret history, than that produced by other works to which it has often been compared. Far from being a curious product of a great writer's “hack” period, it reflects the range of literary and historiographical activities which occupied Smollett from 1756 to 1769. The next chapter will examine how this form of contemporary history narrates the tumultuous history of Hanoverian Britain from the early 1750s to the late 1760s, as well as delve further into the extent to which anecdotal history offered possibilities for representation of the historical present during this period.

⁸⁶ *Critical Review* 10 (1760), 445. The *Universal History* itself can be seen as related to other encyclopedic/historiographical projects such as the *Britannica* and Sir John Sinclair's *Statistical*

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORY, THE NOVEL, AND ANECDOTE: THE POLITICAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY OF HANOVERIAN BRITAIN

This chapter argues that Smollett's *History and Adventures of an Atom* is a narrative of political events in contemporary Britain from 1753 to 1768. Within this political narrative, Smollett expresses a patriotic concern over the conduct of the Seven Years' War under the Pitt-Newcastle ministry. In particular, Smollett can be seen as objecting to Britain's Continental connection to Hanover and Frederickian Prussia which he saw as damaging to British interests. Conversely, the administration of Lord Bute and the young George III is depicted favourably because it ended the war and severed the Hanover connection. It is also a remarkable instance of "novelized history" and stands as an important instance of narrative contemporary history, alongside other forms such as the anecdotal memoir or biographical history.

The Political Narrative of the *Atom*: 1753-1768

The History and Adventures of an Atom relates a fairly taut chronological narrative. This narrative, dictated by the atom to Peacock, is interrupted only by the numerous digressions examined in the previous chapter. The text can be divided into three parts consisting (quite unequally) of an Introductory section, wherein Smollett carefully frames the atom's narrative; a second part which presents a "secret history" of George II's Cabinet from 1754-1757; and a third

section which is a narrative of British political history - foreign and domestic - from 1753 to 1768.

After the obligatory editorial disclaimer of the discovered manuscript, a device common to novelistic genres and especially the nonhuman subgenre, Smollett begins to construct the devices that will frame the entire text. After the atom makes its presence known to Nathaniel Peacock, the London haberdasher whose body it inhabits, the scatological nature of the book is quickly established, as Peacock's fear of the voice inside his brain induces flatulence.⁸⁷ After this initial scene of superstitious terror, Smollett introduces the scheme by which he makes his atom speak. As the atom explains to Peacock, such particles are "endued with such efficacy of reason, as cannot be expected in an aggregate body ... Yet, those ideas which we singly possess, we cannot communicate, except once in a thousand years [again the parallel with *Chrysal*], and then only, when we fill a certain place in the pineal gland of a human creature, the very station which I now maintain in thine."⁸⁸ Having established the technicalities of the situation, the atom begins to dictate his narrative to Peacock "for the instruction of British ministers."

This didactic purpose is quickly undermined, however. In describing its transmigrations and eventual arrival in the brain of Peacock, events which transpired after its sojourn in Japan,

⁸⁷ This episode is an interesting parallel with the ending of Johnstone's *Chrysal*. Just before revealing its hermetic secrets, the alchemist is unable to control his flatulence: "The spirit started at the unpardonable offence to his purity; and looking at me with ineffable contempt, indignation, and abhorrence, vanished from my sight, without deigning a word more... The labour of my life being lost; the *one* moment in a thousand years slipped away in vain. But such is the consequence of human weakness; such the end of all the works, of all the expectations of man." *Chrysal*, Vol. II (Dublin, 1760), 219-220.

⁸⁸ *Atom*, 6. In the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the *glandula pinealis* is described as "a small soft greyish body, about the size of an ordinary pea, irregularly round, and sometimes of the figure of a pine apple." No mention is made of its function. Vol. I, 286. In Coventry's *Pompey*, in the context of a debate concerning the location of the soul, reference is made to Descartes theory that placed the soul in the pineal gland. *Pompey*, 38.

the atom pushes the picaresque to a scatological extreme: the atom describes its passages through a series of excretions which are meticulously catalogued, until its final ingestion by Ephraim Peacock, the father of Nathaniel.⁸⁹ Once this preliminary framing episode ends, the atom begins to narrate its “secret history” of the Japanese court.

George II's Cabinet, 1754-1757

The narrative begins with a description of the current Dairo, or emperor, Got-hama-baba (George II), who is not even a “lineal descendant of the antient Dairos ... but sprung from a collateral branch which was invited from a foreign country in the person of *Bupo*.”⁹⁰ Individuals such as Got-hama-baba and the others to follow, if not readily identifiable on the basis of character traits and oblique references to events in the collective memory of the British reading public, were identified in several early editions with an appendix or “key”. Smollett establishes early on his principal charge against the Hanoverians: their “blind attachment to the worship of Fakku-basi” or the Temple of the White Horse, a reference to the Hanover coat of arms which featured a white horse. Others shared this animosity towards the “Continental connection.” During the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-49), George's overall concern for the interests of Hanover created obvious tensions in his Cabinet.⁹¹

⁸⁹ *Atom*, 7. Smollett uses the term “animalcule”, which the first *Encyclopedia Britannica* (published two years later) defines as “an animal so minute in its size, as not to be the immediate object of our senses.” Vol. I, 316.

⁹⁰ *Atom*, 9-10. Bupo is the key-name for George I, the first Hanoverian monarch.

⁹¹ Among the many general accounts of political history during this period, see W.A. Speck, *Stability and Strife: England, 1714-1760* (Cambridge, Mass., 1977), 243.

Thomas Pelham, the Duke of Newcastle, is introduced as Fika-kaka and, like the Dairo, he also displays a “superstitious devotion for Fakku-basi” (12-13).⁹² It is at this point that reference is made to the first dateable event in the narrative: the so-called Jew Bill of 1753. The “Nem-buds-ju”, a Buddhist sect in Japan that Smollett had read about in the course of his work with the *Universal History*, stand in for the Jewish minority in eighteenth-century Britain. As the atom relates,

The Nem-buds-ju, being few in number, and generally hated by the whole nation, had recourse to the protection of Fika-kaka ... Then a law was promulgated in their favour; a step which was so far from exciting the jealousy of the Bonzas [Anglican clerics], that there was not above three that opened their lips in disapprobation of the measure.⁹³

This picture of non-opposition to the bill was true of the House of Lords, but not to the Commons. Anti-Semitic sentiments were exploited by the opposition in the House, and Newcastle was forced to repeal it in 1754.⁹⁴ During all these events, the atom was lodged beneath the toenail of the Dairo (until transferred to the perineum of Fika-kaka during one of the daily kicking rituals inside the imperial chambers, perhaps a lewd variation on the “royal touch” – that is, a scandalous sexual connotation.)

The remainder of this second section of the *Atom* fills out the satirical portrait of George II's ministry under Newcastle. Of relevance here is Smollett's depiction of two factions within the Cabinet, each jostling for position and influence. One of the recurring preoccupations of the novel - along with the Hanover connection to European affairs - is the paralyzing effect of faction in eighteenth-century British politics. Aligned against the Newcastle-Earl of Hardwicke-Admiral

⁹² *Atom*, 12-13.

⁹³ *Atom*, 14.

⁹⁴ What was really a very mild measure was exaggerated by the opposition press. See Speck (1977), 256-57.

Anson nexus was a rival faction under the direction of the Duke of Cumberland, whose obesity Smollett cleverly reflected by depicting him as “Fatzman”, an actual Japanese warlord.

Cumberland's career was built not only on his success in the War of the Austrian Succession, but on his brutal suppression of the Jacobite rebels at Culloden on April 16, 1746. In keeping with the geographical affinities noted earlier by Smollett in his review of the *Universal History* and in the *Present State of all Nations*, the Scottish rebels are allegorized as people from the north island of Japan (Ximians). As a Scot and the author of “The Tears of Scotland”, a play written just after Culloden, Smollett is clearly representing what should have been exemplary behaviour when he ironically depicts a benevolent Cumberland in the aftermath of the victory:

Instead of sending out the ministers of blood, rapine, and revenge, to ravage, burn, and destroy, without distinction of age, sex, or principle; he extended the arms of mercy to all who would embrace that indulgence.⁹⁵

Smollett then goes on to examine the anti-Scottish wave which lingered after the rebellion, allegorizing it as the south Japanese people's taste for the viscera of Ximians.⁹⁶

The Main Political Narrative in the *Atom*: 1754-1768

The third and final part of the *Atom* consists of a narrative of events from 1754 to 1768, but within these chronological limits, the most substantial portion of Smollett's secret history covers the period from 1756-63, the years in which Britain was embroiled in the Seven Years'

⁹⁵ *Atom*, 23; 153 (n.264). On Smollett's attitude towards the 1745-6 rebellion in the “Tears of Scotland” and *Roderick Random*, see Leith Davis, *Acts of Union: Scotland and the Literary Negotiation of the British Nation 1707-1830* (Stanford, 1998), Chp 2.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

War against France and her allies. The atom begins with the peacetime hostilities between the two countries which began in earnest in 1754 and precipitated the crisis:

In the year of the period Foggien one hundred an fifty-four, the tranquillity of Japan was interrupted by the incroachments of the Chinese adventurers ... They even settled colonies, and built forts on some of them, while the two enemies were at peace with each other.⁹⁷

This is presumably a reference to the forts which the French had begun to build along the Ohio river in 1754; the building of these forts led to a deterioration of Anglo-French relations which culminated in a series of military skirmishes in 1755.⁹⁸

The narrative quickly moves on to the state of open war which was declared in 1756. The first major event the atom relates is the loss of the island of Minorca to the French in that year, an event interpreted in Britain as potentially disastrous. It is in relation to this event that Smollett first raises one of his chief concerns about contemporary British politics: the growing power and influence of the House of Commons and, by extension, public opinion. As one of the Dairo's council members advised him,

The multitude ... is a many headed monster - it is a Cerberus that must have a sop: - it is a wild beast, so ravenous that nothing but blood will appease its appetite: - it is a whale, that must have a barrel for its amusement: - it is a daemon to which we must offer up human sacrifice.⁹⁹

The Newcastle ministry needed a scapegoat in order to deflect attention from their own mishandling of the Minorca campaign; accordingly, the government settled on Admiral Byng (Bihn-go) as the sacrificial victim. As Newcastle assured the crowds that demanded his

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁹⁸ Speck (1977), 262.

⁹⁹ *Atom*, 35.

punishment: "he shall be tried immediately, [and] he shall be hanged directly."¹⁰⁰ Smollett's atom goes on to describe the defamation campaign carried out against Byng, culminating in his execution.

The aspect of the incident which seemed to bother Smollett was not so much the question of Byng's degree of cowardice, but rather his belief that Byng's execution was simply a way to appease the public, a belief reflected in the passage from the *Atom* quoted above. In a letter to John Moore, his cousin and fellow physician, in 1756, Smollett gives his view on the events:

Tho' I never dabble in Politics, I cannot help saying that there seems to have been no Treachery in delivering up St. Philip's fort [Minorca], nor even in the scandalous affair with the French fleet, which was owing to the personal Timidity of our admiral, who is at present the object of the public Detestation. Indeed, the People seem to be in a ferment, and there are not wanting rascally Incendiaries to inflame their Discontent ...¹⁰¹

Voltaire described his disgust over the incident in *Candide* three years later, in a satiric tone anticipating Smollett's *Atom*. Observing the execution while visiting England, Candide asks about the circumstances behind it. An English spectator replied: "in this country it is of very great service to kill an admiral now and then, in order to make the rest fight better."¹⁰² Smollett's indignation at such public concessions to popular opinion recurs frequently in the *Atom*.

This public opinion, characterized variously by Smollett as "the Mob" or "the many-headed Hydra", is harnessed and used to the political advantage of the central character in the atom's narrative of "Japanese" history. This character is Taycho, based on a *shogun* named Hideyoshi who rose from humble beginnings to the rank of viceregent of the Japanese empire. Smollett described this person, and the circumstances surrounding his rise to power during a

¹⁰⁰ Speck (1977), 264.

¹⁰¹ *Letters*, 46-47.

period of political confusion in sixteenth-century Japan, in *The Present State of All Nations*, a work which was written alongside much of the *Atom*:

During these distractions and confusions, a common soldier, by name Tayckoy, a person of obscure birth, but of an entertaining genius, found means to raise himself to the imperial dignity; having, in little more than three years time, by an uncommon share of good fortune and success, subdued all his competitors and opponents ... The Dairo, not being in a condition to obstruct or put a stop to his progress, was forced to submit to his terms.¹⁰³

In the person of Taycho, Smollett had found what he considered a remarkably suitable key for William Pitt, later Earl of Chatham (1708-78), whose rise to power is described by the atom. Smollett had at one time admired Pitt, even dedicating his *Complete History* to him in 1757. But in the *Atom* he is depicted as an opportunistic politician whose chief skill is a sophistic eloquence and ability to manipulate the mob. The reason for this shift in Smollett's perception of Pitt was the latter's commitment, after 1760, to the protection of Hanover and the continuation of the war in Continental Europe.

In the *Atom's* narrative until 1760, George II is satirized for his devotion to the German electorate of Hanover, his ancestral homeland. Hanover (Jeddo) is referred to by the atom as the "little farm", the security of which was the foremost priority of George and his Cabinet, even if this meant continuing the war and its enormous expense. By using Jeddo as a key for Hanover, Smollett once again drew upon his work with the Japanese part of the *Universal History*. In his review of that volume in the *Critical*, Smollett describes the two largest cities in Japan: Meaco [modern Kyoto] and Jeddo [modern Tokyo]. While the review points out that the former was the nominal capital city, it notes that for much of the year, the emperor resided in Jeddo.¹⁰⁴ In the

¹⁰² *Candide and Zadig* (New York, 1966), 72-73.

¹⁰³ *Present State of All Nations*, Vol. 8, 10-11.

¹⁰⁴ *Critical Review* 8 (1759), 193.

Atom, Meaco stands for London, but by designating Hanover as Jeddo the implication is that the German electorate functions as the *de facto* capital of Britain. The folly of this connection to Hanover is emphasized by Smollett in the form of the oath uttered by the Dairo, which includes the following ridiculous assertion: "I believe that the island of Nippon is joined to the continent of Jeddo [and] that two and two make seven: that the sun rules the night, the stars the day; and the moon is made of green cheese."¹⁰⁵

Pitt had earlier been a staunch opponent of any Continental connections with Hanover, or Prussia as it was emerging under Frederick the Great; by 1758, he had reversed his views and fully endorsed such connections by maintaining British troops in Hanover and offering financial subsidies to Prussia, Britain's new ally against France and Austria.¹⁰⁶ Smollett began to sour on Pitt around this time, and in the *Atom* suggests that Pitt opportunistically changed his Hanover policy in order to obtain power within the Newcastle wartime coalition. As Taycho says to Got-hama-baba:

admit me to a share of the administration - I will commence your humble slave - I will protect the farm at the expence of Japan, while there is an oban left in the island of Nippon; and I will muzzle these bears [the firms and merchants which Pitt manipulated] so effectually, that they shall not shew their teeth, except in applauding our proceedings.¹⁰⁷

As "Chief Scribe" (Secretary of State), Taycho committed himself to three primary interests: the protection of the farm in Jeddo, the war effort, and controlling the "Mob" (House of Commons).

¹⁰⁵ *Atom*, 27.

¹⁰⁶ For an analysis of Pitt and his Hanover policy, see Marie Peters, *Pitt and Popularity* (Oxford, 1980), 115-142. This difference of attitude toward Continental connections had a polarizing effect on public opinion as well as marking a fundamental shift in policy between the Pitt-Newcastle ministry and the Bute ministry which followed in 1762.

¹⁰⁷ *Atom*, 41.

According to the atom, Taycho was brilliantly successful in these aims, particularly in his transformation of public attitudes towards Jeddo:

The farm of Yesso, which they had so long execrated as a putrid and painful excrescence upon the breech of their country ... they now fondled as a favourite mole, nay, and cherished as the apple of their eye.¹⁰⁸

The war, however, began to turn in favour of the British. After the taking of Quebec in 1759, the *Atom's* secret narrative relates how Pitt took credit for the victory and, in a grotesque image typical of the work as a whole, remarks how the orator “milked the dugs of the monster [the Mob] till the blood came.”¹⁰⁹ What was worse for Smollett, though, was the by now complete reversal of Pitt regarding Continental connections, even to the point of courting the favour of Frederick the Great (Brut-an-tiffi). “By this time”, explains the atom, “Taycho was become not only a convert to the system of Tartary (Germany), which he had formerly persecuted, but also an enthusiast in love and admiration of Brut-an-tiffi, who had lately sent him his poetical works in a present.”¹¹⁰

As we shall see in the next chapter, Smollett's consistent objection to Continental connections is expressed in the *Continuation of the Complete History of England* (1760-65), albeit in a more restrained and “objective” manner. What is important to note in the *Atom's* narrative up to 1760 is Smollett's clear opposition to the Pitt-Newcastle ministry's decision to pursue narrowly Hanoverian interests over the larger interests of the British state. In prolonging the war on the Continent, Britain was accumulating an enormous debt that, according to Smollett, was completely unnecessary and counterproductive to British interests. In this context,

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 93.

Smollett's political ideology is decidedly anti-ministerial and against the continuance of the Seven Years' War.

Another tenet in Smollett's political ideology becomes evident in the *Atom's* political narrative as it carries events into the 1760s. This is his distaste for faction, whether opportunistically motivated like Pitt's, or under the banner of party loyalties. Smollett's awareness of these structures - whether or not one can refer to them as "party" structures at this point is a matter of debate¹¹¹ - comes to the fore in the atom's dictation of events after the death of Got-hama-baba (George II) in 1760.

With the accession of Gio-Gio (George III) and his favourite Yak-Strot (John Stuart, 3rd Earl of Bute), Smollett outlines some fundamental shifts in policy that actually took place took place at Westminster. They are summarized as four political objectives: the maintenance of the established Anglican Church, the elimination of faction and corruption, the ending of the war, and finally, the severing of the Hanoverian connection (at least in its tangible, financial sense).¹¹² With regard to faction, Smollett believed that the traditional names of Whig and Tory had lost their meaning long ago; in the *Atom*, the two parties of Japan are identified with the almost

¹¹¹ The debate, it could be said, begins with Sir Lewis Namier, who in his *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III* (1929) downplayed the significance of Whig and Tory party structures at Westminster without wholly dismissing them. For the view that the Tory-Whig polarity at Westminster had dissolved by 1760, see J.C.D. Clark, *The Dynamics of Change: The crisis of the 1750s and English party systems* (Cambridge, 1982).

¹¹² *Atom*, 96-97. As Ian Christie has written: "[Bute] naively believed that a reign of virtue should and could replace a reign of vice and corruption. Under his influence the young prince was encouraged to think the worst of his grandfather's ministers and to understand that his task would be to cleanse the Augean stables of corruption." *Wars and Revolutions: Britain, 1760-1815*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), 58.

identical names of “Shit-tilk-ums-heit” and “She-it-kums-hi-til”, clearly indicating the interchangeability of the two.¹¹³

This ambivalence towards party designations was stated more directly in the *Briton*, a political pamphlet series which Smollett wrote in support of Bute from 1762-1763. In January 1763 Smollett wrote:

We have of late heard mighty parades upon the merit of Whiggism, and the most sarcastic invectives against Toryism, though perhaps no principle for these 30 years past, has been better understood, than that they were terms invented by knaves, and adopted by fools ... for my own part, I know no difference in the principle, tho' there is in the exercise of their administrations.... Thus ... I cannot pronounce our present government to be either Whig or Tory.¹¹⁴

In Smollett's view, Pitt's opportunistic reversals were microcosms of this wider political fickleness and mutability. After Pitt resigned his Cabinet position in 1761 over the issue of war with Spain, he quickly accepted a generous pension. This added to Smollett's animosity. “This miracle of patriotism”, he comments in the *Atom*, “received the bounty as a turnpike-man receives the toll ...”¹¹⁵

Bute, who had become Treasurer and first minister after Newcastle's resignation in May 1762, held the same opinion of the Hanover connection as Smollett. Accordingly, as the atom tells Peacock, Yak-Strot

determined to detach his master gradually from those continental connexions, which had been the source of such enormous expence, and such continual vexation to the empire of Japan. In these sentiments, he with-held the annual

¹¹³ *Atom*, 97.

¹¹⁴ *The Briton*, No. 35, Saturday, 22 January 1763. Reprinted in *Poems, Plays, and The Briton*, Edited Byron Gassman (Athens, Ga., 1993), 411-413.

¹¹⁵ *Atom*, 107. Smollett expressed his surprise at Pitt's acceptance of the pension in *The Briton*, No. 7, Saturday, 10 July 1762, 270.

tribute which had been lately payed to Brut-an-tiffi.¹¹⁶

Largely on the basis of this and other similarities in their political philosophies, Smollett was enlisted by Bute to contribute a weekly political pamphlet, which first appeared on May 29, 1762 as *The Briton*.¹¹⁷ By 1762, then, Smollett's entry into the political debates of mid-eighteenth-century Britain, which had begun with reviews of political pamphlets in the *Critical* in 1756, was complete. Much of the remaining narrative in the *Atom*, covering the period from Bute's rise to official power in 1762 through to the Wilkite riots in 1768, reflects Smollett's experience as Bute's apologist during a period of widespread anti-Scottishness in England.

Political Narrative in the *Atom*, 1762-68: Bute, Wilkes, and the Scots

Smollett's treatment of Lord Bute in the *Atom* differs somewhat from the way in which Smollett treated him in the *Briton*. This is not remarkable in the sense that Smollett had a decidedly pro-Bute mandate when he was producing the weekly pamphlet from 1762-1763, while the *Atom* followed a few years later. Smollett's portrait of Bute in the *Atom* is therefore more balanced (written from the perspective of as many as five years after his involvement with the *Briton*), but the former first minister is still portrayed with a great deal of sympathy. It seems that this was due in some part to their shared Scottish origins and that this contributed to their similar

¹¹⁶ *Atom*, 109.

¹¹⁷ It is not known for sure who approached Smollett on behalf of Lord Bute. By 1762, however, Smollett's profile in London was certainly high enough to attract attention in political circles. When Smollett agreed to write the weekly pamphlet, John Wilkes is reported to have remarked that "After having distributed among his adherents all the places under Government, [Bute] is determined, it would seem, to monopolize the wit also." Quoted by Byron Gassman, "Introduction", *Poems, Plays, and the Briton* (Athens, Ga., 1993), 227.

political ideologies. With both, Scottishness was not expressed in parochial terms; rather, Smollett saw his own British patriotism reflected in the political ideals of Bute and the young George III. These ideals placed British interests over English or even more narrowly Hanoverian ones. By the same token, Smollett also felt the effects of the wave of anti-Scottish sentiment which attended Bute's administration – an episode which is vividly described in the *Atom*.

In describing Yak-Strot (Bute) to Peacock, the atom claims that the royal favourite “valued himself much upon the antient blood that ran in his veins, and still more upon his elevated ideas of patriotism.”¹¹⁸ The “character” of the first minister is related in glowing terms:

In the midst of all this detestation and disgrace, it must be owned for the sake of truth, that Yak-strot was one of the honestest men in Japan, and certainly the greatest benefactor to the empire. Just, upright, sincere, and charitable; his heart was susceptible of friendship and tenderness. He was a virtuous husband, a fond father, a kind master, and a zealous friend. In his public capacity he had nothing in view but the advantage of Japan, in the prosecution of which he flattered himself he should be able to display all the abilities of a profound statesman, and all the virtues of the most sublime patriotism.¹¹⁹

This is one of the first indications given by Smollett of Bute's cherished ideals of Britishness and resistance to faction, ideals he tried to pass along to George III even before he became first minister. The occasion of Smollett's vindication of Bute's career was created when Bute resigned in 1763, after a period of virulent campaigning by Pitt, John Wilkes and a wider anti-Scottish reaction to his administration.

The Scotsman Bute had become the *de facto* prime minister of Britain after the resignation of Newcastle in 1762. As the atom relates, this was “to the great scandal and dissatisfaction of the Nipponites [English], who hate all the Ximians [Scots] with a mixture of

¹¹⁸ *Atom*, 96.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 123.

jealousy and contempt.”¹²⁰ In a series of passages similar to the description of anti-Scottish feelings after the 1745 rebellion, Smollett notes the various personal criticisms that were directed towards Bute, in particular his association with and patronage of other Scots:

He took delight in no other conversation but that of two or three obscure Ximians, his companions and counsellors, with whom he spent all his leisure time, in conferences upon politics, patriotism, philosophy, and the Belles Lettres. Those were the oracles he consulted in all the emergencies of state; and with these he spent many an Attic evening ... The new Cuboy was vastly well disposed to make his Ximian favourites great men. It was in his power to give them consequence in the eyes of the public ... Their naked backs and hungry bellies were now clothed with the richest stuffs, and fed with the fat things of Japan. Every department civil and military was filled with Ximians. Those islanders came over in shoals to Nippon, and swarmed in the streets of Meaco ... His very partiality to his own countrymen, brought upon him at last the curses of the whole clan.¹²¹

Smollett here echoes an attitude that prevailed during Bute's administration, describing an English xenophobia which as a Scotsman he of course did not share. As the bookseller John Almon wrote in 1763, “[Bute's] partiality to his needy countrymen, to whom he abundantly distributed the favours of the crown, showed the danger to which the whole English nation was exposed by his power.”¹²² But there is also a tension in his treatment of Bute which is particularly evident when he discusses the patronage of other Scotsmen. The two Scotsmen alluded to in this passage are probably John Home (1722-1808), the author of the play *Douglas* (1756) and private secretary to Bute; and Sir Harry Erskine, M.P. and commander of the Royal

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹²² *A Review of Lord Bute's Administration* (London: Printed for I. Pridden, in Fleetstreet, 1763), 112-114. In a long footnote, Almon lists a number of the promotions made by Bute before his resignation, including among them offices given to John Home, the Edinburgh dramatist and friend of Smollett and Alexander Carlyle, and William Mure, Bute's brother-in-law and friend to David Hume. It is also interesting to note that John Almon was one of the booksellers Smollett anonymously sent his *Atom* manuscript to in 1768. Almon, a staunch supporter of Pitt, actually

Scots. Smollett's bitterness could have been the result of his inability to obtain a pension after working for Bute in the *Briton*.¹²³

In his artistic patronage, however, Smollett was not pleased with Lord Bute's choices of beneficiaries. His search for worthy candidates, relates the atom, "proved so unsuccessful, that not above four or five men of genius could be found in the whole empire of Japan, and these were gratified with pensions."¹²⁴ These included the aforementioned John Home (1722-1808), a member of the Moderate party of the Scottish Church and described as a "secularized Bonza [clergyman] from Ximo"; Thomas Sheridan (1719-88), "a reformed comedian of Xicoco [Ireland]"; Dr. Thomas Thompson (c.1700-1763), "an empiric who had outlived his practice"; and, perhaps most interestingly, the English writer and lexicographer Samuel Johnson, whom Smollett characterized as a "malcontent poet of Nippon."¹²⁵

In his paper the *North Briton* (1762-63), John Wilkes took advantage of Bute's Scottishness in order to claim that "Englishness" was being eroded from the highest offices of state. Indeed, as Linda Colley has stated, it was "a sheer gift" to Wilkes and his followers, mostly London radicals, that the prime minister was a Scot.¹²⁶ The attacks on Bute became increasingly more personal, even to the point of suggesting that the prime minister was conducting an

published a short run of the book until he or someone else realized the contemporary politico-historical nature of the book.

¹²³ See Smollett's December 1762 letter to John Home, *Letters*, 110-11.

¹²⁴ *Atom*, 102.

¹²⁵ Johnson and Smollett were not friends, but did maintain a mutual respect. Smollett had dubbed Johnson the "Great Cham" of literature. See *Letters*, 75; Knapp, 218.

¹²⁶ *Britons* (London, 1994), 110. For an analysis of the Wilkite agitations of the 1760s in the context of English nationalism, see Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism* (New York, 1987), 159-225. J.G.A. Pocock has suggested that Wilkite radicalism and its anti-Scottish "chauvinism" was a direct result of Bute and George III overplaying their hand in driving both Pitt and Newcastle from office, provoking opposition from all sides. See *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (Cambridge, 1985), 81.

indecent love affair with the King's mother, the Princess Dowager.¹²⁷ Rumours abounded that the prime minister, himself related to the Stuart Pretenders to the British crown, was participating in a plot to restore the old dynasty. In the *Atom*, Smollett attributed these slanders to Pitt:

Taycho had [the people's] understanding so much in his power, that he actually made [them] believe Yak-strot had formed a treasonable scheme in favour of a foreign adventurer who pretended to the throne of Japan, and that the reigning Dairo was an accomplice in this project for his own deposition. Indeed, they did not scruple to say that Gio-gio was no more than a puppet moved by his own grandmother and this vile Ximian, between whom they hinted there was a secret correspondence which reflected very little honour on the family of the Dairo.¹²⁸

At the time when these "balls of filth" were being hurled at Bute, Smollett was still writing the *Briton*, and in the issue for October 2, 1762 he defended Bute against such charges. Smollett began his defense against these charges by stating that their veracity rested on two obvious and irrelevant facts concerning Bute: "The first is that he is a Scotchman, and the next is that he is a Stuart."¹²⁹

Smollett's defense of Bute is also evident in the later volumes of his *Continuation of the Complete History of England* (1760-65), as we shall see in the next chapter.¹³⁰ What is significant to note here is that even in the *Atom*, published by Smollett two years before his death and behind a veil of anonymity, Bute is virtually the only political figure that remains more or

¹²⁷ Christie, 77; Colley, 121-22.

¹²⁸ *Atom*, 113.

¹²⁹ No. 19, 2 October 1762, 333.

¹³⁰ Pocock has asserted that Smollett was ultimately "destroyed" by casting himself in the role of apologist for Bute, retiring to Italy with his health and reputation shattered, 137. This is the conventional assessment of Smollett's historiographical career, and as I have been trying to show, it needs to be re-positioned, particularly as a writer in the vanguard of a historically oriented cultural fascination with representing contemporary history. Smollett produced the *Atom*,

less unscathed. While the patronage of his fellow Scots likely contributed to the wave of anti-Scottish sentiment in England, a climate which affected Smollett as much as any other London Scot, Bute is assessed favourably on the basis of his enlightened political principles. These principles, shared by Smollett, are summarized in the *Atom*:

He had the resolution to dissolve the shameful and pernicious engagements which the empire had contracted on the continent of Tartary (Germany). He lightened the intolerable burthens of the empire: he saved its credit when it was stretched even to bursting. He made a peace, which, if not the most glorious that might have been obtained, was, at least, the most solid and advantageous that ever Japan had concluded with any power whatsoever ... and, by this peace, he put an end to all the horrors of a cruel war.¹³¹

These policies and objectives, it will be remembered, figure throughout the political narrative of the *Atom* and effectively mirror Smollett's own political views. These views, I believe, can be ascribed to Smollett's special position as a London Scot and a commitment to wider British interests before more narrowly English, or even Scottish, ones.

Like many others, Smollett continued to believe that Bute was an *eminence grise* behind the scenes long after his resignation in 1763. As the *Atom's* narrative relates events up to 1768, successive administrations are depicted as puppet-shows being controlled by Bute behind the curtain.¹³² Shortly after these insinuations, however, the political narrative of the *Atom* breaks off in 1768 amidst the Wilkite riots. By this time, Smollett's health had deteriorated, and before he left for Italy for the last time he obviously decided to publish the book as it was.

Humphrey Clinker, and *The Present State of All Nations* during this time, and the *Critical Review* flourished long after Smollett's death in 1771.

¹³¹ *Atom*, 124.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 125-26. Hume also believed this. See *Letters of David Hume*, Vol. I, 439. Although the idea persisted until at least 1770, it had little basis in reality. On the "Bute legend" see Christie, 72-73; see also John Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III* (Cambridge, 1976), 90-92.

This chapter has demonstrated how Smollett's "novelized history" operated as a contemporary history of mid-eighteenth-century British political and socio-cultural history. Continuing what he had done in *Ferdinand Count Fathom* and its narrative surrounding the War of the Austrian Succession, Smollett's *Atom* has been considered as a historical narrative in which Smollett expresses a patriotic concern over the conduct of the Seven Years' War under the Pitt-Newcastle ministry. In particular, Smollett can be seen as objecting to Britain's Continental connection to Hanover and Frederickian Prussia which he saw as damaging to British interests. Conversely, the administration of Lord Bute and the young George III is depicted favourably because it ended the war and severed the Hanover connection (in its physical manifestation of troops and money).

Anecdotal and Biographical History

What is most important for the larger study, however, is the possibility of the novel and its subgenres to provide a literary and ideological vehicle with which to historically represent the present in late early modern Britain. In many respects, this kind of "novelized history" meets the same end as all of the hybrid forms of contemporary history during the 1830s, replaced by the historical novels of Walter Scott – making the distant past seem present through vivid recreations of worlds no longer contemporaneous – and the realist novel, with its simultaneously contemporary yet ahistorical narrations of the social world. I would like to end this chapter by examining another elusive and hybrid literary form which offered another opportunity for the historical representation of the present: the anecdotal history.

As with the other genres and forms of writing under discussion in this study, the anecdote possesses the kind of elusive quality that characterizes the kind of intertextuality and genre hybridity that characterized the writing of contemporary writing in Britain during this period, and which also accounts for why so many writers seem to operate within many of these forms at once. Historians and literary critics share little agreement on what relationship the *petite histoire* of the anecdote bears to historical writing. Benedetto Croce, for one, places a firm divide between anecdote and the proper writing of history, locating it rather on the boundary of the historical novel.¹³³ In recent years, it has been discussed in relation to historiography only by literary historians. Daniel Fineman has declared the opening of an ambitious project which would understand the long history of historiography as “the history of the effect of anecdotal form.”¹³⁴ And more recently, Lionel Gossman has brought the issue to the pages of *History and Theory*.¹³⁵ However, both of these discussions are limited in their applicability to my field of concern because of a high level of generalization which limits their historical specificity. For example, Gossman is correct to point out the anecdotal nature of Smollett’s later historical writings, but in doing so describes them as detachable “addenda” extrinsic to the principal political narrative of the histories. As will be demonstrated in the next chapter, it is the centrality of these anecdotal or novelistic characteristics – integrated within the historical text proper – that give such works their peculiar eighteenth-century contemporary historical peculiarity.¹³⁶ But perhaps the best place to begin is by examining a particularly rich late eighteenth-century discussion on anecdotes and their place within literary history.

¹³³ *History as the Story of Liberty*, trans Sylvia Sprigge (Meridian 1941), 123-4.

¹³⁴ “The History of the Anecdote: Fiction and Fiction”, in Aram Veesser ed, *The New Historicism* (NY: Routledge, 1989), 62.

¹³⁵ “Anecdote and History”, *H&T* 42 (2003): 143-68.

In his *Dissertation on Anecdotes* (1793), Isaac Disraeli does not confine the anecdote only to biography. As he writes, “we give anecdotes of the art as well as the Artist; of the war as well as the General; of the nation as well as of the Monarch.”¹³⁷ He advocates the careful introduction of anecdotes into historical narratives, in turn lamenting the dullness of histories that are lacking such elements. Interestingly, Disraeli also advocates a kind of differentiation among historiographical anecdotalism, where the antiquarian’s pleasurable anecdote differs from that of the historian of manners:

A Hearne would feel a frigid rapture, if he could discover the name of a Saxon monarch unrecorded in our annals ... A Hume is only interested with those characters, who have exerted themselves in the cause of humanity, and with those incidents, which have subverted or established the felicities of a people. Hence the history of manners has become the prime object of the researches of philosophers ... it is alone by anecdotes the genius of an age or nation is thoroughly to be understood.¹³⁸

Moreover, it is this sense of the anecdotal text as an entry point beyond the biographical and into the contemporary historical field that is interesting to note. In his *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Lord Kames*, Alexander Fraser Tytler, due to the quality of his biographical subject, sets out also to “exhibit the moral and political character of the Times in which he lived, and to detail the progress of the Literature, Arts, Manners, and General Improvement of Scotland, during the greater part of the eighteenth century.”¹³⁹

In a similar vein, William Smellie’s *Literary and Characteristical Lives* (of John Gregory, Lord Kames, Adam Smith and David Hume), provides biographical sketches in a self-professed anecdotal fashion, particularly in the case of Hume. But Smellie’s plan was more

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* 149.

¹³⁷ *Dissertation on Anecdotes*, 1793 (Garland repr., 1972), vi.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 4-6, 9.

ambitious, and involved a plan to write a kind of Scottish literary biography of contemporary Scots, including Hugo Arnot, Hugh Blair, John Campbell, Lord Hailes, Adam Ferguson, Lord Monboddo, William Robertson, and Gilbert Stuart, in addition to the four that were published. Smellie's avowed aim was to "encourage in his native country a taste for biographical writing, which never fails to excite a spirit of inquiry [and] to expand the views of men with regard to science and every thing that contributes to aggrandise, or to adorn a nation."¹⁴⁰

Appended to Smellie's biographical sketches is a lengthy "Dissertation on the Means of Promoting and Supporting Public Spirit". In one section of this appendix, Smellie provides a kind of manifesto that describes the new kind of historical biography he saw himself as writing. He begins by questioning the value of the neoclassical historical taste that Smollett was transforming with his contemporary historical narratives. Using the example of the schoolboy, Smellie asks whether or not Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar should remain the exemplary subjects of history.¹⁴¹ As Smellie writes,

Imagine not, however, that we here exclaim against history in general. Nothing can be more foreign to our intention. It is only the history of tyrants, the great revolutions and dissensions of empires and nations, which we deem improper to be put into the hands of children.

Smellie goes on to describe the different kind of history he has in mind:

We rejoice in the capacity of pointing out one peculiar species of history, which, instead of corrupting the tender minds of youth, seems admirably calculated for promoting generosity of temper and a true spirit of patriotism. Biography, or the history of the actions and dispositions of particular persons, upon the slightest consideration, will be found to be that species of history which is not only best suited to the capacity of children, but likewise ... for inspiring them with a catholic love to the human race. But here

¹³⁹ 2nd edition, 3v (Edinburgh, 1814), Vol 1, vi.

¹⁴⁰ *Literary and Characteristical Lives* (Edinburgh, 1800), iv-v.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 360-1.

it must be remarked, that it is not the lives of warriors that we recommend; the biography from which any advantage can be derived ... is the history of private lives and private characters.¹⁴²

Smellie's suggestion is to focus on the biographical history which can best transmit an historical portrait of the times, and that this is to be found in the lives of its men of letters, rather than the traditional political and military heroes of the classical tradition. And as his own example attests, it is up to the writers of one's own period to record such historical biographies: "Reflect rather on the virtues, actions, and various incidents in the life of your late friend ... Your labour will then be less irksome, attended with greater emolument to yourselves, and productive of more intrinsic utility to your readers."¹⁴³

Indeed, Smellie's ambition appears to resonate with the more thoroughly articulated plans outlined by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, begun by Smellie and David Erskine (Lord Buchan) in 1780. It will be shown in Chapter 4 how the Society, particularly under the leadership of Smellie and Buchan, tried to initiate a massive statistical and historical account of Scotland. Also part of the plan, however, was a "Biographical History of Scotland, exhibiting an illustration of the lives of her citizens who have added to her fame by arms, by arts, or by sciences."¹⁴⁴ As will be seen, some of these contemporary biographies were produced along with the parish statistical accounts, but its chief importance lies in the model it provided for Robert Chambers (1802-71), whose *Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen* (4 v, 1832-4) was, in his mind, the culmination of this project. Chambers, who would later attain a large measure of celebrity for his evolutionary ideas in the *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844),

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 363-4.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 366.

explicitly cites the early example of both Lord Hailes (his *Biographica Scotica*) and Smellie. At the same time, however, works such as the *Biographical Dictionary* were bringing an historicist attitude of impartiality and distance to the biographical figures, and began to enter the national biography only once deceased. Another significant example of this kind of anecdotal history was provided by Lord Henry Cockburn's posthumous memoir, published in 1856 as *Memorials of His Time*. Cockburn composed his memoir as a collective biography of his generation, living in and around Edinburgh. In contrast to his biography of Francis Jeffrey, also published posthumously, Cockburn framed his memoirs as an generational historical biography, written explicitly for a future age.¹⁴⁵ Once again, Judith Shklar is instructive when writing about the French *Encyclopedie* and Jean d'Alembert. As she notes, "history was meant for posterity, and it demanded accurate biographies in order to study mankind carefully and scientifically ... The history of science, the history of men of learning, and philosophical political history all have their diverse uses and aims. In the *Encyclopedie* all were to come together".¹⁴⁶

Another interesting instance of an anecdotal history of the times is provided by Alexander Carlyle of Inveresk, who will reappear in Chapter 4 as a key contributor to Sir John Sinclair's *Statistical Account of Scotland*. Carlyle wrote a well-known *Autobiography* (subtitled "Memorials of the Men and Events of his Time") that was finally published in 1860 (but with the title of *Autobiography*, rather than Carlyle's original title of *Anecdotes*). In this remarkable historical artifact written by a key member of the Moderate literati, the reader can follow the

¹⁴⁴ William Smellie, *Account of the Institution and Progress of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* (2 vol, 1782-4), Vol 1, 105.

¹⁴⁵ For an important discussion of Cockburn as an historical writer in this sense, see Phillips, *Society and Sentiment*, 309-20.

¹⁴⁶ Shklar, 660.

major events of Scottish history from the early 1730s through 1770.¹⁴⁷ The anecdote, then, is an illustrative mode which captures everyday realities outside of more conventionally defined political and social narratives.

The Challenge of Remembering the Present: William Playfair and Thomas Somerville

Another two examples were written almost simultaneously from 1813-14. William Playfair is known more for his “statistical” works, such as the *Statistical Breviary* (1801). However, he becomes yet another multigeneric contributor to representations of the present during this period, when he turned his hand to political anecdotes with his *Political Portraits, in this new aera; with Explanatory Notes, Historical and Biographical* (3 v, 1813-16).¹⁴⁸ Playfair acknowledges the nature of the book at the outset, noting that “Curiosity is a leading passion, and mankind are impelled by it to listen to what is said of persons that they know, and from this arises the love of private anecdote, which is so universal.”¹⁴⁹ Like many of his generation, Playfair’s historical bent was formed by bearing witness to the terrible event of his time, the French Revolution: “it led me naturally to seek for the connection between the cause and the event. At the same time that my mind was thus set upon observation and inquiry, my feelings were acted on in a most sensible manner, so that the character of a violent reforming patriot, and of a modern philosopher, preaching up equality, became my detestation, and the government of

¹⁴⁷ *Autobiography*, ed John Hill Burton (Edinburgh 1860); another remarkable example of such a work is Lord Henry Cockburn’s *Memorials of his Time*, published in 1856. An important discussion of Cockburn’s memoir, see Phillips, *Society and Sentiment* (Princeton, 2000), 309-21.

¹⁴⁸ I am grateful to the librarians at the Rare Book Room in Firestone Library at Princeton University for allowing me to read a damaged copy of this book, donated by Jacob Viner.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol 1, iv.

the many my greatest dread.”¹⁵⁰ Also, Playfair seems acutely aware of the special character of the contemporary period he was to describe through his sketches:

Conceiving that the present moment is highly important, and that a great change is immediately about to take place, I thought it might be useful to give to the public the following portraits. The change that I foresee is very near at hand, and inevitable, though I do not pretend to know its nature, as that depends on some future events ... As there never was a more important era than the present, so it was never more useful to take a fair view of those political characters, who flourish, guide, and direct public affairs.¹⁵¹

In this sense, Playfair delimits himself as a historian concerned with past and present observations, and not as a kind of political journalism or ideological campaign looking toward the future. Even if Napoleonic France falls, Britain will have economic and political difficulties both domestically and on the Continent. Where Playfair has an ideological perspective, it springs from his belief that Britain had not fully internalized the historical lesson of revolutionary and Napoleonic France, as evidenced by the large audiences of anarchists, republicans and anti-royalists.

One reason for this failure to process the lessons of the immediate past is their scale, speed and complexity. “The great events that have taken place”, writes Playfair, “and their rapid succession, have prevented the minds of most people from taking a fair and true view of circumstances; add to this, that the spirit of party has been very active in misrepresentation.”¹⁵² Perhaps here was the chief justification for writing a new kind of contemporary history during a period which was trying desperately to find new ways to understand and historically represent its rapidly emerging modernity, particularly when read against the political and cultural trauma of

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, viii-ix.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, xi, xxi.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 32.

the American and French Revolutions. In trying to account for the almost universal sense of lamenting one's time in favour of the nostalgic glow of history – particularly in terms of public opinion and George III – Playfair notes that the “disposition to complain is so inherent in the British people, that the present times are always represented as bad, and all the publications on temporary politics since the British press was free are a proof of that.”¹⁵³

Aside from the royal family, Playfair's other anecdotal sketches are of the naturalist Sir Joseph Banks, and, interestingly enough, Sir John Sinclair. Playfair's account of the latter is remarkable not least in terms of its comparison of Sinclair to Adam Smith. However, I will leave it aside until the later discussion of Sinclair in Chapter 4.

Finally, I will end this chapter by looking at yet another important contributor to British contemporary history during this period, both in terms of his own anecdotal historiography and, as will be shown later, as a contributor to Sinclair's *Statistical Account* in the 1790s. Thomas Somerville (1741-1830) became minister of the affluent parish of Jedburgh in 1772. While he was a prominent member of the Popular party of the Church of Scotland, he was more of a Moderate in his theology.¹⁵⁴ Somerville published a few conventional histories of late seventeenth-century Britain, but *My Own Life and Times, 1741-1814*, written in 1813-14 and published in Edinburgh in 1861 is also significant. Somerville self-consciously intended the work as an historicized memoir of the period in which he lived, assembled from anecdotes,

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁵⁴ John R. McIntosh, *Church and Theology in Enlightenment Scotland: The Popular Party, 1740-1800* (Tuckwell, 1998), 187-8; on the dispute over ministerial patronage which precipitated the Popular and Moderate split, see the general discussion in T.M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation: A History 1700-2000* (Harmondsworth, 1999), Chp 5; on the Moderate party, see Richard Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh, 1985); on Somerville as a historical writer, see D.B. Horn, “Some Scottish Writers of History”, *Scottish Historical Review* 129 (1961).

recollections, as well as portions of chapters that read like conventional historical narratives. Indeed, in Chapter II of his book, Somerville provides a narrative for 1760-64 that begins with a view of the city of Edinburgh – and the state of Britain – in 1760. After relating the sense of optimism upon the accession of George III, Somerville's anecdotal account of the Bute administration and its virulent opposition echoes Smollett's, particularly in relating the cultural backlash of the anti-Scottish xenophobia.¹⁵⁵ In typical fashion, Somerville then narrows the frame to particular anecdotes of his ministerial life, but in terms of social conditions of all classes in the parish, as well his encounters with the literati of Edinburgh and elsewhere. He also provides sensitive and immediate historical silhouettes of the Scottish clergy of his time, describing the complicated process of their emergence from a strife-ridden partisan ethos that survived from the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, but was gradually waning despite the emergence of new fault lines.¹⁵⁶ The next seven or so chapters then provide microscopic narratives of four to five-year periods, again alternating between public transactions and private anecdotes of Somerville's personal transactions, including the progress of his own publications. Indeed, he relates a 1795 meeting with the booksellers Strahan and Cadell at which they tried to persuade Somerville to provide a new history of Hanoverian Britain into the contemporary period:

They informed me they had long wished to find some person qualified to continue the History of Britain from the Revolution down to the present time. I understood them to mean that the work should be more elaborate and correct than Smollett's History ... They proposed the work to be published in octavo volumes, giving a premium of L. 300 for every volume, and perhaps a larger sum if the work should meet with a favourable reception. This undertaking I declined without a moment's hesitation, because it was incompatible with my professional

¹⁵⁵ Somerville, 51-5.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 64-7.

duties ...¹⁵⁷

In a footnote, Somerville adds that Strahan wrote to him a few months later, proposing that he “write the History of England during the reign of George the Third, which, with Hume’s and Smollett’s, would make a complete History of England to the Present Time.” Once again, Somerville appears to have turned this down. The request, however, is another indication of the commercial viability and prestige of contemporary history in its conventional form, as well as a further example of the extent to which Smollett had become recognized before his death in 1771 as the contemporary historian of his generation. This will be one of the main concerns of the next chapter.

Returning to Somerville’s narrative, the five-year structure of the first nine chapters changes abruptly with Chapter X, which pulls back from the microscopic narrative to provide a history of manners and the socio-cultural field for the broad period from 1741 to 1800. Somerville describes this as a “brief retrospect of the state of society in Scotland, and the condition of [his] country in the earlier period of [his] life”, limiting himself for the most part to his own parish of Jedburgh, where he had enjoyed the “best opportunity of personal observation.”¹⁵⁸ This description of the clothing, dress, manners, sanitary laws, amusements, social habits, intolerance, class distinctions, trades and manufactures and myriad other socio-economic subject matter, written by Somerville in 1813, would have surely been derived from his earlier contribution to Sinclair’s call for “statistical” accounts of the Scottish parishes, and we will return to Somerville at that point. I now wish to turn to the next chapter, and a discussion of the more conventionally historiographical form of contemporary history.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 325.

CHAPTER THREE

“THE NEW-BORN OCCURRENCES OF THE DAY DRESSED IN THE POMPOUS ROBE OF HISTORY”

By the middle of the eighteenth century, historical narratives that related contemporary or near-contemporary events were becoming an increasingly attractive form of historical narrative. Indeed, contemporary history was an exemplary part of the classical canon as enshrined in the ancient Greek historians, particularly Thucydides in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*. According to this model, historical explanation consisted of a narrative of the recent past, with a particular focus on political and military events. Indeed, the classical historiographical tradition has been elegantly reconstructed by Arnaldo Momigliano in a series of seminal essays. In particular, Momigliano posits that two parallel yet independent strands of the classical tradition developed alongside each other, and that aside from a brief union in early Medieval ecclesiastical history, these two lines do not achieve a union until Gibbon's synthesis in the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, the first volume of which appears in 1776. These two strands spring from the Thucydidean narrowing of history to a contemporary or near-contemporary narrative of political and military subject matter, and Herodotus' antiquarian researches into various aspects of human culture.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ See especially, “Historiography on Written Tradition and Historiography on Oral Tradition”, *Studies in Historiography* (London: Nicolson, 1966); “The Herodotean and the Thucydidean Tradition”, *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1990). For an alternative to the Momigliano thesis, see Phillips 1996.

On the other hand, however, the reception of contemporary history during the first half of the eighteenth century reveals a decided stigma that had become attached to the genre. Many historians, especially those who comprised the polite vanguard of this pre-professional and gentlemanly activity, felt that historical narratives that ventured too near the living present undermined the nobility and dignity of the genre, and this perception was a significant obstacle to the acceptance of contemporary history in Britain in the first half of the eighteenth century. Historians such as John Oldmixon and James Ralph were stigmatized as the historiographical denizens of Grub Street: hack writers whose partisan politics and gossip-laden exposes of elite, private experience were treated harshly in the reviews.¹⁶⁰ Other writers in this earlier part of the eighteenth century who aspired to be historians of their own times were careful to either delay publication, or even avoid it entirely. As late as the early 1750s Lady Mary Wortley Montagu wrote what she described as a "History of My Own Time", clearly echoing Gilbert Burnet's early eighteenth-century work. However, she destroyed the manuscripts almost as soon as she wrote them, and only scattered fragments have survived.¹⁶¹ One recent historian has argued that Thucydidean history, in terms of the neoclassical writing of the history of one's own times, died with the reputation of Clarendon's history of the English civil wars and the party polemics of the "hack" historians of the early eighteenth century.¹⁶² And when David Hume's Stuart volumes were received in 1754 as the first great British historiographical achievement, the narrative ended, significantly, with the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Hume then resisted requests to produce a continuation, despite the *History of England* going through five editions between 1762

¹⁶⁰ On Oldmixon and Ralph, see especially Laird Okie, *Augustan Historical Writing: Histories of England in the English Enlightenment* (Lanham: UP of America, 1991).

¹⁶¹ See Devoney Looser, *British Women Writers and the Writing of History, 1670-1820* (Johns Hopkins, 2000), 62-3.

and 1776.¹⁶³ Upon closer inspection, it appears that the obituary was premature, for by mid-century there is an increased concern with writing the history of the times according to the conventions of general history.

The climate for contemporary history was beginning to change in the 1750s. The Thucydidean classical tradition was being re-fashioned to meet the needs of a cultural desire to represent, know and understand an increasingly complex present as an historical period in itself and in relation the past. Not only was the tincture of party less overbearing, but the traditional political and military subject matter was augmented by discussions of the economic, social and cultural fields. The genre also loses much of the neoclassical sense of decorum that governed it earlier. This development will be examined in depth by looking at Tobias Smollett's treatment of contemporary political and cultural history during the great military conflict of his generation, the Seven Years' War, in his *Continuation of the Complete History of England*. It is my contention that the writing of the contemporary history of Hanoverian Britain was re-invigorated at mid-century, in part because it offered writers of general history an opportunity to represent and engage with the problems and anxieties associated with a rapidly changing British polity and empire. Following the lead of Smollett in particular, there was a marked increase in the number of such works, and their reception indicates a greatly enhanced sense of their cultural and literary importance.

As noted in the Introduction, the conventional genre of contemporary history begins to wane somewhat in the 1830s. In some ways, literal versions of the historical present such as that

¹⁶² Hicks, 110-42.

¹⁶³ Hume's oft-quoted reasoning was his assertion that he was "too old, too fat, too lazy and too rich". See N.T. Phillipson, *Hume* (London, 1989), 137. The more pointed reason, however, was Hume's reticence to engage in partisan political debates and controversies.

rendered by Smollett are being replaced or supplemented by narratives of remote periods that are themselves rendered more immediate. And, importantly, “contemporary history” as a conventional genre recedes as nineteenth-century historicism prioritizes temporal perspective as a fundamental aspect of historical thought. In Chapter 1, it was demonstrated how generic traditions of satire were utilized by Smollett to construct a highly entertaining and topical history of British culture and politics during the Seven Year’s War. Within such hybrid genres, even the later eighteenth-century British antiquarian project evinces these concerns, as we shall explore later, as do new periodical genres which grow out the general history, such as the “Historical Register”. We should now turn, however, to the transformation of Thucydidean contemporary history during the middle of the century, and a detailed look at the general history of Tobias Smollett.

Smollett and the General History of Hanoverian Britain

Sometime in 1755, Smollett turned his attention from his successful novel-writing career to the writing of history. There is no indication in his letters or from his biographers as to exactly why he decided to write a history of England from the Roman conquest to the end of the War of the Austrian Succession in 1748.¹⁶⁴ The first three volumes of his *Complete History of England* were published in 1757, while the fourth volume appeared the following year. The work sold

¹⁶⁴ Smollett may have been trying to compete with his fellow Scot, David Hume. The first volume of his *History of England* had appeared in 1754. See Knapp, 186. The first reference Smollett makes to his own *History* is in a letter to Dr. George Macaulay in April, 1756. See *Letters*, 45.

very well, and Smollett later brought his narrative into the reign of George III with his *Continuation of the Complete History of England*, published in five volumes from 1760-1765.

In the *Continuation*, Smollett deals with the period from 1748-1765, a period roughly analogous to the "secret" political narrative provided in *The History and Adventures of an Atom*. My examination of Smollett's *Continuation* consists of three parts. First, I will look at Smollett's treatment of political events from about 1753-1763, particularly the events that are also described in the political narrative of the *Atom*. Second, attention will be focused on Smollett's extensive discussion of the state of letters and the arts in England at the death of George II in 1760. In these two sections, the dual preoccupation with politics and literature which, as was shown in the previous two chapters, forms the basis of the *Atom*, is also evident in Smollett's historical work. Furthermore, it will be argued that Smollett's satiric treatment of political events and persons in the *Atom* is also evident in the *Continuation*. In the latter, however, the satiric tone is, on the whole, more subtle and restrained than in the *Atom*.

In a third section, building from the evidence of the first two, I hope to show that Smollett helped initiate a reworking of the Thucydidean tradition of contemporary history that had begun to decline in relation to newer forms of historical writing such as conjectural and philosophical history. Many observers recognized this contribution by Smollett, which extended into utilizing the new periodical press as a vehicle not just for the reviewing of historical works, but as historical texts in themselves, exemplified by the "historical register" genre. In order to discuss this type of history, however, our conception of genre - as it applies to eighteenth-century historical writing in Britain - needs to be considerably widened. Beyond the conventional political narrative, other types of historical writing were being practiced. Within this broader context, the type of historical writing which Smollett produced in the early 1760s had less to do

with other genres of historical writing - such as philosophical and conjectural history, or even his earlier treatment of non-contemporary history - than it did with his other literary activities, particularly the editing of the *Critical Review* and his novelistic writing, including the *Atom*. Indeed, like the *Atom*, Smollett's more "polite" histories also reflect his unique perspective as a London Scot who had attained the status not only of a historian of contemporary events, but of an arbiter of British letters and, more broadly, and advocate of the importance of British history.¹⁶⁵

Smollett's Political History, 1753-1765: The Seven Years' War, Lord Bute and Hanoverian Politics

In the *Atom*, the first historical event Smollett alluded to in his "secret" narrative of British political history was the Jewish Naturalization Bill of 1753. Similarly, when Smollett carried his narrative beyond 1748 in the *Continuation*, the controversial bill was one of the first significant political events he chose to discuss. In describing the debates over this piece of legislation, Smollett strays far from his professed aims in 1757, when the first volumes of his *Complete History* appeared. In the "Plan" which prefaced the first volume, Smollett claimed that he had "avoided all useless disquisitions" and "waved all remarks of his own, except such as

¹⁶⁵ The text of Smollett's *Continuation* I have used is the 8 vol (1791) edition in the Rare Book Room at Carleton University, a valuable one as it includes all of the text save for the extremely rare fifth volume which includes the narrative for 1765 (a narrative until 1783 has been rather flatly provided by its Edinburgh editors). Only a handful of copies of the 1765 volume exist, and are mostly in British libraries or personal collections. The edition I have used is entitled *The History of England from the Revolution to the End of the American War, and Peace of Versailles in 1783* (Edinburgh, Printed for G. Mudie et al, 1791). All references to the *Continuation* will be from this edition, hereafter cited as the *History*. References to the *Complete History* (Smollett's narrative runs to 1748) are from a separate edition.

seemed absolutely necessary.”¹⁶⁶ In the *Continuation*, however, Smollett's own arguments become more evident with each year he describes. His discussion of the Jewish Bill, then, is a good place to start looking at these intrusive arguments, especially since it resonates with his description of it in the *Atom*.

Smollett provides a meticulous description of the debates - both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary - which surrounded the issue. According to Smollett, however, these debates seemed to consist of “more passion than patriotism [and] more declamation than argument.” The opposition took advantage of anti-Semitic currents in order to delay its passing through the Commons, even though it easily passed through the House of Lords. After it did become law, however, Newcastle had to submit to opposition pressure and repealed the legislation. Smollett's treatment emphasized the influence of faction in such situations, as he enumerated some of the fanatical and prejudiced reasoning which contributed to its repeal. It was suggested that

rich Jews ... would purchase lands, and even advowsons; so as not only to acquire an interest in the legislature, but also to influence the constitution of the church of Christ, to which they were the inveterate and professed enemies.¹⁶⁷

Strikingly similar to the *Atom* is the role assigned to political demagogues and orators in the manipulation of public opinion for their own gain, whether personal or factional. As Smollett the historian writes:

These arguments and apprehensions, which were in reality frivolous and chimerical, being industriously circulated among the vulgar, naturally prejudiced [non-Jews] against the Jewish people ... The truth is, [the law] might have increased the wealth, and extended the commerce of Great Britain, had it been agreeable to the people.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ *Complete History*, Vol. 1 (London, Printed for James Rivington and James Fletcher, at the Oxford Theatre, and R. Baldwin, in Paternoster-row, 1757), non-paginated preliminary section.

¹⁶⁷ *History*, Vol. III, 327.

In this case, Smollett presents, in the form of historical argument, one of his chief preoccupations: the manipulation of the “the Mob” by corrupt ministers in order to marshal support for policies which, while promoting their own careers, are not in the best interests of Britain. As a London Scot writing of these events in the early 1760s, Smollett was well placed to anatomize such subtle forms of manipulation and prejudice. Indeed, as will be seen later, he himself was a victim of such a cultural backlash during these years.

Moving on to 1754-55, Smollett begins to relate some of the circumstances of Anglo-French rivalry in North America which eventually led to the Seven Years' War. Smollett does not limit himself to political and military events, however. Interwoven between the political and parliamentary proceedings are descriptions of non-political events including economic transactions and natural disasters such as the Lisbon earthquake on December 8, 1755. Although not an English or British occurrence, the earthquake was noteworthy for Smollett because of the 100,000 pound aid package voted by Parliament. What made this donation significant in Smollett's estimation was the fact that, although grain was somewhat scarce domestically, “a considerable part of the sum was sent in corn, flour, rice, and a large quantity of beef from Ireland.”¹⁶⁹ This example of British generosity, culled as it was from all corners of the nation, is proudly presented. What is interesting is that the source of such pride in 1755 is not the impending war with France; rather, this act of international benevolence is taken by Smollett as an index of British national character.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 328. For examples of this public outcry in the context of anti-Semitism in eighteenth-century Britain, see Frank Felsenstein, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes: a paradigm of otherness in English popular culture, 1660-1830* (Baltimore, 1995), 187-214.

¹⁶⁹ *History*, Vol. III, 452-54.

In far less boastful terms, Smollett also deals with the case of Admiral Byng. Smollett clearly shared Voltaire's disgust with the conduct of Byng's trial and his execution after the British defeat at Minorca in 1756. Moreover, the two accounts by Smollett do not differ very much in their emphasis on and condemnation of the Newcastle ministry, which, in the historian's estimation, sacrificed a largely blameless individual in order to deflect attention from the government.

The *Continuation* also depicts the fickle nature of public opinion during the war. After the loss of Minorca, Smollett relates,

The populace took fire like a train of the most hasty combustibles, and broke out into such a clamour of rage and indignation against the devoted admiral, as could not have been exceeded if he had lost the whole navy of England, and left the coasts of the kingdom naked to invasion ... This animosity was carefully fomented and maintained by artful emissaries ... In a word, he was devoted as the scape-goat of the ministry, to whose supine negligence, ignorance, and misconduct, the loss of that important fortress was undoubtedly owing.¹⁷⁰

Smollett characterizes the persecution of Byng in terms that reappear in the *Atom*, in the form of Taycho's "sops" thrown to "the Mob":

Byng's miscarriage was thrown out like a barrel to the whale, in order to engage the attention of the people, that it might not be attracted by the real cause of the national misfortune.¹⁷¹

Smollett also suggests, as he would later in the *Atom*, that the Newcastle ministry actually hired people to defame Byng's reputation and to publicly burn him in effigy.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 478.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 478; *Atom*, 35.

¹⁷² For the Minorca crisis and the damage control initiated by the Newcastle ministry, see Kathleen Wilson, "Empire of Virtue: The imperial project and Hanoverian culture c.1720-1785," *An Imperial State at War: Britain from 1689 to 1815*, Edited Lawrence Stone (London, 1994), 128-64.

In all his historical works, Smollett found fault with the drain on British resources occasioned by Continental connections with both Hanover and Frederickian Prussia. As early as 1755-56, when Smollett was writing the *Complete History*, his preoccupation with Continental connections was evident. Smollett traced these distracting connections back to the Revolution of 1688 and to the policies of William III:

Whether he really thought the interests of the continent and Great Britain were inseparable, or fought only to drag England into the confederacy as a convenient ally; certain it is, he involved these kingdoms in foreign connexions, which, in all probability, will be productive of their ruin.¹⁷³

As the Seven Years' War dragged on and the debt continued to accumulate, Smollett's alarm was raised even further, and this is reflected in the *Continuation* as it took shape. The focus of Smollett's ire was, as we have seen, the Hanoverian connection with the British ruling dynasty. From 1714 until the Bute administration in 1762-63, the shielding of Hanover - not only from France and Austria, but from the ostensible ally, Prussia - was a central object of British foreign policy. In the *Continuation*, a satirical tone can often be heard, as in this passage on the German war:

At no times, since the days of ignorance and barbarity, were the lives of men squandered away with such profusion as in the course of this German war. They were not only unnecessarily sacrificed in various exploits of no consequence, but lavishly exposed to all the rigour and distemper of winter campaigns, which were introduced on the continent, in despite of nature, and in contempt of humanity. Such are the improvements of warriors without feeling! Such are the refinements of German discipline!

¹⁷³ *History*, Vol. 1, 420. This particular reference to the *Complete History* is from the 1791 "combined" edition.

Smollett was by no means alone in his objections to this Hanoverian foreign policy. A number of pamphlets appeared during the 1750s and 1760s which pointed out the faults of such a policy. One of the most influential was Israel Maudit's *Occasional Thoughts on the Present German War*, which first appeared in 1760. Since the French had been defeated in North America, Maudit and others could see little sense in the prolongation of the war in Continental Europe; moreover, the great war for empire could actually strain British resources too far. As Maudit wrote, "a nation may overconquer itself: and by being fed with more conquests than it can digest, may have the overplus turn to surfeit and disease instead of nourishment."¹⁷⁴ The pamphlet was reviewed favourably in the *Critical Review* shortly after it appeared, and, while there is no definitive evidence that Smollett wrote the review, as editor he would have at least sanctioned it.¹⁷⁵ Maudit's pamphlet helped to shape a sector of public opinion that, like Smollett, came to believe that the cost of subsidizing Prussia, just to protect the electorate of Hanover, far outweighed any strategic importance to British interests in the conduct of the war.¹⁷⁶ This was so primarily because British interests lay in securing the North American colonies, something it had accomplished by 1759. It was also widely believed that France could support a land war in Europe without incurring a significant debt, a point also supported in another contemporary account of the war. John Entick's *A Compleat History of the Late War, or, Annual Register of its Rise, Progress, and Events in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America*, published in London in 1764.

¹⁷⁴ *Occasional Thoughts on the Present German War*. Third Edition. (London, Printed for John Wilkie, in St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1761), 1.

¹⁷⁵ *Critical Review* 10 (1760), 403-404.

¹⁷⁶ For the influence of Maudit and other pamphleteers on public opinion, see Robert Spector, *English Literary Periodicals and the Climate of Opinion during the Seven Years' War* (The Hague, 1966), 89.

Smollett's views on the German war were also shared by Lord Bute, who enlisted Smollett to produce *The Briton*, a pro-Bute weekly editorial. Written over the last two years of the war, the paper articulated the opposition to the Continental connection shared by Smollett and Bute, two North Britons who saw the prolongation of the war as an impediment to purely British interests. The happiness of the nation, wrote Smollett, "cannot be properly consulted while our country is involved in a cruel and destructive war, which hath shed her best blood, exhausted her treasure, and strained every sinew to bear the loads it hath imposed."¹⁷⁷ As Maudit had argued a few years earlier, Smollett too warned of the possible over-extension of British power. In a vivid medical analogy (Smollett was a physician, we should remember), he diagnosed that Britain,

would be in the condition of a waggon loaded, until the axle-tree cracks in the centre; that she would resemble an emaciated body with dropsical members: the vitals would be exhausted, and the limbs would mortify for want of circulation from the heart.¹⁷⁸

Great Britain would then be in a vulnerable position and possibly the target of a combined European offensive alliance:

The truth is, we have become too formidable to our neighbours: we have used our success in such an imperious manner, as to excite the disgust, as well as the jealousy of the other maritime states of Europe; and, were it possible to continue the war, until our rage of conquest could be satiated, I should expect to see this nation exposed to the hostilities of a grand alliance, formed on purpose to set bounds to our ambition.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ *The Briton*, No. 6, Saturday, 3 July 1762, 266.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, No. 22, Saturday, 23 October 1762, 349.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 351-52. On Smollett's writings in the *Briton* in this context, see Peter Miller, *Defining the Common Good: Empire, religion and philosophy in eighteenth-century Britain* (Cambridge, 1994), 175-76.

Smollett's pro-Bute stance in the *Briton* led opponents of the ministry to mount a counter-attack; this countering movement was articulated by John Wilkes in *The North Briton*, and was part of a larger anti-Scottish backlash. This backlash, which was just beginning to gain momentum while Smollett was writing the final sections of the *Continuation*, is clearly and passionately described.

In *The History and Adventures of an Atom*, Smollett identified how Yak-Strot (Bute) had been "represented" by his detractors. Similarly, in his historical presentation of the prime minister, Smollett describes the various ways in which he was represented. The most typical characterization of Bute was as a "worthless favourite", a depiction stemming from his friendship and tutoring of George III.¹⁸⁰ In his analysis of the Bute backlash it was the prime minister's Scottishness which Smollett identified as the focal point of criticism. He noted that

the character and conduct of the minister might have possibly stood proof against all those assaults, had not his enemies artfully pointed their arrows at that part of him which was most vulnerable. The earl of Bute was not only a Stuart by name, but he had the misfortune to be born a native of North Britain; and this very circumstance, we will venture to say, was ... more than sufficient to counter balance all the good qualities which human nature could possess.¹⁸¹

Smollett goes on to report that not only was this backlash directed against Bute and other Scots in public office, but was extended to all North Britons who had emigrated to the south in search of the opportunities afforded by the union of the two kingdoms in 1707:

In a word, the English people looked upon them with an evil eye, as interlopers

¹⁸⁰ *History*, Vol. 6, 43. In Almon's *Review of Lord Bute's Administration* (1763), he includes the following epigraph: "The Title of FAVOURITE, let him be ever so deserving, has always been odious in England", as well as a two-page footnote on the history of favourites at various European courts. *Review*, 9-10.

¹⁸¹ *History*, Vol. 6, 44.

in commerce and competitors for reputation ... They revived, and retailed with peculiar virulence, all the calumnies, ancient and modern, that have ever been uttered against the Scottish nation.¹⁸²

One can read in this passage the Smollett of the *Atom*, describing the attitudes of the "Nipphonites" towards the rude and ambitious "Ximians" landing on their shores in unparalleled numbers during Yak-Strot's tenure as Cuboy of the Japanese empire.

In the political narrative of the *Continuation*, then, the political preoccupations that are evident in the *Atom* are presented in arguments quite similar in content and tone. That is to say, by at least 1760 Smollett's views had hardened into a solid opposition to Hanoverian and Prussian subsidies as well as to the unnecessary prolongation of the war with France. For Smollett, this was a conflict between two commercial empires, the main theatre of which was the North American colonies. Once the security of the colonies had been secured in 1759-60, there was no reason to continue the war, other than to appease Frederick the Great in his conflict with the Austrian Habsburgs, newly allied with the French. This appeasement of Frederick was, in the minds of Smollett and others such as Maudit and John Entick, purely in the interests of Hanover, the ancestral "farm" which Smollett satirized in the *Atom*.

Seen in this context, it is now possible to re-evaluate Smollett's politics as they had long been interpreted, largely on the basis of his historical writings. Contrary to the testimony of his friend Alexander Carlyle, Smollett was not a Tory.¹⁸³ Nor can he accurately be called a Whig of any variety. Indeed, we have seen that in the *Atom* Smollett mocked the uselessness of these labels in the 1750s and 1760s. From a modern historical perspective, the inapplicability of either of these terms to Smollett has already been pointed out, but only by characterizing him as

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 44-45.

“apolitical”.¹⁸⁴ This he certainly was not; but, instead of using the terminology of party, as it existed in Britain in the middle of the eighteenth century, perhaps the most accurate description of Smollett's political ideology would be “independent”.¹⁸⁵ This suggestion is borne out by what we have seen as Smollett's consistent resistance, both in his historical writings and in the *Atom*, to faction, the Westminster party system, ministerial manipulation of public opinion, Continental connections, the Seven Years' War, and the overextension of the British commercial empire. Seen from this perspective, the public, political narrative of contemporary British politics which Smollett offered in his historical writings is but a more restrained and polite version of the “secret” political narrative which he offered anonymously towards the end of his life in the *Atom*. Moreover, Smollett's historical sense can be traced to an ideal of British patriotism which a recent analysis of Scottish historical writing interestingly terms as “Scoto-British”. In this sense, as the case of the *Continuation* demonstrates, mid-eighteenth-century Britishness was associated with Scottishness, but not Anglo-Britishness. The sources of British patriotism were derived from more traditional forces, such as anti-Catholicism, the French rivalry, contemporary military

¹⁸³ Carlyle, 199.

¹⁸⁴ Robin Fabel, “The Patriotic Briton: Tobias Smollett and English Politics, 1756-1771,” *Eighteenth Century Studies* 8 (1974): 100-114.

¹⁸⁵ This has been suggested quite correctly by both Laird Okie in *Augustan Historical Writing* (Lanham, MD, 1991), 215; and by W.A. Speck in *Society and Literature in England 1700-60* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1983), 170-71. However, both of these analyses place Smollett in earlier historical and political traditions termed, respectively, “Augustan” and “Country”. I would suggest that Smollett's political ideology conforms more directly to what Frank O'Gorman has identified as an “ideology of independence”: a resistance to oligarchical and Westminster party structures at the local, constituency level which operated within a non-coercive system of paternalism and deference. See *Voters, Patrons, and Parties* (Oxford, 1989), 224-317 and *passim*.

and naval heroes, and the critique of anti-Hanoverian that Smollett and Bute could appeal to successfully.¹⁸⁶

Politics was not Smollett's only concern, however. As in the *Atom*, Smollett intersects his mainly political narrative with other subjects, including criminal activity, fires, and other domestic occurrences.¹⁸⁷ Most prominent, though, are Smollett's discussions of the state of British literature and the cultivation of national arts and sciences. The inclusion of this subject matter in Smollett's historical writing stems directly from his perception of himself as a British academician and cultural arbiter during his editorship of the *Critical Review*, the literary journal which was the result of Smollett's plans for an academy.

Smollett's History of Contemporary British Letters

In his historical treatments of earlier periods, Smollett had given little or no attention to anything other than the traditional, political subject matter. This is particularly the case with *The Complete History*, but also with the early parts of the *Continuation*. Smollett restricts his narrative, for the most part, to a detailed discussion of the parliamentary transactions of each year. Once the narrative is carried into the 1750s, however, this pattern changes dramatically.

At first, deviations from the political narrative remain within the context of parliamentary proceedings. In 1753, for example, the House of Commons voted to purchase the museum and

¹⁸⁶ Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past* (Cambridge, 1993), 205-206.

¹⁸⁷ *History*, Vol. III, 387-92. Included in Smollett's account of crime for 1758 is Shebbeare, who was arrested for his series of pamphlets entitled *Letters to England*. Smollett reports that "this good man suffered for having given vent to the unguarded effusions of mistaken zeal, couched in the language of passion and scurrility." Smollett himself would serve a short prison term in

library of the naturalist Sir Hans Sloane (1660-1753), a collection which would form the basis of the British Museum. In a page-long discussion, Smollett reported the novelty of the situation:

From the usual deliberations on civil and commercial concerns, the attention of the parliament, which had seldom or never turned upon literary avocations, was called off by an extraordinary subject of this nature.

After relating the decision by the House to purchase the collection, Smollett registered his approval; Sloane's cabinet of curiosities could be

subjected without reserve to the view of the public, under certain necessary restrictions, and exhibit a glorious monument of national taste and liberality.¹⁸⁸

Smollett ascribed a special significance to this transaction, as it was one of those rare convergences, at least in the eighteenth-century Britain that Smollett was surveying, of politics and learning. Smollett was discouraged by the lack of government patronage of the arts. In describing the activities of the privately-funded Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, he noted a concomitant lack of support from government agencies:

Nor was encouragement refused to those who distinguished themselves ... in any branch of the liberal and useful arts and sciences, though no Maecenas appeared among the ministers, and not the least ray of patronage glimmered from the throne. The protection, countenance, and gratification, secured in other countries by the institution of academies, and the liberality of princes, the ingenious in England derived from the generosity of a public, endued with taste and sensibility, eager for improvement, and proud of patronizing extraordinary merit.¹⁸⁹

He would later write in the final volume of the *Continuation*, which detailed events to 1765:

The spirit of national improvement was not confined to the parliamentary

November 1760 for libel in the Admiral Knowles case. These two instances may partly account for Smollett's anonymous publication of the *Atom* in 1768-69.

¹⁸⁸ *History*, Vol. III, 335.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 393.

or public bodies. The patriotic society for encouragement of the arts, and manufactures exerted themselves in a most amazing manner during the course of this year [1764].¹⁹⁰

As will be seen, the idea of an academy of arts and sciences, based in the British capital and mediating between a literate British public and the cosmopolitan Republic of Letters, was one of Smollett's preoccupations throughout the 1750s and early 1760s.

The closer the *Continuation* gets to the contemporary period, the more frequent such non-political and explicitly literary "intrusions" become. They are no longer generated solely from a political context. The foremost example occurs in Smollett's post-mortem examination of George II's reign from 1727-1760. Unlike David Hume, who in his essay "A Character of Sir Robert Walpole" (1741) had asserted that learning had declined under a corrupt political administration, Smollett celebrates the achievements of British arts and sciences during George II's reign, a period in which "the powers of the human mind were freely and fully exercised."¹⁹¹

Smollett began his abstract of British intellectual achievement on a less than optimistic note. In treating religion and philosophy, he stated:

The progress of reason, and free cultivation of the human mind, had not, however, entirely banished ... ridiculous sects and schisms ... Imposture and fanaticism still clung to the skirts of religion.¹⁹²

As elsewhere, Smollett displays his consistent antipathy for factiousness and fanaticism, whether political or religious in motivation. He then goes on to document achievements in metaphysics, medicine, agriculture, and mechanics. The actor David Garrick is praised, as are many of

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, 301.

¹⁹¹ David Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*. Edited Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis, 1985), 576; Smollett, *History*, Vol. V, 249.

¹⁹² *History*, Vol. V, 250.

Smollett's Scottish friends and correspondents. His fullest treatment, however, is of the literary arts. In an astonishing catalogue of eighteenth-century British writers, Smollett examines achievements in poetry, biography, history, fiction, and drama, as seen in this excerpt:

Thomson, the poet of the Seasons, displayed a luxuriancy of genius in describing the beauties of nature. Akenside and Armstrong excelled in didactic poetry. Even the Epopoes did not disdain an English dress, but appeared to advantage in the Leonidas of Glover, and the Epigoniad of Wilkie. The public acknowledged a considerable share of dramatic merit in the tragedies of Young, Mallet, Home, and some other less distinguished authors. Very few regular comedies, during this period, were exhibited on the English theatre, which, however, produced many less laboured pieces, abounding with satire, wit, and humour ... That Great Britain was not barren of poets at this period, appears from the detached performances of Johnson, Mason, Gray, the two Whiteheads, and the two Wartons, besides a great number of other bards who have sported in lyric poetry, and acquired the applause of their fellow citizens. Candidates for literary fame appeared even in the higher sphere of life, embellished by the nervous stile, superior sense, and extensive erudition of a Corke; by the delicate taste, the polished muse, and tender feelings of a Lyttleton ... Even the female sex distinguished themselves by their taste and ingenuity. Miss Carter rivalled the celebrated Dacier in learning and critical knowledge; and Mrs. Lennox signalized herself by many successful efforts of genius, both in poetry and prose. The genius of Cervantes was transfused into the novels of Fielding, who painted the characters, and ridiculed the follies of life with equal strength, humour, and propriety. The field of history and biography was cultivated by many writers of ability, among whom we distinguish the copious Guthrie, the circumstantial Ralph, the laborious Carte, the learned and elegant Robertson, and above all the ingenious, penetrating, and comprehensive Hume, whom we rank among the first writers of the age, both as an historian and philosopher. Nor let us forget the merit conspicuous in the works of Campbell, remarkable for candour, intelligence, and precision. Johnson, inferior to none in Philosophy, philology, poetry, and classical learning, stands foremost as an essayist ... The laudable aim of inlisting the passions on the side of virtue, was successfully pursued by Richardson, in his Pamela, Clarissa, and Grandison; a species of writing equally new and extraordinary, where, mingled with much superfluity and impertinence, we find a sublime system of ethics, and amazing knowledge, and command of human nature.¹⁹³

Smollett even discusses accomplishments in English translation such as Alexander Pope's Homer and Joseph Warton's edition of Virgil.¹⁹⁴ In short:

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 253-255.

Every literary production of merit, calculated for amusement or instruction, that appeared in any country or language of Christendom, was immediately imported, and naturalized among the English people. Never was the pursuit of knowledge so universal, or literary merit more regarded, than at this juncture, by the body of the British nation.¹⁹⁵

Unlike Hume, who limited these discussions to appendices to avoid the violation of the neoclassical narrative, Smollett re-fashions the classical paradigm by integrating these discussions into the main body of the historical narrative.

An even longer, but less well known, examination of cultural and literary history is included in Smollett's *Present State of All Nations* (8 vol, 1768-9). In the England volumes, he moves from a discussion of "diseases" to the "state of learning", beginning with the great universities of Oxford and Cambridge, where "the liberal foundations of the respective colleges that compose these seminaries, have encouraged men of extraordinary merit to embrace the academical life." Intellectual life in England was more "generally diffused" than anywhere else:

The clergy are famous for their profound knowledge in theological points and divinity; witness the labours of Clarke, Barrow, and Atterbury. The lawyers are remarkably skilled in all the branches of their profession, and plead with equal eloquence and precision. Elocution seems a natural talent among the English of all ranks, who, from the bishop to the cobbler, accustom themselves to harangue in public. At a meeting of journeymen tailors, one may be entertained with tropes, figures, and all the flowers of rhetoric. With respect to assemblies of a higher nature some of them are distinguished by the most sublime strokes of oratory; and many speeches are made in both houses of parliament, which would not have disgraced a Roman senate, at the zenith of their eloquence and patriotism. Medical knowledge flourishes in England ... The physicians, exclusive of their own province, are well tinctured with other arts and sciences, in consequence of an extensive and liberal academical education. Many of this class have distinguished themselves in the world of taste and polite literature ... Being easy in circumstances, they live like men of fashion,

¹⁹⁴ Smollett had translated LeSage's *Gil Blas* in 1748, and *Don Quixote* in 1755. See Knapp, 103-105.

¹⁹⁵ *History*, Vol. V, 255.

are always considered as gentlemen, and everywhere respected on account of their profession ... Metaphysics and natural philosophy are studied even by the vulgar in England. The names of Newton, Locke, and Halley, will always be remembered with admiration and esteem. Many sceptical performances, equally bold and ingenious, have made their appearance in the English language; and much learning and argument have been exhausted in controversies, between deistical and orthodox writers. Foreigners have observed, that England was defective of historians: but the cause of that reproach is now removed. The task of collecting, collating, and arranging old papers and records, is but ill suited to the impatience of the English disposition: but, this labour being in a great measure surmounted by those who had no other merit than industry, divers English authors have lately exhibited elegant specimens of historical talents. Mathematics have made a greater progress, and mechanical knowledge has been more usefully reduced to practice, in this, than in any other nation; witness the curious clocks, watches, carriages, mills, machines and engines of various kinds, with which the kingdom abounds.¹⁹⁶

What were the peculiar conditions that made all of these developments possible? Namely, the freedom of government institutions and of the press, public lectures, "the incredible series of books, pamphlets, Reviews, Magazines, and news-papers, daily published."¹⁹⁷

Indeed, these inventories of the history of British culture and ideas were informed by Smollett's immersion in the periodical world of London. Smollett's high profile as the founder and editor of the *Critical Review* established his reputation as a literary and cultural arbiter within the British critical establishment. His role as editor and primary contributor from its beginnings in 1756 to his leaving for France in mid-1763 brought him into contact not only with the British scene, but a more international and cosmopolitan Republic of Letters as well.¹⁹⁸ By the time Smollett wrote the *Continuation*, then, he was widely recognized, from London to Edinburgh to Glasgow, as having earned his position as a literary and cultural arbiter. The catalogue from the

¹⁹⁶ *Present State of All Nations*, Vol 2, (1768), 223-25.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 225.

¹⁹⁸ Basker, 151, 214, and *passim*.

Continuation cited above was reprinted in a number of contemporary publications, including *The Public Advertiser*, London's major newspaper at the time, and in both the *Edinburgh* and *Scots Magazine*. Careful attention was paid to these assessments; for example, Garrick was so pleased with his flattering portrait that he promptly sent Smollett a gift of his most recent Shakespeare adaptation.¹⁹⁹ The *Critical Review*, however, had its origins in a larger scheme in which Smollett proposed an academy of British arts and sciences. Once again, a lengthy section of the *Present State* illustrates the extent to which he considered "Societies for Propagating Knowledge" as vital parts of a nation's intellectual history and vitality. After a lengthy discussion of the Royal Society and its founding by royal charter in 1662, even if lately "persons of very little merit or erudition have insinuated themselves into this society. The members seem to have degenerated in their studies; and some of the modern Transactions have entailed ridicule and contempt upon the whole body." Smollett then goes on to discuss the Society of Antiquaries of England, "curious individuals ... who investigate old manuscripts, coins, gems, busts, statues, and monuments; and have made considerable progress in this kind of enquiry; though many of their conjectures are ridiculously extravagant." Finally, historical notice is given to the academy of painters and engravers.²⁰⁰

In a letter to his cousin John Moore in 1756, Smollett revealed his plans for an academy, as he wrote that the *Critical Review* was but "a small Branch of an extensive Plan which I last year projected for a sort of Academy of the belles Lettres, a Scheme which will one day, I hope, be put in Execution to its utmost Extent."²⁰¹ This idea was not new, as it had first been proposed by Thomas Sprat in his *History of the Royal-Society of London* in 1667. Its express purpose was

¹⁹⁹ Smollett *Letters*, 103.

²⁰⁰ *Present State*, Vol 2, (1768) 231-33.

to rehabilitate the condition of British letters through a regulatory body, to be chaired by Smollett.

These ambitious plans for an academy never materialized, but the *Critical Review*, in both its editorial structure and subject matter, reflected Smollett's academic ideal in its promotion of British learning. For example, in the first volume of the journal, Smollett personally reviewed a work entitled *A New and Accurate History of South America*. The review is unfavourable, and Smollett took the opportunity to describe the damage to British national respectability inflicted by such works:

The British learning of this age is grown into contempt among other nations, by whom it was formerly revered ... [because of] the inundation of mean performances, undertaken for the emolument of booksellers, who cannot distinguish authors of merit, or if they could, have not sense and spirit to reward them according to their genius and capacity ... we own ourselves warmed with a sort of national indignation, against those who by their presumptuous ignorance depreciate and degrade the character of their country.²⁰²

In this case history-writing, a genre Smollett was just beginning to engage in by 1756, is seen as an index of British national character and excellence in *belles lettres*. But other arts were considered equally important by Smollett. Through the medium of the *Critical Review* and in the *Continuation*, he tried to cultivate a native British school of painters to rival French and Italian influences.²⁰³

Smollett's experiences from 1756-1763 - as academician, editor, and political pamphleteer in *The Briton* - can be seen, then, as the crucible which forged his recognized role as

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁰² *Critical Review* 1 (1756), 97-98.

a qualified commentator on mid-eighteenth-century British literature and politics, the dual preoccupation which we have seen dominates both the *Atom* and Smollett's contemporary histories. In this role, his principles were inherently British, or at least Anglo-Scottish, in the sense that Smollett promoted a political and cultural identity that was not simply "English".²⁰⁴

Furthermore, Smollett's cultural history can be seen as an example of another aspect of contemporary history. David Allan has argued that an important concern of Scottish Enlightenment writers was to represent themselves as the ideal social and intellectual leaders of the new society that was emerging after the middle of the eighteenth century. Smollett's sense of himself as a literary arbiter and historical writer fits this description.²⁰⁵ Elsewhere, Mark Phillips has pointed out the representation of the social and intellectual fields of history that formed an important part of the historical horizon during this period.²⁰⁶ In this sense, works as disparate as Smollett's *Continuation* and the fourth volume of John Millar's *Historical View of the English Government* (1803) can be seen as part of a new kind of intellectual and cultural history that was a transformation of the Thucydidean tradition of contemporary politico-military narrative.

Moreover, Smollett's ideal of a British Republic of Letters necessarily linked him to similar currents of thought in North Britain; this connection went beyond the important fact that Smollett was part of a community of London Scots. There has been no serious attempt to examine Smollett within the context of a network of Scottish intellectuals in eighteenth-century

²⁰³ Basker, 146. In his description of the visual arts during the reign of George II, Smollett wrote that "The British soil, which had hitherto been barren in the article of painting, now produced some artists of extraordinary merit." *History*, Vol. V, 257.

²⁰⁴ Basker has asserted that "in Britain the Scottish writers, feeling themselves on the periphery of an older, native-English culture, tried to combine the spread of learning with a new cosmopolitanism. And among those anxious Anglo-Scots, Smollett was the most prominent and the most energetic at the mid-century", 10.

²⁰⁵ Allan, *Virtue, Learning and the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh, 1993), 191-2.

Britain, and the attempt will not be made with the force it deserves here.²⁰⁷ By the same token, however, Smollett should not be seen as an isolated and, as some have suggested, alienated London Scot. Although Smollett spent the majority of his life in London, he seems to have retained a genuine affection for his native Scotland. In addition, we have already seen that in the *Atom* and in *The Briton*, Smollett sympathetically portrayed Anglo-Scots as the victims of English xenophobia and prejudice. In 1754, Smollett wrote the following to his friend Alexander Carlyle, author of the *Autobiography* and later contributor to Sinclair's *Statistical Account of Scotland*:

I do not think I could enjoy Life with greater Relish in any part of the world than in Scotland among you and your Friends, and I often amuse my Imagination with schemes for attaining that Degree of Happiness, which, however, is altogether out of my Reach. I am heartily tired of this Land of Indifference and Phlegm where the finer Sensations of the Soul are not felt, and Felicity is held to consist in stupifying Port and overgrown Buttocks of Beef, where Genius is lost, Learning undervalued, and Taste altogether extinguished, and Ignorance prevails to such a degree that one of our Chelsea Club asked me if the weather was good when I crossed the Sea from Scotland ...²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Phillips, *Society and Sentiment* (Princeton, 2000), *passim*.

²⁰⁷ Scholars of English literature and aesthetics have attempted this connection, but usually only with regard to his canonical novels, in particular *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771). See M.A. Goldberg, *Smollett and the Scottish School* (Albuquerque, 1959); for a discussion of *Clinker* as the first "British" novel, see Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Oxford, 1992), 55-75; see also Howard D. Weinbrot, *Britannia's Issue: The Rise of British Literature from Dryden to Ossian* (Cambridge, 1993), 512-16, 533-34.

²⁰⁸ *Letters*, 33. The reference to Scotland as an island separated from England might have been another source for Smollett's Ximo-Nippon analogy in the *Atom*. At any rate, Smollett reproduced the remark in *Humphry Clinker*, as well as Jerry Melford's response that "the people at the other end of the island know as little of Scotland as of Japan." Also in *Clinker* is the well-known letter from Matt Bramble to Dr. Lewis in which he writes: "Edinburgh is a hot-bed of genius. - I have had the good fortune to be made acquainted with many authors of the first distinction ... These acquaintances I owe to the friendship of Dr. Carlyle." *Humphry Clinker* (New York, 1960), 234. And, as Martz has correctly pointed out, the vivid geographical and cultural descriptions of Scotland included in *Clinker* are culled, for the most part, from the second volume of *The Present State of All Nations* (1768-9).

This went beyond a sentimental reverence towards the place of his birth. Through his cousin John Moore, Smollett had a tangible link to the Glasgow Enlightenment.²⁰⁹ Smollett's ties to the Edinburgh Moderate Enlightenment were largely through his friendship with Carlyle, through whom he met other notables such as William Robertson, John Home, Adam Smith, and Hugh Blair.²¹⁰ Many of these writers contributed to the *Critical Review* at Smollett's request.²¹¹ And in 1761-62 Smollett personally reviewed *Fingal*, James Macpherson's Ossianic epic, in the *Critical*. Defending Macpherson against charges of fraud, Smollett proclaimed it a "perfect epic" which compared favourably with Homer and Virgil.²¹²

Unfortunately, Smollett's promotion of a British Republic of Letters, with its concomitant endorsement of fellow Scots, rendered him a vulnerable target during the anti-Scottish backlash of the mid-century. Smollett had been aware of his conspicuous identity as a London Scot since his arrival from Glasgow in 1739, and Carlyle would later report the care Smollett took during a London riot in the aftermath of Culloden in 1746. Smollett warned Carlyle not to reveal his accent, "lest the mob should discover [their] country and become insolent, for John Bull ... is as haughty and valiant to-night as he was abject and cowardly on the Black Wednesday when the

²⁰⁹ On Moore, see H.L. Fulton, "John Moore, the Medical Profession and the Glasgow Enlightenment," *The Glasgow Enlightenment*. Edited Andrew Hook and Richard B. Sher (East Linton, 1995), 176-89.

²¹⁰ In 1758 Smollett, Carlyle, Robertson, Smith, and Home dined together in Edinburgh. As Carlyle later reported, Smollett had "now become a great man ... We dined together, and Smollett was very brilliant ... We passed a very pleasant and joyful evening. When we broke up, Robertson expressed great surprise at the polished and agreeable manners and the great urbanity of his conversation. He had imagined that a man's manners must bear a likeness to his books, and as Smollett had described so well the characters of ruffians and profligates, that he must, of course, resemble them." *Autobiography* (Thoemmes reprint, 1990), 355-56.

²¹¹ Basker, 151.

²¹² *Critical Review* 12 (1761), 405-18; 13 (1762), 45-53.

Highlanders were at Derby.”²¹³ After 1756, it was Smollett's association with the *Critical Review* which made him the target of snubbed writers, many of whom focused attention on his Scottish background and connections.

In 1758, Smollett wrote a letter to Moore in which he expressed regret over a poor review in the *Critical of Douglas*, a play written by John Home and staged in London in 1757. As Smollett explains, he did not see the review before it was published, nor another unfavourable review of a Scottish epic, and in the course of his explanation describes the anti-Scottish atmosphere in the British capital:

The Remarks upon Home's Tragedy I never saw until they were in print, and as yet I have not read one Line of the Epigoniad. I am told the work has merit, and am truly sorry that it should have been so roughly handled. Notwithstanding the Censures that have been so freely bestowed upon these and other Productions of our Country, the Authors of the C. Review have been insulted and abused as a *Scotch Tribunal*. The Truth is there is no Author so wretched but he will meet with Countenance in England if he attacks our Nation in any shape. You cannot conceive the Jealousy that prevails against us. Nevertheless, it is better to be envied than despised.²¹⁴

In an anonymous pamphlet two years later, Smollett was caricatured as “Sawney MacSmallhead” and the *Critical Review* condemned as a vehicle for the Celtic fringe.²¹⁵

Smollett and the Genre of Contemporary History

²¹³ *Autobiography*, 199.

²¹⁴ *Letters*, 65.

²¹⁵ *The Battle of the Reviews*, [16 March] 1760. Reprinted in *Tobias Smollett: The Critical Heritage*. Edited Lionel Kelly (London, 1987), 162-69.

David Hume did not carry his *History of England* (1754-62) beyond the Glorious Revolution in 1688, although he seems to have entertained the idea of producing an additional volume at least until 1768.²¹⁶ In the void created by Hume's decision not to carry the national narrative into the late Stuart and Hanoverian periods, Tobias Smollett established a niche as the re-inventor of a classical genre.²¹⁷ Moreover, I would argue that Smollett's new synthesis of contemporary political and socio-cultural history established a new subgenre of eighteenth-century British historiography that reflected the period's fascination with representing historical contemporaneity across such a diverse set of writings.

Staying with Hume for the moment, it is interesting that Smollett's historical writings have often – especially from the nineteenth century – been seen only in relation to Hume's. Thomas Peardon summarized a persistent nineteenth and early twentieth-century viewpoint when he wrote:

If Tobias Smollett finds a place among the early successors of Hume it is only because of the familiarity of his name and the long-standing use of his book. His *Compleat* [sic] *History of England* (1757-1758) was merely a rapid compilation written as a commercial venture to rival Hume. But since, with a *Continuation*, it carried a Tory interpretation beyond 1688 into the eighteenth century, it was long used as a supplement to Hume.²¹⁸

²¹⁶ As mentioned in an earlier note, Hume gave two reasons for delaying the volume: a lack of accessible sources and political factiousness. See *Letters*, Vol. I, 243, 251, 359, 370, 378, 465, 491. Vol. II, 177, 223. Donald Livingston has suggested another reason why the volume was never written, claiming that Hume possessed some sort of proto-Hegelian historicist sense that events are only intelligible well after they have occurred. See *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life* (Chicago, 1984), 104-105. On a lighter note, Hume also professed to be “too old, too fat, too lazy and too rich.” Quoted in Nicholas Phillipson, *Hume* (London, 1989), 137.

²¹⁷ This has been noticed by John L. Bastian, “Smollett's and Goldsmith's Histories and the Mid-Eighteenth Century Reaction to the Genre of History,” PhD Dissertation, Boston University, 1952, 172. His analysis, however, does not penetrate beyond the fact of Smollett's presentation of recent historical events, nor does it engage with the set of genres which I have been arguing constitute a wider and more significant episode in British intellectual and cultural history.

If we limit ourselves to the *Complete History*, this assessment would be difficult to challenge. By Smollett's own admission it was hastily written under pressure from his publishers. Remarkably, it sold better than Hume's *History of England* until about 1761, a situation Hume acknowledged (in an ironic tone) in a letter to Robertson in 1759 shortly after the publication of the latter's *History of Scotland*:

A plague take you! Here I sat near the historical summit of Parnassus, immediately under Dr. Smollett; and you have the impudence to squeeze yourself by me, and place yourself directly under his feet. Do you imagine that this can be agreeable to me?²¹⁹

It is inappropriate, however, to compare Smollett with Hume on the basis of the *Complete History*, especially the portions of it which handle the same periods as Hume's *History*. In terms of their respective contributions to eighteenth-century British historiography, my argument here is that the proper comparison should be with the *Continuation*. Once again, though, it is somewhat distorting to see this work only in relation to Hume's *History*. Rather, it is my contention that Smollett made the subject of contemporary history - a subject that Hume refused to treat - a newly important one in terms of both formal achievement and dignity of content, and that this did not go unnoticed during the eighteenth century.

Smollett was certainly aware of the differences between himself and "philosophical" historians like Hume. In his otherwise favourable review of the latter's second volume of the *History of England*, Smollett complained of the frequency of "reflections", which, "instead of elucidating the subject", only serve to "perplex the reader".²²⁰ What made Smollett's historiography different, though, was certainly not his own objectivity. Quite the opposite was

²¹⁸ *The Transition in English Historical Writing 1760-1830* (New York, 1933), 77.

²¹⁹ *Hume Letters*, Vol. I, 302.

the case: the closer Smollett's narrative approached the present, the more opinionated and subjective it became. Smollett's role as reviewer and cultural arbiter here merges with the role of historian of Hanoverian Britain. This was noticed by one observer as early as 1758. In his review of the fourth volume of the *Complete History*, Owen Ruffhead notes that Smollett, in treating events since 1688, becomes less concerned with documenting his sources, particularly in his description of Culloden and the Duke of Cumberland's brutal suppression of the Jacobite rebels.²²¹

Smollett's *Continuation*, however, seems to have been received and appreciated for the same reason that Ruffhead censured the last part of the *Complete History*. Shortly after the appearance of the first volume, an anonymous reviewer in the *Critical* (almost certainly not Smollett) displayed an awareness of the unique problems of the genre:

In writing the history of the present times, Dr. Smollett has encountered difficulties which will vanish before a future historian; but he hath likewise experienced very peculiar advantages ... Our author sympathizes with the distress, and exults in the prosperity of his country, with heart-felt emotions that must appear counterfeit, should they be expressed by a writer of the future age.²²²

Rather than follow what historians of historiography such as David Wootton, Donald Kelley and John Pocock have described as a turn to more remote periods of British history during the eighteenth century, Smollett evinces the most explicitly historiographical aspect of what I have been positing as a fascination with the historical present in Britain from 1750 through the 1830s, a fascination that needs to be seen alongside antiquarianism, conjectural history, and other forms

²²⁰ *Critical Review* 2 (1756), 386.

²²¹ *Monthly Review* 18 (1758), 289-305. Ruffhead wrote that "it is not in our power to prove a negative, but we have at least a right to expect the sanction of some authority for such injurious assertions; but the Reader may readily determine the writer's country."

of historiographical practice during the period. To use the useful categories of Mark Phillips, Smollett is offering both an approximate and a distanced perspective at once: the narrative closure of the history brings the present to a close, keeping it at a remove; on the other hand, Smollett's formal practice is often to render the historical narrative in a vivacious and immediate fashion, rendering those events "present" in yet another sense, if an ocean away. It has already been shown that in *The History and Adventures of an Atom*, Smollett drew upon his historical works to produce a "secret" political narrative within a novel; similarly, in his treatment of contemporary history in the *Continuation*, Smollett utilized novelistic formal techniques.

The most salient example of this in the *Continuation* is Smollett's description of the "Black Hole of Calcutta" incident in 1756. The viceroy, Sur Raja al Dowlat, imprisoned a number of English officers in the Black-Hole, a poorly ventilated jail. As Smollett reported, "the humane reader will conceive with horror the miserable situation to which they must have been reduced." Smollett went on to provide a sympathetic account of the officers' plight which could have been confused with one of the Gothic chapters of *Ferdinand Fathom*:

By this time, a profuse sweat had broke out on every individual, and this was attended with an insatiable thirst, which became the more intolerable as the body was drained of its moisture. In vain those miserable objects stripped themselves of their clothes, squatted down on their hams, and fanned the air with their hats, to produce a refreshing undulation ... The dreadful symptom of thirst was now accompanied with a difficulty of respiration, and every individual gasped for breath. Their despair became outrageous: Again they attempted to force the door, and provoke the guard to fire upon them by execration and abuse. The cry of 'Water! Water!' issued from every mouth.²²³

²²² *Critical Review* 12 (1761), 284.

²²³ *History*, Vol. III, 512-13. In *Humphry Clinker*, Smollett actually did import an episode, almost verbatim, from his serialized "History of Canada", which had appeared in the *British Magazine* from 1760-1763. See Martz, 176-80.

One of the earliest commentaries on Smollett's contemporary history was supplied by Oliver Goldsmith, who had established himself as a literary success in 1759 with *An Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe*. After the appearance of the *Continuation's* early volumes, Goldsmith wrote the following in *Lloyd's Evening Post* in January of 1762:

Some nights ago I was agreeably entertained with that part of Doctor Smollett's History of England, in which he characterizes the Writers and the Literature of the present times. His style is rapid and elegant, and he is perhaps the first who ever undertook to dress the newborn occurrences of the day in the pompous robe of history. I was not a little mortified, however, to find that most of the Writers he mentions, as doing honour to the present age, are Scotchmen.²²⁴

Goldsmith himself followed this lead and proceeded to write his own contemporary histories, an early example of which was *The Martial Review; or, A General History of the Late Wars*, which first appeared weekly in the *Reading Mercury*. Goldsmith described the Seven Years' War as a formative part of "the brightest period of any in the British annals", and felt compelled to be its military historian.²²⁵ What is most interesting about this text, though, was its serial publication. Indeed, around the late 1750s and early 1760s, the regular consumption of contemporary history was made possible with the increase in the periodical genre of the "historical register".

The Historical Register

In many respects, Robert Dodsley (1703-64) was the originator of this periodical genre. John Campbell, Smollett's co-compiler of the *Universal History* mentioned earlier, was a member of the Dodsley circle and became the editor of the "Historical Memoirs" parts of the

²²⁴ *New Essays by Oliver Goldsmith*. Edited Ronald S. Crane (New York, 1968), 110.

Museum, which appeared in 1746-7 and included Campbell's "History of Modern Europe", much of which was a contemporary account of the War of the Austrian Succession. In 1758, Dodsley started his much more enduring *Annual Register*, hiring the young Edmund Burke as an editor, a position he probably held until 1764 or 1765, when he became private secretary to the Marquis of Rockingham. He continued as a consultant, however, and corrected drafts of the 1784-5 and 1787 editions were found in his papers.²²⁶ Published every spring, the *Annual Register* was a review of the previous year. During his direct involvement from 1758-64, almost precisely the years in which Smollett's contemporary histories were appearing, Burke was responsible for the "Historical Article" portion of each issue. This text was divided into three parts. The first was a coherent narrative of the year's events (for example, the "Present War" to 1763, and the "History of Europe" after 1763); a secondary supplement including a non-narrative chronicle of births and obituaries and an appendix of historical documents, taxation tables and other such data; and finally a compilation of miscellaneous reading matter drawn into digest form from other contemporary publications.²²⁷ The "Historical Article", in this sense, posits a clear connection between history and contemporary information in an unproblematic way, and the popularity of the venture is a further testament to the demand for the history of the present that we are tracking across these various forms of writing. In 1780 Andrew Kippis (1725-95), a non-conformist divine and member of both the Royal Society and Society of Antiquaries, began a rival publication with his *New Annual Register*. Also the editor and chief author of the *Biographica Britannica* (5 vol, 1778-93), Kippis himself wrote the "Review of the Transactions of the Present Reign" in the opening issue, as well as the "History of Knowledge, Learning, and Taste" which

²²⁵ *The Martial Review* (1763), iii.

²²⁶ F.P. Lock, *Edmund Burke, 1730-1784* (Oxford, 1998), Chp 6.

appeared regularly in every volume to 1794. William Godwin's *History of the Life of William Pitt, Earl of Chatham* made its first appearance in the *New Annual Register* in 1783. Finally, Walter Scott himself took on the editorship of the *Edinburgh Annual Register* from 1810-1819 (the review itself died in 1826 after failing to supplant the *Annual Register*). It consisted of two parts: the history of the preceding year, and the history of Europe. Obviously, much of both sections was devoted to the Napoleonic Wars, and fell to a succession of chief historians, the first of which was Robert Southey, followed by James Russell, a notable writer of a history of modern Europe. Only towards the end of his tenure did Scott undertake the task himself.²²⁸

Meanwhile, non-periodical contemporary histories continued to thrive after mid-century and the example furnished by Smollett. Robert Bisset's *History of the Reign of George III* (6 vol, 1803) opens with a self-conscious expression of the attractions, fascinations and opportunities of writing the history of the present:

I am fully aware, that many votaries of historical literature deem it more difficult to write a history of present times, than of remote transactions; experience, however, does not confirm the opinion, as some of the most authentic and impartial works have recorded events which passed during the lives of the authors. The writer who is competent to the task of composing a history, may execute the work on a cotemporary subject, as easily as on any other ... Britain, from the revolution to the present time, appeared to me to afford a scope for narration and reflection, equal to any that had hitherto been treated in history; and I cherished a hope of being able, some time or other, to complete a narrative of that period.²²⁹

Indeed, this still appears to be a re-worked version of the classical tradition, adapted to a new and complex commercial society yet still a genre capable of inculcating the moral lessons associated with the older tradition.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

²²⁸ See Kenneth Curry, *Sir Walter Scott's Annual Register* (Knoxville, 1977).

As with each aspect of the cultural episode I am discussing, however, this peculiar form of hybridized contemporary history begins to be transformed during the 1830s. The temporal shift that other intellectual historians have posited (I think in an overstated way) in the later eighteenth century begins to occur at this later point. Smollett's historiographical career began during the 1750's, a decade which featured the crystallization of the spectrum of representational concerns which develop in the English novel and culminate after the turbulence of the 1760's. For Smollett and his re-fashioning of the classical Thucydidean genre, the "contemporary" and the "historical" are on the same spectrum of necessary knowledge for the modern citizen and consumer of historical literature. Indeed, the concern to represent, consume and understand the historical present forms the basis of what I am trying to track across a disparate set of genres and texts as a "cultural episode".

In the 1830s, however, we can also see evidence of the continuation of the comparative register between past and present that is central to all forms of contemporary history. Thomas Carlyle, for example, begins with the project of identifying the kernel of the contemporary with his "Signs of the Times" in 1829 and continues his interest in the intersection of the historical and the contemporary with *The French Revolution* in 1837, and again in 1839 with his *Chartism*. At the end of the 1830s, moreover, Carlyle turns to a diagnosis of contemporary society by means of the construction of an illustrative medievalism in *Past and Present* (1842). While Carlyle perceived a greater disjuncture between history and the contemporary field than did Smollett and Bisset, such a work attests to much longer afterlife of contemporary history, despite the historicist awareness of the radical difference of the past that took root at the outer edge of the

²²⁹ Robert Bisset, *The History of the Reign of George III*, Vol 1, 1820.

1830s. This study, however, must confine itself to the temporal limits it has set out, and leave the question of Victorian contemporary history for future analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR

SURVEYING CONTEMPORANEITY: PRESENT STATES, ANTIQUARIANISM, AND 'STATISTICS'

In this chapter, examination will be made of a variety of "survey" genres and inquiries that appeared in Britain during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. While these works may appear as a disparate mass of texts, they all share a primary preoccupation with recording and preserving, as accurately as possible, a picture of the historical present, as well as a prospective look to the future. Indeed, such a prospective aspect bears much in common with many of the narrative genres discussed earlier in this study. Seen from this perspective, works such as Henry Cockburn's *Memorials*, Smollett's histories, and Sir John Sinclair's *Statistical Account of Scotland* seem less disparate than one might think. Indeed, most of these survey genres and texts have not previously been seen as belonging to historical genres in addition to also being examples of nascent historical geography, sociology and political economy. This is so, despite the fact that the comparison between past, present and future is a fundamental element of the historical thought of any period, but particularly during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Other texts discussed in this chapter have been characterized only as antiquarian researches concerned only with the remote past. My purpose in this chapter is to maintain that all of these "survey" genres can be re-positioned as part of an historiographical project that takes the mapping of the contemporary "present" – in counterpoise to the past and future – as its temporal focus. These texts, then, can be re-situated as examples of the contemporary historiographical "episode" from the 1750s to the 1830s that is the object of this study, and are as important for our

understanding of the wider historical sense of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Britain as they are to understanding other emerging human and social sciences. These forms can stand alone as various aspects of the cultural desire to represent the historical present during this period, but they also all contribute to a rich hybrid genre of a contemporary historical nature: the “statistical survey” of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

Present States

The eighteenth-century genres of the “Present State” and the geographical grammar have their origins in a long tradition of ‘survey’ discourses. The “political arithmetics” of William Petty (1623-87), along with Charles Davenant and Gregory King, are important precursors in this respect.²³⁰ Petty’s political arithmetic was the promotion of an early version of political science: essentially in determining the quantifiable resources of a state. In terms of the ‘present states’ genre, once again Tobias Smollett was a key contributor, although his *Present State of All Nations* (8 vol, 1768-9) was a late contribution to a genre that began to flourish in the latter part of the seventeenth century. Closer to our period, an interesting example of the interplay and fluidity between history, “present states” and the geographical grammar can be seen in the writings of Thomas Salmon (1679-1767). The son of a Bedfordshire rector, his best known work is his *Modern History, or the Present State of All Nations*, illustrated by Herman Moll and appearing in 32 volumes between 1725-39. As a Tory historian from the wrong side of the tracks, Salmon did not cut a major figure in the early eighteenth-century British historiographical

vanguard. The *Modern History*, though, was a success, and was translated several times.²³¹ He achieved even more success with his *A New Geographical and Historical Grammar* (1749), which went through thirteen editions by 1785 until it was superseded by William Guthrie's similarly titled work which appeared in 1770.²³² The latter work pays special attention to Britain, for obvious reasons, and displays a patriotism not uncommon in such works. Salmon sets out with the goal to "create in the British youth a laudable ambition to excel in such pursuits as most conduce to their own honour and happiness, and [the] prosperity of their native country."²³³

In addition, Salmon seems acutely aware of and sensitive to an emerging desire for information about the contemporary world. As Salmon asks, "Can there be a rational creature unconcerned to know the state of the world around him, and the manners, customs, and history, of the several nations his cotemporaries?" Almost grudgingly, he admits to this popular taste, noting that "we find every gentleman, and almost every lady, inquiring into the history of the day, and reading the most trifling occurrences, which nothing but the novelty can recommend."²³⁴ Salmon clearly intended his work to be read not as a continuous narrative to be read from start to finish, but as a handy reference work for all segments of society. He aspired to present "an epitome of Modern History, or the present state of all nations", that would fill the demand for contemporary information that was emerging from every quarter:

²³⁰ For these sixteenth and seventeenth-century English chorographies and political arithmetics, see Barbara Shapiro, *A Culture of Fact: England, 1550-1720* (Cornell, 2000). Shapiro's is the only recent study I have found that examines the ubiquitous "present state" genre.

²³¹ On Salmon as a political historian, see Okie, 99-110.

²³² Salmon's reputation among historians of British geography seems to fluctuate. David Livingstone summarily treats the grammars of both Salmon and Guthrie in *The Geographical Tradition*, 112. A more recent discussion can be found in Robert Mayhew, *Enlightenment Geography*, 132-40.

²³³ Salmon 1780, v.

²³⁴ *Ibid* v-vi.

here the senator and politician may view the constitution, forces, and revenues, of the respective kingdoms and states; the divine may observe the religion and superstition of the respective people; the merchant, and marine officer, the produce, traffic, periodical winds and seasons, in the various climates of the globe ... In those that have not read larger accounts, it may create an appetite to search further into these interesting subjects, and in those who have been conversant in larger works, it may revive the memory of what they have read, and prevent that confusion in chronology and geography which is too apt to attend the reading many histories of different countries.²³⁵

In many ways, the “present state” genre bears a clear relationship to encyclopaedic works, and the encyclopedic impulse of eighteenth-century Europe can also be regarded in some ways as part of a cultural demand for the codification of what was “known” about the contemporary world. Surprisingly little, however, has been suggested about the relationships between encyclopedism and historiography – of any form – during this period.²³⁶

The editors of the first two editions of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (3 vol 1771 and 10 vol 1778-83) – the printer and natural historian William Smellie (1740-95) and James Tytler (1747?-1805) – both can be seen as practitioners of what this study suggests as variants of contemporary history. In addition to natural history, the field in which he undoubtedly made his chief contribution, Smellie was a biographer of eminent contemporary Scots, a role in which, as noted earlier in this study, he was acknowledged as a model by Robert Chambers. And as will be discussed below, Smellie was one of the key figures behind the plans for a statistical survey of

²³⁵ *Ibid* vi-vii.

²³⁶ Until recently, British encyclopedism had not been the object of much scholarship. The best recent study is Richard Yeo, *Encyclopedic Visions* (Cambridge 2001). See also Frank Kafker, *Notable Encyclopedias of the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1994). Among the many examinations of the French *Encyclopedie*, Judith Shklar has noted the extent to which Jean d’Alembert (1717-83) envisioned the massive work as a contribution to a new sort of contemporary history. “Jean D’Alembert and the Rehabilitation of History”, *Journal of the History of Ideas* (1981): 645. For Biblical history and British encyclopedism, see Silvia

Scotland under the auspices of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. Tytler, on the other hand, did not enjoy as stellar a reputation as his fellow printer Smellie, but was a writer of tremendous versatility. He not only edited the second edition of the *Britannica*, but also wrote most of the ten volumes himself. In 1791-92, he also issued a contemporary history periodical along the pattern of the *Annual Register* entitled *The Historical Register: or Edinburgh Monthly Intelligencer*.²³⁷

The other obvious source for the “present state” – and ultimately for the “statistical survey” later in the century was the German historiographical tradition of *Statistik*, or study of the state. An innovation in the German science of state, its aim was to acquire an understanding of contemporary affairs such as economic data, population figures, and national production through a rigorous collection of observed facts. Within this tradition though, statistics was already closely intertwined with certain types of history.²³⁸

Antiquarianism and the Statistical Survey

Sir John Sinclair’s massive *Statistical Account of Scotland*, published in 21 volumes between 1791 and 1799, claimed to be the epitome of its kind. It had its origins, however, not just in the “present states” and geographical grammars of the early and mid-eighteenth centuries, but in more conventional historical and antiquarian projects as well. Moreover, my use of the

Sebastiani, “Conjectural History vs. the Bible: eighteenth-century Scottish historians and the idea of history in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*”, *Cromohs* 6 (2001): 1-6

²³⁷ On both Smellie and Tytler, see Stephen W. Brown, “William Smellie and Natural History: Dissent and Dissemination”, in Withers and Wood eds, *Science and Medicine in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Tuckwell, 2002).

²³⁸ Michael Carhart, “Anthropology and Statistik in the *Gottingsches Historisches Magazin* (1787-1794)”, in *Historians and Ideologies: Essays in Honor of Donald R. Kelley*, edited by Anthony T. Grafton and J.H.M. Salmon (Rochester, 2001); David Lindenfeld, *The Practical Imagination: German Sciences of State in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago, 1997), 20-1.

term “survey” suggests a broader category that includes antiquarian texts, tours and questionnaires produced throughout the eighteenth century. As we shall see below, Sinclair himself acknowledged this genealogy, and most important models for the British statistical surveys of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries can largely be found among these early antiquarian works.²³⁹ It is the argument here that the statistical survey movement of the late eighteenth century, of which Sinclair’s *Statistical Account* is the most notable example, is a form of inquiry intent on constructing a picture of the historical present, and that it developed out of the antecedents mentioned at the outset of this chapter, as well as the antiquarian survey projects of the earlier eighteenth century. After establishing this genealogy up to the 1780s, Sinclair’s *Statistical Account* will be examined as, in many respects, the culmination of this tradition.

The antiquarian William Maitland (1693?-1757) is perhaps best known for his urban histories of London (1739) and Edinburgh (1753). However, he also envisioned a general description of contemporary Scotland as part of his projected *History of Scotland*, and with this goal in mind, he submitted a series of questionnaires to the parish ministers of Scotland. Modelled on works such as Sir Robert Sibbald’s *History of Fife and Kinross* (1710), itself part of a questionnaire initiative by the author, Maitland abandoned the project in light of the very few

Lindenfeld, however, is wrong to suggest that the German statistical science had a shared horizon with history, but the English version did not.

²³⁹ For the historical geography of the survey projects of Scotland, see the important work of Charles W. J. Withers, most notably “How Scotland Came to Know Itself: Geography, National Identity and the Making of a Nation, 1680-1790”, *Journal of Historical Geography* 21 (1995), and his recent monograph, *Geography, Science and National Identity: A Historical Geography of Geographical Knowledge in Scotland, 1520-1914* (Cambridge, 2001). I am grateful to Professor Withers for sending me a draft of his manuscript before publication. See also F. V. Emery, “Geographical Description of Scotland prior to the Statistical Accounts”, *Scottish Studies* (1959): 1-15.

number of responses he received.²⁴⁰ To my knowledge, the only printed response is by the Rev. Adam Milne, minister at Melrose until his death in 1747. His *Description of the Parish of Melrose, in answer to Mr. Maitland's Queries to each parish of the kingdom*, was first published in 1743. It consists mostly of a description of the Abbey, as well as a linear chronological narrative of the history of the parish.²⁴¹ Even in Maitland's more conventional historical works, he is acutely sensitive to an historiographical comparison between past and present. In the *History and Antiquities of Scotland* (1757), for example, his remarks on the remote Scottish past include a cautionary note that "a parallel between those and present times, I imagine, will not be thought impertinent."²⁴²

Walter Macfarlane (d. 1767) collected a variety of manuscripts containing geographical and historical descriptions of Scotland, a collection that was sold to the Faculty of Advocates in 1785. The majority of the writers who produced these accounts were not clergymen, but many of them use the parish as the focal point of antiquarian and topographical description.²⁴³ In a similar vein, John Campbell (1708-75), who as we saw earlier collaborated with Smollett and others on the Modern Part of the *Universal History*, released his two volume *Political Survey of Britain* in 1774. In his own genealogy of survey literature, Sinclair praises the work but laments its shortage of necessary materials.²⁴⁴ Campbell's survey, while ponderous to read, is heavily researched and footnoted. The immediate precedent, however, and, as it would turn out, the main rival for

²⁴⁰ On Sibbald's project, see Withers, "How Scotland Came to Know Itself", 380-82.

²⁴¹ I examined Milne's *Description* in the *History of Melrose Abbey*, by James Wade (Edinburgh, 1861), 21-81.

²⁴² Quoted in David Allan, "'This Inquisitive Age': Past and Present in the Scottish Enlightenment", *Scottish Historical Review* 76 (1997), 72.

²⁴³ *Geographical Collections Relating to Scotland*, 3 Vol, Edited Sir Arthur Mitchell (Edinburgh 1906).

²⁴⁴ Sinclair, *Statistical Account*, Vol 21 (1799), lxxvi.

Sinclair's project, was an initiative of the newly minted Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, to which we shall now turn.

Society of Antiquaries of Scotland

Much of what we know about the establishment and early activities of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland is due to William Smellie. Smellie enjoyed a successful career as a printer, editor, and author in his own right. He edited (and wrote the majority of) the first edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and co-edited (with Gilbert Stuart) the short-lived but notable *Edinburgh Magazine and Review* (1773-76). Later, he translated Buffon and then authored his own work on natural history in the 1790s. When he collaborated with the Earl of Buchan to establish the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, he had been looking for a learned society that he felt did not concern itself with social or academic rank.²⁴⁵ In its struggles for acceptance and incorporation, Smellie was instrumental in articulating the early self-image of the Society.

The history of the Society is related by Smellie in his *Account of the Institution and Progress of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* (2 vol, 1782-4).²⁴⁶ Smellie's account begins with the professed reasons for the establishment of the Society, in particular the convulsions of Scottish history that had proved detrimental to the study of Scottish antiquities. Such a poor knowledge of Scottish history and antiquities seemed at odds with the extraordinary achievements of the intellectual community, as well as the public demand for such research. Now

²⁴⁵ Stephen W. Brown, 197.

²⁴⁶ I am grateful to the staff of the Marquand Library at Princeton University for allowing me to view their copy of this rare text (in terms of North American libraries), and all citations below are from that edition.

that the political convulsions of the past had been smoothed over, the conditions were ripe for Scottish antiquarianism to be unified under a public institution. Smellie describes in some detail the coming together of a group of people in November 1780 at the Edinburgh residence of the Earl of Buchan, a group that included Smellie, Lord Kames, Lord Hailes, Hugh Blair, James Boswell, Robert Henry, William Creech, and Gilbert Stuart.²⁴⁷

The Earl of Buchan, David Stewart Erskine (1742-1829), opened the meeting by speaking about his plans for the Society. Seemingly placing himself in the tradition of Richard Gough, the most notable English antiquarian of the period, Buchan begins by discussing what has been accomplished in Scottish antiquities, as well as what remains to be done in the present and future. After ranging through the major periods of Scottish antiquity, Buchan appeals to the patriotic nature of antiquarian research, echoes of which would be amplified even more in Sinclair's project. Buchan then presents an account of late seventeenth-century as well as current Scottish antiquarians, singling out Sibbald, Sir David Dalrymple, Lord Hailes (1726-92), and Henry Home, Lord Kames (1696-1782) for special mention. Importantly, Buchan highlights Hugo Arnot's civic history of Edinburgh, as much a contemporary as a remote history, as a model for the kind of research he has in mind for the Society.²⁴⁸ In order to understand the historical senses of past and present that animated Scottish writers such as Buchan, Smellie, and Sinclair in the last twenty years of the eighteenth-century, it is worth setting this scheme out in some detail.

Buchan launches into his plan for a Society of Antiquaries by lamenting that "it has long been a subject of regret, that no regular Society for promoting Antiquarian researches has

²⁴⁷ Smellie, Vol 1, 3.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

subsisted in this part of Great Britain.” He advocated regular meetings at his own house until a suitable venue was found. In a hybrid role of patron and scholar, Buchan humbly submits that he is less qualified to suggest such a Plan than the invitees, and solicits their opinions for the next meeting. “In the mean time”, continues Buchan, “I shall take the liberty to throw out a few loose thoughts concerning what has been already done, and what yet remains to be explored, in the line of our Scottish History and Antiquities.”²⁴⁹ Buchan demonstrates a typical lack of interest in the late antique world of Scottish history, relying as they must on scattered fragments in classical historians. As a consequence, the more remote periods of the Scottish past are not as immediately attractive as they undoubtedly were for English antiquarians.

Ossianic Scotland (identified as the early 3rd century by Buchan, during the time of Caracalla’s campaign) is the notable exception. In speaking of these poems, Buchan accepts their authenticity, and more importantly their historical specificity as evidence of the history of manners is carefully noted. “These Poems, as exhibiting the manners of those times, are the most extraordinary morsels of antiquity in the world. I cannot doubt of the general truth of the groundwork of these beautiful compositions; and yet I cannot help being staggered by so strange a singularity in the history of the human mind.” But the tangible traces of this past, however, are few. What is more interesting is the continuity of a Scottish (English) tradition of chorography and topography which Buchan sets out as a criterion even for such remote periods, and which served as part of a significant ideological genealogy for Sinclair in his later project. This tradition was also a powerful model for Tobias Smollett in his *Present State of All Nations* earlier; it is interesting to note that Smollett’s description of Scotland (in Vol 2) has a far more detailed topographical analysis than any other entry in the eight-volume survey of the world, including

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

England. No doubt both Sinclair and Buchan were struck by Smollett's exhaustive accounting of climate, soils, and topography (itself building on the traditions of geographical grammar as well as Smollett and Campbell's work with the *Universal History* from 1758-62). As Buchan writes, "The names of mountains and rivers are the most permanent subjects of topography, and may lead to farther elucidations. The Gaelic Topography in Scotland is yet very imperfect; and a general attempt in this way, accompanied with a Map, would be a proper object, I apprehend, for our suggestions and investigation."²⁵⁰

The next period of Scottish Antiquities in Buchan's scheme runs from the period of Caracalla to the Saxon-Pictish wars, and is deemed even more lacking. Buchan hopes that the inspiration of the Society will inspire a "Scottish Whittaker" to adopt the task, referring to John Whitaker, the English historian of Manchester. Significantly, Buchan appeals to a Scottish patriotism in looking to the antiquarian past, in very similar terms, as Sinclair and many of his parish contributors will be shown to do in the service of the contemporary survey. In this sense antiquarianism acquires a contemporary relevance, particularly in terms of the political resonance of a kind of contemporary antiquities. Indeed, even the exemplariness and school of virtue associated with the classical political narrative are situated within such genealogies of the nation:

Such inquiries may seem useless or frivolous to some persons. But is there any such thing, Gentlemen, of this nature, that can be considered as puerile by those who truly love their country? With how much minuteness do we not investigate the histories of our own families; the antient boundaries of our estates long since alienated; the names of our houses; parish churches; and the trivial accompaniments of the private lives of our fathers? It is an emanation of tenderness linked to the selfishness of our nature, and should expand itself to the utmost limits of that native country, which hath ever been the object of the virtuous pride and warm affection of those who are not entirely contaminated by the infection to which the too highly polished and enervated ages of society are subject."²⁵¹

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

The third period in Buchan's historical scheme runs from the Scottish/Pictish "union" until Malcolm III (r. 1058-93). It is here that more tangible traces have been inscribed on the Scottish topography, serving to bear out the "Monkish accounts" of the history of the period, as well as the next from the twelfth century to James VI in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. This gives Buchan an opportunity to single out the Dalrymples in glowing terms:

We owe much to the labours of Sir James Dalrymple, and the present Sir David Dalrymple of Hailes, my worthy relation, and much respected friend, for their arrangement of the Historical Annals of the old race of our Scottish Monarchs since the commencement of that period, and for clearing up several controverted matters relating to the fictitious stories or traditions of our country."²⁵²

Interestingly, it is particularly the history of the early modern period – and not the more extremely remote periods – than are deemed of most interest to "this refined and critical age" of new historiographical objectives and methods. This is outlined as significant also in terms of the contemporary union with England. "A work of that nature, fully digested from ample collections, and by the pen of Dr Gilbert Stuart, would be a most interesting performance to every true Scotchman, and might tend to inspire us with sentiments more congenial to the free and noble nature of the people with whom we are now united. Whilst English literature flourished under the auspices of a Cobham, a Worcester, a Rivers, and a Howard, our ancestors and native country were plunged in the gloom of superstition, and agitated by the barbarous passions of domestic strife."

Indeed, the early modern period of Scottish history outlined here has some similarities to William Robertson's revered *History of Scotland* (1759), particularly in terms of the religious

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 9.

turmoils of the period. But there seems to be more of a sense of a usable Scottish past in Buchan's view, as well as a greater appreciation for the continuity of Scottish learning:

"Elphinstone, Bishop of Aberdeen, Hector Boece, Major, Buchanan, Leslie, and other eminent persons, appeared, who vindicated our country from the opprobrium of literary obscurity, which, as a nation, it had laboured under since those antient times, when Scotland and Ireland had been the asylum of northern erudition."²⁵³

But it is in the contemporary period – beginning in the seventeenth century but culminating in Buchan's living room audience itself, that the Scottish revival has been most remarkable.

And here, Gentleman, allow me to recall to your recollection a bright constellation of Caledonian Naturalists and Antiquaries, which adorned the end of the last century, and continued to illuminate the beginning of this. The Earl of Cromarty, Sir George M'Kenzie of Rosehaugh, Sir James Dalrymple, second son of the Viscount of Stair, Sir Robert Sibbald, the Honourable Mr Henry Maule, and the Bishop of Carlisle; to whose names we may add, as less illustrious, though not less laborious, Mr Hamilton of Wishaw, Mr Gordon, Mr Innes, Mr Crawford, Mr Nisbet, Messrs Ruddiman and Anderson, and Mr James Sutherland ...

These gentlemen, with several others, appear from the preface to Sir James Dalrymple's Collections to have formed themselves into a Society, who had regular meetings ..."²⁵⁴

More recent figures mentioned include Lord Kames, Hugh Blair, Sir John Dalrymple, Walter Macfarlane (for his *Geographical Collections*), and Hugo Arnot, "who has written the history of [Edinburgh] in a manner so comprehensive, that I cannot but propose it as conveying the spirit of the inquiries which I wish to be connected with our lucubrations." The contemporary portions of Arnot's civic history was an important model in the background of William Creech's entry for Edinburgh in Sinclair's later *Statistical Account*.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 10

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

In his search for a usable antiquities that could resonate with the present along the flattened horizon of history and the contemporary during the period I am discussing, Buchan is also looking for a new vocabulary (Sinclair's essentially similar project found its new vocabulary in the German state science of *Statistik*). Buchan seems concerned to replace a seemingly older category of antiquarianism that was being seen as less relevant in light of the desire for a historical understanding of both past and present:

And here I cannot but observe, that the name of ANTIQUARY, from the frivolous researches of some of them, and the prejudices of the uninformed public, has, with other still more respectable appellations, become the butt of fashionable and humourous stricture, which, if we could embrace the more useful and interesting subjects that are connected with antiquities, might be happily avoided.²⁵⁵

Buchan seems to be articulating the desire for a usable past that a practical antiquarianism could reconstruct and reconcile with the description of the current condition of Scotland. Sinclair would include this as part of his later project, but using the new vocabulary and criteria of statistical history. As he adds,

I do not expect that we shall be able to introduce antiquities with the Morning Post at breakfast, or to make them light summer reading; but a great point would be gained, if they could be rendered interesting amusement for a long winter night.²⁵⁶

In this interesting juxtaposition, albeit in an ironic tone, Buchan insinuates the daily consumption of news and current affairs as potential competing genres for the kind of present-minded and practical antiquities for which he is advocating. What he has in mind, in this tone of modest self-deprecation, is indeed more much than an interesting night's amusement. In terms of the present-mindedness of historical research, the mandate of the Society would be a general structure – for

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

example in the proposed parish surveys – of an explicit comparison between the past and present state of Scotland: “in general, everything that may tend to compare our antient with our modern attainments.”²⁵⁷

The nascent Society of Antiquaries of Scotland met again in December 1780, at the Edinburgh Hall of the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge. Its initial committee consisted of the Earl of Bute as President, with Buchan as 1st Vice-President.²⁵⁸ Smellie’s history appears to indicate that a plan for a comprehensive survey of Scotland was hatched at an early stage, particularly in terms of the combination of antiquities with natural history, a field in which Smellie had attained a stellar reputation despite a lack of academic appointment.²⁵⁹ Here we see a significant difference with Sinclair’s project a decade later: while both initiatives highlighted the role of recovering an historical present, one envisioned a survey grounded in antiquities and natural history (the twin concerns of Buchan and Smellie), while the other deemphasised both of those concerns in favour of political arithmetic and social mathematics immersed in an historiographical milieu. The Society’s Plan, then, was printed and circulated through the parishes. The Buchan/Smellie proposal simply stated what kinds of information the correspondents should include. Furthermore, there is no sense of the parish ministers as the only agents for collecting this information, another index of the Society’s somewhat anti-

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.* The ultimate caricature of the antiquarian, of course, was constructed later in the persona of Jonathan Oldbuck in Sir Walter Scott’s *The Antiquary*.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁵⁸ William Tytler, Lord Woodhouselee, whose interest in contemporary biography and history is discussed in Chapter, served as 5th Vice-President.

²⁵⁹ On the contest between Smellie and Rev. John Walker for the Chair of Natural History at Edinburgh between 1775-79, see Withers, “Natural Knowledge as Cultural Property: disputes over the ownership of natural history in the late eighteenth century”, *Archives of Natural History* 19 (1992): 289-303, and Steven Shapin, “Property, Patronage, and the Politics of Science: The

establishment ethos. The template that the Society circulated throughout the parishes included entries for antiquities, geography, agricultural information, and natural history, but it also requested demographic data from actual surveys, as well as descriptions of trade and manufactures, both core subject matter of later statistical surveys.²⁶⁰ An interesting early donation to the Society – and an example of the kind of ‘contemporary’ artifacts that it was also part of their mandate to collect in addition to ancient ones – was a “ticket to the masquerade in Boston New England, which was to have been exhibited on the 11th of March 1776; but did not take place on account of General Howe’s evacuating that city on the 6th of that month; also one of Gaine’s New-York Gazettes, printed on blue paper, dated the 12th of August 1776.”²⁶¹

In outlining their plans for a survey of Scotland, Buchan and Smellie provided a template to be followed. This template is interesting to note in detail, as it firmly delimited the kinds of contemporary knowledge that the project was aiming to assemble and interpret historically:

Account of the Parish of A.

I. “The situation and boundaries of the parish, geographically and topographically described, with the names, antient and modern, of the parish, and the principal places in it; the latitude, longitude, and number of acres in the parish; how watered, &c. accompanied by two maps, one geographical, and the other representing a bird view of it, ...”

II. “Nature of the soils in the parish of A; size of the farms; state of agriculture; the mode of husbandry; the rent of land; ordinary endurance of leases; some particular clauses and prestations in them; the ordinary produce of the best land in the parish; prices of labour, provisions, and tools of husbandry; how are the women and children employed?”

“Are there any farming clubs? the extent of the villages; fairs, markets, customs, amusements, dresses where singular, plantations of wood, the price of timber, how conveyed to a

Founding of the Royal Society of Edinburgh”, *British Journal for the History of Science* 7 (1974): 1-41.

²⁶⁰ Smellie, Vol 1, 20-23.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

market, how rendered more easily transported, what diseases infest the trees, what remedies applied."

"The number of inhabitants, taken from actual survey. Proportion of the births to the burials for ten years past. An account of the improvements that have been carried on lately in the parish, and by whom."

III. "State of the high roads, bridges, navigable canals, &c.; expences attending them; what tolls? what materials for repairing? statute labour what? give drawings of any remarkable bridges, &c.; how supported?"

IV. "Mines, minerals, and fossils; stone quarries; prices of stone, lime, marle, &c."

"Coal-mines. Give an accurate account of the time and manner they have been wrought, by whom, and to what extent; ..."

"Iron, lead, copper, cobalt, and other minerals discovered, in the same accurate manner. Accompanying these descriptions with specimens of the different articles."

V. "Police, trade, and manufactures; description of the nature and extent thereof, whether increasing, or otherwise; number of hands employed: Fisheries, where any, to be particularly described, and the promoters of these to be particularly and honourably mentioned."

VI. "The antiquities of the parish, with drawings of such as are any way remarkable; as churches, monuments, obelisks, engraved stones, antient arms, old castles, or fortifications; together with transcripts of any inscriptions that are curious, antient, or throw light upon particular events or genealogies."

"Give a drawing of the church on a scale of ten feet to an inch, with an account of its foundation, antient name; chapels, succession of ministers till the revolution, and other particulars relating to ecclesiastical history."

VII "Miscellaneous observations may conclude the account of the parish; and it will be proper to take notice of any remarkable decorations in the parish of gentlemens seats, such as noble mansions, elegant gardens, uncommon trees or vegetables; curious portraits of illustrious or learned persons, and remarkable instances of longevity; of the salubrity or insalubrity of the climate; and, in general, of such matters as could not be properly introduced into the former part of the work."

"The publication of this plan has already produced the happiest effects. Several gentlemen of ability are now employed in composing histories of parishes upon the plan

recommended. Many more, it is to be hoped, will follow an example so laudable, and which promises so much utility to the country.”²⁶²

While overall the proposal did not result in the comprehensive survey that Buchan and Smellie envisioned, there were a handful of completed parish histories by the early 1780s. However, the first years of the Society of Antiquaries were difficult, particularly its struggle for a royal charter, and its rivalry with the University of Edinburgh and the Moderate Literati, an episode that is important to examine in light of the apparent differences between the two historiographical and statistical projects. These difficulties partly account for the late publication of the Transactions of the Society which began to appear only in 1792, once Sinclair’s *Statistical Account* had already begun its publication. After examining the tensions of the early 1780s, we will take a closer look at those parochial accounts before moving on to Sinclair’s project.

Incorporation Dispute

The dispute is an interesting episode in the rivalry between the Buchan circle, dominated by the Popular Party of the Church of Scotland, and the powerful Moderate faction, dominated by the “Literati” of Edinburgh, some of whom were also members of the Society of Antiquaries, interestingly enough. The challenge raised by Buchan polarized the Scottish literati. Robertson doubted the integrity of a scholarly institution led by a radical Whig and Masonic enthusiast, and Buchan later dismissed the Edinburgh Principal and his circle as a “Junto of Jacobites and Tories

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 21-23.

who insult the best men in Scotland.”²⁶³ Before discussing the 1780s incorporation dispute, it is worth noting a slightly earlier literary controversy that can be seen as part of this political and intellectual rivalry: the scathing treatment of the early volumes of Robert Henry’s *History of Great Britain* (1771-93).

Henry’s work was an interesting experiment in historical narrative, and David Hume himself had written a very positive review intended for the *Edinburgh Magazine and Review*, a periodical which lasted from late 1773 to the summer of 1776 and was co-edited by Smellie and the controversialist historian Gilbert Stuart. Henry was himself a member of the Popular faction, but like Thomas Somerville, veered toward the Moderate literati in his political and intellectual outlook. Indeed, James Boswell recorded a conversation between himself and Robertson in which he comments: “I have heard Henry’s ‘History of Britain’ well-spoken of; I am told it is carried on in separate divisions ... I wish much to have one branch well done, and that is the history of manners, of common life.” According to Boswell, Robertson replied that “Henry should have applied his attention to that alone, which is enough for any man.”²⁶⁴ Hume’s review,

²⁶³ See Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 304-5. On the Popular Party, see John McIntosh, *Church and Theology in Enlightenment Scotland* (Tuckwell, 1998). This episode has been reconstructed by Steven Shapin, “Property, Patronage, and the Politics of Science: The Founding of the Royal Society of Edinburgh”, *British Journal for the History of Science* 7 (1974): 1-41, as well as by R. L. Emerson, “The Scottish Enlightenment and the End of the Philosophical Society of Edinburgh”, *British Journal for the History of Science* 21 (1988): 33-66. Both Shapin and Charles Withers locate the basis of the tension as the contest between Walker and Smellie for the Chair of Natural History at Edinburgh in the 1770s, and they view the conflict as primarily an episode in the history of science and philosophy. While this cannot be entirely disputed, the tension between the factions, however, suggests that something else may have been at stake as well: the Moderate-Popular rivalry is one way to look at this, while the formal differences between the two rival versions of parochial accounts suggests a different historiographical outlook as well. This is framed by Emerson as a contrast of political outlooks as well as a dichotomy of intellectual perspective in “The Scottish Enlightenment”, 57-61.

²⁶⁴ James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (Modern Library, n.d.), 833.

however, was suppressed by Stuart and replaced with his own harsh assessment. Stuart, it is undoubtedly true, harboured a resentment toward not only Henry, but other Edinburgh literati who had achieved more success as historical writers, but his actions are just as attributable to local Scottish political and religious factionalism.²⁶⁵

Returning to the 1780s dispute, Smellie relates the pursuit of a royal charter for the Society, in order that it could own property and exist as a legal entity. In November 1782, the petition for a charter had been passed along to the Lord Advocate of Scotland, Henry Dundas (1742-1811). However, the University of Edinburgh, led by Principal William Robertson, attempted to block the granting of the charter. In his letter to Dundas, Robertson suggested that one general society should be formed for a country as small as Scotland, and that this organization, centred around the University of Edinburgh, would be better suited to the interests of science and literature in Scotland. Collections of natural history and antiquities should be located within the University Museum and the Advocates' Library as the "repository of every thing that tends to illustrate the history, the antiquities, and the laws" of Scotland. Robertson petitioned for the denial of the new charter, and the prevention of a new natural history collection, particularly as it might lead to a rival Chair, a clear reference to the Walker-Smellie contest that had been recently decided. Smellie had been named as the Society's "Superintendent of Natural History", and plans for a lecture series on the philosophy of natural history had been proposed by his patron, Lord Kames, an Edinburgh literatus who also had ties to the Society of Antiquaries. Smellie, the likely author of the letter, describes the lectures on the philosophy of

²⁶⁵ *Edinburgh Magazine and Review* 1 (1773), 199-207, 264-70; for a well-known anecdotal treatment of the affair, see Isaac Disraeli's *Calamities and Quarrels of Authors* (1814); for a more recent assessment, see Willam Zachs, *Without regard to Good Manners: A Biography of Gilbert Stuart* (Edinburgh, 1992), 75-83.

natural history to be inherently abstract, and thus of a private, non-institutional nature.²⁶⁶

Conversely, Robertson proposed the granting of a royal charter to another new society entirely, the “Royal Society of Scotland”, covering all the branches of science and literature.²⁶⁷ As Robertson writes,

The Society of Scottish Antiquaries, instituted here in the last year 1780 has two different objects, the antiquities of this country, and its natural history: In order to prosecute the study of these, they have opened a Museum for the reception of records, charters, and other monuments, tending to illustrate the history and antiquities of Scotland; and also for collecting the various objects of natural history. They have lately applied for a charter from the crown, in order to give them the permanency and privileges of a body corporate ... though sensible of the good intention with which the Society of Antiquaries was instituted, and though they entertain an high respect for many of its members, we are fully persuaded, that a literary society may be formed on a plan more favourable to the progress of science and literature in Scotland, more suited to the state of the country, and more consistent with the interest of the University, and which they have good reason to believe will meet with the approbation of many respectable members of the Antiquarian Society.

After examining literary and scientific societies in other European countries in relation to their geographic size, Robertson continues his argument:

If it would be improper to multiply literary societies in a narrow country, the impropriety of multiplying separate public collections, either in the line of antiquities or of natural history, is still more evident. Scotland may furnish one good collection in each of these departments. The library of the Faculty of Advocates has been, during a century, the repository of every thing that tends to illustrate the history, the antiquities, and the laws of this country. The collection is very considerable, though still far from being complete. By its situation, it is easily accessible to the courts of justice, and to the practitioners at the bar. It is humbly submitted, whether an attempt to form a new and rival collection, be a measure prudent, expedient, and of advantage to the public. The Museum of the University of Edinburgh contains those objects of natural history which are exhibited by the professor of that branch of science to his students, and are illustrated by him in the course of his lectures. This professorship was instituted and endowed by his present Majesty, and will be of great utility in perfecting the plan of education in this University. It appears to the Senatus Academicus, that the establishment of another public

²⁶⁶ Smellie, Vol 2, 24; on Smellie’s work in natural history, see Paul Wood’s “Introduction” to the *Philosophy of Natural History* (Thoemmes, 2001). The first volume was published in 1790, followed by a posthumous volume in 1799.

²⁶⁷ Smellie, Vol 2, 13-15.

Museum would not only intercept the communication of many specimens and objects which would otherwise have been deposited in the Museum of the University; but many induce and enable the Society of Antiquaries to institute a lectureship of natural history, in opposition to the professorship in the University. This there is greater reason to apprehend, as a motion was made in that Society, soon after its institution, to appoint one of their own number a lecturer in natural history; and, though the measure was over-ruled at that time, by the exertion of gentlemen friendly to the University; yet, such a disposition appears in other members of that Society, that it may again be resumed. It is therefore proposed, that, instead of granting a charter to the Scots Antiquaries, as a separate society, that a Society shall be established by charter upon a more extensive plan, which may be denominated, 'The Royal Society of Scotland,' and shall have for its object all the various departments of science, erudition, and belles lettres. That, whatever collection of antiquities, records, MSS. &c. shall be acquired by this Royal Society, shall be deposited in the library of the Faculty of Advocates, and all the objects of natural history acquired by it, shall be deposited in the Museum of the University of Edinburgh, so as both may be most accessible to the members of the Society, to the public, and of most general utility.²⁶⁸

Lord Dundas also forwarded a letter of support for Robertson's request that he had received from William Cullen on behalf of the Philosophical Society of Edinburgh, as well as a letter of concern from the Curators of the Advocates' Library.²⁶⁹

The Society of Antiquaries responded with a letter of their own to Dundas, dated 18 February 1783. The response insisted that the Society had set out to repair "two great national defects", defined as the lack of public repositories for the Antiquary and Historian as well the Naturalist. The sense of a bipolar factionalism, rather than a plurality of individual or corporate jostling for position, is clearly evident. Regarding the three letters, from the University, the Philosophical Society of Edinburgh, and the Curators of the Advocates' Library, the Antiquaries maintain that "these caveats have the appearance of being individually three; but it cannot escape your Lordship's penetration that they are really one."²⁷⁰ The letter also points out the self-image of the Society of Antiquaries as a public archive, in sharp contrast to the exclusive and corporate

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 13-15.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

nature of the Faculty of Advocates. And as for the argument of the University as a more suitable repository of natural history, the accusation is levelled that the donations of Sir Robert Sibbald, among others, had been misplaced or destroyed, while other collections had been sold to foreign interests.²⁷¹ Ultimately, both the Society of Antiquaries and the new Royal Society of Edinburgh received their charters from George III, while the Philosophical Society ceased to be a separate organization.

Parish Surveys

In the meantime, while the charter dispute was going on, there had been some contributions made towards the parochial account of Scotland. The first volume of the *Archaeologia Scotica* appeared in 1792 (only five volumes in total would appear between 1792 and 1890). An account of the parish of Haddington appeared first, written by the Rev. George Barclay. It started with a physical description of the parish, followed by population data, agricultural details, and more topographical information. Section II dealt with antiquity, civil government, manufactures, and remarkable occurrences, including footnotes to contemporary matters such as the selling of valuable property in recent years. The remainder treated ecclesiastical history and eminent persons, proudly claiming John Knox as a favourite resident. A set of appendices – farm and estate lists, rent values, and grain yields by year – closes out a relatively long account, at least in comparison to many of the contributions to Sinclair a decade later.²⁷² In the same volume, Buchan contributed his account of the parish of Uphall, which he intended as a template for future accounts. In this survey, Buchan is not only concerned with

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

antiquities, but with the wider subject matter outlined in the template examined above (and a step towards the wider field of the contemporary that would be the primary interest for Sinclair in his later project.) The interplay and relationship between remote and antiquarian concerns and the political arithmetic of the historical present so central to the later *Statistical Account* is evident already in Buchan's project as a temporal mediation between past, present and future:

To know the proportion that takes place between births and burials, is one of the greatest objects of political arithmetic, and, were it properly and accurately ascertained, would lead to inferences and regulations of the highest importance to the state [...] Such accurate accounts of parishes as I am now engaged in, would go far to exhaust this interesting subject, if a method could be fallen upon to bring forward regular and authentic registers of the births and burials.²⁷³

Additionally, Buchan suggests a payment of one shilling for each proper entry into the parish register, as an incentive in the proper accounting of contemporary historical demography.

The third printed contribution is Rev. Thomas Wyte, for the parish of Liberton. This is a very long and dense description of geography, ecclesiastical and family estates, complicated family histories and descriptions of properties, ministerial lists, population data, and poor relief funds. Alongside an antiquarian appendix of Latin charters is juxtaposed another appendix on contemporary population statistics for 1786, the kind of temporal counterpointing that Buchan had envisioned.²⁷⁴ The second volume of *Archaeologia Scotia* did not appear until 1822, but it contained printed versions of parish accounts received in the late 1780s. Extracts from the "History of the Parishes of Monivaird and Strowan", by Rev. Porteous, were published in this volume.

²⁷² *Archaeologia Scotica*, Vol 1, (1792), 40-121.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 141.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 292-388; for the 1786 population statistics, see 373-4.

Contemporary National Biography

Before moving on to the next phase of the statistical account and the project of an historiographically oriented contemporary survey outlined by Sir John Sinclair, I would like to end this discussion of the Buchan circle by demonstrating the “contemporary biography” impulse that was demonstrated by Smellie, Buchan, and the founders of the Society of Antiquaries. This impulse was yet another aspect of the contemporary historiographical bent of these writers, and places them even more firmly within the eighteenth-century British cultural episode we have been tracking throughout this study.

In an earlier discussion, we noted that Smellie and Lord Hailes (Sir David Dalrymple) were acknowledged by Robert Chambers as early examples and models for his version of a Scottish national biography. In November 1781, Buchan delivered his second annual address to the Society, in which he outlined a plan for Scottish national biography focused heavily on the contemporary period. In patriotic language, he describes the first year of the Society:

Great, my Lords and Gentlemen, will be your glory, if, by the prosecution of the noble design, you become finally successful in calling forth the attention of our countrymen from those idle and enfeebling amusements of the day, which are but too emphatically called *relaxations*, to those manly objects which can inform, refine, and usefully amuse our fellow citizens, and which are left us as fair and free pursuits, by colleges and philosophical societies already established in this country.

... Our Society is calculated to fill up the only chasm of a literary nature that seemed to be wanting in this country; and none but envious neighbours, or false brethen, can disapprove of our attempting to add this useful decoration to our native country.²⁷⁵

He then goes on to note the early returns on the parish survey project and the network of correspondents involved:

²⁷⁵ Smellie, Vol 2, 101-102.

With relation to the more accurate description of our own country, and the knowledge of its antiquities, a plan has been devised and approved of by this Society, for procuring distinct parochial accounts of all those matters which are so very difficult to be obtained by an inquisitive individual, who surveys no spot, with much chance of success, where his correspondents are not attached to him by the ties of consanguinity or friendship.

Of particular significance is the apparent movement from local and regional knowledge, to a universal and national knowledge that is to be accomplished by the large-scale contemporary survey method.

Another avenue that the Society envisioned as an entry point for this large-scale history was a proposed plan for a kind of national biography, a plan that seems parallel to the project envisioned by Smellie noted earlier. As Buchan proclaims,

A resolution has been formed, and highly approved of by the public, to promote a Biographical History of Scotland, exhibiting an illustration of the lives of her citizens who have added to her fame by arms, by arts, or by sciences ...
To this resolution was added, that of affixing, by ballot, under the purest and strictest regulations, the portraits of virtuous and illustrious countrymen and fellow citizens, in the Museum of the society, with a view to restore that noble and generous thrift for fame, which gave birth to the glorious efforts of antient virtue and patriotism in Greece and Italy.²⁷⁶

Another patron of the project, Lord Mountstewart, joined Buchan in the call for the biographies to be written. The biographies would form as important a collection in the Society's museum as its curious flora and fauna (Smellie himself reflected the Society's hybrid interest in antiquities, contemporary biography and natural history). As Mountstewart noted, Buchan was persuaded that "all our ingenious members and countrymen, who have been accustomed to that species of writing [biography], will afford their assistance for the composition of new and elegant lives,

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 105.

where such are wanting, or to polish, correct, and enrich those which have been already written.”²⁷⁷

“A Variety of Queries”: Sinclair’s Statistical Account of Scotland

While the Society of Antiquaries was not by any means an organizational wing of the Popular Party of the Church of Scotland, the initial leadership of Buchan and Smellie, as well as the central role of prominent Popular Party members such as the historian Robert Henry, helped to fashion a self-image marked by a scrappy provincialism of sorts, and a kind of anti-academic practicality that seemed to set itself up in contrast to the more polished and corporate establishment of the Edinburgh literati, most of whom were members of the Moderate faction under the leadership of William Robertson, the foremost historian of Scotland and Principal of the University of Edinburgh. Moreover, as a radical Foxite Whig, Buchan posed a clear political challenge to Dundas, at least before the conservative reactions to the American and French Revolutions.²⁷⁸ Sir John Sinclair (1754-1835), on the other hand, operated closer to the Dundas, Argyll and the Moderate nexus of patronage, and also seemed to share many of the historiographical concerns of Moderates such as Robertson and Alexander Carlyle.

Sinclair and Narrative Contemporary History

Born in Thurso Castle at Caithness in the north of Scotland, Sinclair enjoyed a stellar political career as an MP and, most significantly, served as the first President of the Board of

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 106.

²⁷⁸ R. L. Emerson, *Professors, Patronage and Politics* (Aberdeen: U of Aberdeen Press, 1992), 6.

Agriculture.²⁷⁹ It is crucial to note that Sinclair himself wrote a good deal of contemporary history in its more conventionally historiographical sense, and, like Smollett earlier, can also be seen as the kind of multigeneric contributor that characterizes the different forms of contemporary historical writing during this period. Sinclair's first major work was a *History of the Public Revenue* (3 vol, 1785-90), and he followed it with a continuation (3 vol, 1803-4) which carried the narrative to 1802. These are dense historical narratives of British commercial history, in stark contrast to the thin, unreadable chronicles of other works on the same subject. Indeed, Sinclair saw himself as the originator of the genre: "although we have had many naval, military, commercial, ecclesiastical, and parliamentary histories, yet this may be said, is the first attempt at a financial history, on an enlarged scale."²⁸⁰ Sinclair narrates the financial history of Britain from the Roman period to its "present state" in 1802.

There were some precedents for Sinclair's commercial histories. In 1759, James Postlethwayt wrote *The History of the Public Revenue, from 1688 to 1758*. For the most part, it consists of a listing of dates and revenues, tables of grants and expenditures. As the author states, the work is intended as an account "in which the Author is to appear as little as possible [and] it is apprehended [that] an attentive Reader, conversant in the History of the Times, will anticipate him in many Particulars."²⁸¹ In addition, Adam Anderson was one of the chief practitioners of "commercial history", based on the reputation of his *An Historical and Chronological Deduction*

²⁷⁹ For the only biography of Sinclair, see Rosalind Mitchison, *Agricultural Sir John* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962).

²⁸⁰ Sinclair, *Public Revenue*, 1803-4, iv. Sinclair cites Turgot, who "appreciated well the importance of a financial history".

²⁸¹ Postlethwayt, Advertisement.

of the *Origin of Commerce to the Present Time* (2 vol, 1764).²⁸² I am not certain that Anderson would have seen himself as a contemporary historian. One of his continuators, however, most certainly constructed such an image. William Combe, the infamous “Dr. Syntax”, was an historical writer who, like Smollett, wrote an historiographical key novel, *The Devil Upon Two Sticks in England*, in 1790. The following year, Combe began to plan a *History of the Present Reign*, and while he never completed it, he told correspondents as late as 1818 that if he lived to correct it, he would “leave behind [him] the history of [his] own times – which will be six volumes, at least, in heavy quarto.” Instead of releasing his own manuscript, however, Combe wrote a continuation of Anderson’s commercial history to 1789 (4 vol, 1787-9), published in the same year of his *History of the Late Important Period*.²⁸³ Anderson’s commercial history was continued yet again by David Macpherson (1746-1816), a protégé of George Chalmers (1742-1825), the antiquarian prototype for Sir Walter Scott’s Jonathan Roebuck. Macpherson enlarged Anderson’s work as the *Annals of Commerce* (4 vol, 1805), and rewrote the contemporary narrative (1760-1801). Commercial, or financial history, can be tracked as yet another aspect of the emerging interest in the contemporary historical field, particularly as the mechanics and scope of the British commercial empire continued to evolve with great rapidity.

Later, in his *Collection of Papers on Political Subjects* (1818), Sinclair again adopts the position of the contemporary historian in the following discussion regarding the East India charter:

²⁸² For an interesting discussion of Anderson’s *Chronological Deduction* as a curious hybrid of chronicle, antiquities and, at least in its appendices, philosophical history, see Phillips, *Society and Sentiment*, 161-62.

²⁸³ Harlan Hamilton, *Doctor Syntax: A Silhouette of William Combe, Esq.* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1969).

The progress of the East India Company is one of the most extraordinary events recorded in history. That a few merchants in Great Britain, even though aided by the government of the country in regard to naval and military operations, should have become possessed of one of the greatest empires that ever was established, inhabited by above fifty millions of people, with immense revenues, a great military force, and with a trade of unequalled extent; and, on the whole, should manage such remote dominions, and such vast and complicated concerns, with ability and success, would appear impossible, were it not a fact established beyond doubt by the history of our own times.²⁸⁴

As the Society of Antiquaries tried to get its parochial account of Scotland off the ground, Sinclair began to formulate his own project. However, it was Sinclair's plan for a statistical survey that attracted the interest of the Edinburgh literati, in particular the patronage of William Robertson and the Duke of Argyll. Due to the fragmentary nature of the Society of Antiquaries project, it is probably unfair to compare it with the astonishing success of the *Statistical Account*. However, as mentioned in the Introduction, Sinclair's account displays a much wider and more richly nuanced historiographical comparison between past and present that marks it as a form of contemporary history, and not just an episode or formative text in the history of demography, geography and other emerging social sciences. Sinclair's editorial gloss and subsequent analysis of the parish reports he received – as well as the parish accounts in themselves – articulate a need for a kind of contemporary history founded upon a different assumption about the subjects and materials that were of relevance and interest to the British polity at the close of the eighteenth century. These new subjects and materials grew out of Sinclair's earlier contemporary histories of British commercial history that, like Smollett's earlier histories, had pulled the Thucydidean historiographical model into the realms of social, cultural and commercial action in addition to politico-military action. The field of statistics itself was just coming into view, but was still an

²⁸⁴ Sinclair, *Collection*, 246.

amorphous genre whose fluidity proved very useful as a vehicle for this new kind of contemporary historiographical analysis.²⁸⁵

Origins of the *Statistical Account*

In 1780, Sinclair became MP for Caithness, the location of his family estate in the north of Scotland. The most significant political contribution of his career was his service as the first President of the Board of Agriculture at its establishment in 1793. The *Statistical Account of Scotland*, published in 21 volumes from 1791-9, and was followed later by his *Analysis of the Statistical Account of Scotland* (2 vol, 1825),²⁸⁶ both of which will be examined. Sinclair's plan was to circulate a questionnaire among all of the incumbent clergy of each parish in Scotland, with the aim of assembling a comprehensive contemporary survey. In the second to last volume, printed in 1798, Sinclair includes a prefatory "History of the Origin and Progress of the Statistical Account of Scotland", a reply to critics of the project, as well as a history of its conception and material fortunes under the direction of William Creech. Sinclair had long wanted to produce a contemporary "General View of the Political Circumstances" of Scotland, but he felt his own collected materials were insufficient for such a project. In 1790, while

²⁸⁵ Histories of the statistical movement in Britain during this period include, in particular, Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact* (Chicago, 1998); Lawrence Goldman, "The Origins of British 'Social Science': Political Economy, Natural Science and Statistics, 1830-35", *Historical Journal* 26 (1983): 587-616; Michael Cullen, *The Statistical Movement in Early Victorian Britain* (NY: Harvester Press, 1975); Alain Desrosieres, *The Politics of Large Numbers* (Harvard, 1998).

²⁸⁶ In addition to the works of Charles Withers, see Arthur Geddes, "Scotland's Statistical Accounts of Parish, Country and Nation: c1790-1825 and 1835-1845", *Scottish Studies* (1959).

attending the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland (as a ruling elder), Sinclair decided to approach the Scottish clergy for help:

... it fortunately occurred to me, that I might prevail upon that respectable body, to furnish such information, respecting the general state of Scotland, as might enable me to give a sufficient idea of the political situation of that part of the British empire. My original intention was, to have drawn up a General Statistical View of North Britain, without any particular reference to parochial districts; but I found such merit and ability, and so many useful facts and important observations, in the communications which were sent me, that I could not think of depriving the Clergy, of the credit they were entitled to derive from such laborious exertions ...²⁸⁷

In May 1790 Sinclair had circulated "a variety of Queries" among the clergy of each parish. The original letters included a series of questions grouped under four broad rubrics: the geography and natural history of the parish; its population; the "productions" of the parish; and, finally, a series of miscellaneous observations. In this way, Sinclair provided the parish clergy with a template questionnaire designed to fill in the gaps of his projected contemporary history of Scotland during the last decade of the eighteenth century. Like the proposal advanced by Smellie and Buchan, the queries included a request for traditional data on antiquities and natural history, but there is a new emphasis on the current details of the parish: its demographic data, commerce and industry, agricultural state, and the contemporary manners, morals, religion, occupations and social makeup of the people who live there, with a paternalistic eye towards the improvement of their situation. The full list is worth mentioning at the outset:

The name, and its origin
 [Geography]
 [Agriculture]
 Commerce
 State of the church
 State of the schools, and number of scholars

²⁸⁷ Sir John Sinclair, *Statistical Account of Scotland*. Vol 20 (Edinburgh 1798), xii-xiii.

Antient state of population
 Present Population
 Divisions of the inhabitants [jobs, religion]
 Eminent Men
 Antiquities
 Miscellaneous observations
 Character of the people
 Their manners, customs, stature, &c.
 Means by which their situation could be meliorated

From the outset of the *Statistical Account*, Sinclair took pains to emphasize its novelty.²⁸⁸ Sinclair was very aware of his terminological innovations. "Many people were at first surprised", noted Sinclair, "at my using the new words, *Statistics* and *Statistical*, as it was first supposed, that some term in our own language, might have expressed the same meaning."²⁸⁹ Sinclair was searching for a vocabulary with which to measure and describe contemporary social conditions against an historical backdrop of comparable data, and although he appropriates a German term for the study of the political situation of modern states, it is clear that he has something different and more fluid in mind. He confesses that

... I apply a different idea to that word, for by *Statistical* is meant in Germany, an inquiry for the purpose of ascertaining the political strength of a country, or questions respecting *matters of state*; whereas, the idea I annex to the term, is an inquiry into the state of a country, *for the purpose of ascertaining the quantum of happiness enjoyed by its inhabitants, and the means of its future improvement*; yet, as I thought that a new word might attract more public attention, I resolved on adopting it, and I hope that it is now completely naturalised and incorporated

²⁸⁸ It should be noted, however, that Sinclair was quite conscious of the survey tradition to which he was contributing. In one of the many appendices to the *Statistical Account*, he provides a genealogy of such works in other European countries, and especially in England and Scotland. While he has kind assessments of important predecessors such as Sir Robert Sibbald, William Maitland, and the Earl of Buchan, he clearly views their earlier attempts (particularly Buchan's) as part of a failed enterprise, and he envisioned his own project as "an ambition to accomplish what others had failed to execute." *Ibid.* Appendix G, lxxx. It is interesting to note that Sinclair served as 5th Vice-President of the Society of Antiquaries from 1792-97, after Buchan's presidency terminated in 1790.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.* xiii.

with our language.²⁹⁰

Initially, Sinclair was disappointed by the number of unresponsive clergy. Fortunately, his project enjoyed influential patronage that had not been accorded to the project started ten years earlier by Buchan's Society of Antiquaries. The General Assembly circulated letters to the delinquent ministers urging them to complete the questionnaire, and another letter was sent on behalf of the Duke of Argyll, the Earl of Fife, and the Reverend Principal William Robertson. Robertson exhorted the clergy to, at the very least, answer those queries relating to the current population and "political circumstances" of their parish, even if the consequence was less detail concerning antiquities and natural history.²⁹¹ These letters, as well as repeat circulations of the questionnaires, proved successful in eventually securing most of the parish contributions. To fill in the gaps that remained, Sinclair recruited "*Statistical missionaries*" to send out into the uncharted parishes.

In addition to Robertson, other historians saw the utility of the *Statistical Account* as a valuable work of contemporary research. Only a few years before his death, Rev. Robert Henry, a prominent member of the Popular Party whose *History of Great Britain* (1771-93) was emulated for its experiments in historical narrative (in spite of its savaging in Smellie and Stuart's *Edinburgh Magazine and Review*), returned a letter to Sinclair in which he commended the idea of a contemporary account of Scotland as a project in which "every Scotchman, who has it in his power, should assist."²⁹² In 1794, after thirteen volumes had already been published, John Gillies wrote to Sinclair, describing his work as an exemplary act of patriotism. And John Petit Andrews, the author of the continuation of Robert Henry's *History*, proclaimed that "the southern

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.* xiii-xiv.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.* Appendix F, lvii.

part of the island ought to blush, at having never produced a similar work.”²⁹³ The eminent antiquarian Lord Hailes (Sir David Dalrymple), also wrote to Sinclair after receiving some initial specimens of the project. But the *Statistical Account* received the approbation of a much wider audience as well. As one historian of Enlightenment historical geography has argued, Sinclair’s contemporaries understood and welcomed the *Account* as a “scientific, nationally-focused project” of geographical knowledge, and that Sinclair’s methodology lent it a decided “epistemic credibility”.²⁹⁴

Throughout the whole of the *Statistical Account*, the basic textual structure that had been requested in the original questionnaires remains, to a large degree, intact. Sinclair reproduced and, in some cases, condensed the parish entries returned from the incumbent clergy or the “statistical missionaries”. The first parish examined in the original volume is Jedburgh, based on materials returned by the Reverend Thomas Somerville. As we saw earlier, Somerville was himself a writer of contemporary history with his *My Own Life and Times*, and had also been approached by Strahan and Cadell to write a continuation of Smollett’s contemporary histories. As Sinclair had gently urged, most of the ministers focused on the demographic and commercial aspects of the survey, rather than on curiosities and antiquarian subjects. But the contributors were accorded a great deal of authorial autonomy; as long as the essential materials were

²⁹² *Ibid.* lx.

²⁹³ *Ibid.* lxvii.

²⁹⁴ On epistemic credibility see Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago UP, 1994). On Sinclair and historical geography, see Withers 2001. These valuable analyses, however, are situated within contexts that differ from the historiographical one being reconstructed in this study, specifically the histories of science and geography. This study hopes to re-position writers such as Buchan and Sinclair within an historiographical context that ran parallel to other concerns that have been painstakingly constructed by other historians.

included, scope was given to long sections on antiquities, often accompanied by maps and drawings.

Somerville's contribution is one such entry that took advantage of the scope provided under Sinclair's editorial hand. He begins by describing recent developments in the medical care of the parish, where rheumatism and other related disorders are ascribed by Somerville to the depressed social status of the population. In addition, though, "the ravages which the small-pox formerly made have been greatly mitigated, inoculation being of late very general and very successful. In order to reconcile the minds of the common people to this useful practice, the heritors of Jedburgh, about ten years ago, allowed a small sum to defray the expence of innoculating the children of the poor, at a period when the disease was peculiarly fatal. This generous design was attended with the happiest success."²⁹⁵

Somerville continues his particularly acute analysis of the current social history of Jedburgh by discussing its population decline, a pattern that would have been unusual in relation to many other parishes. "This decrease is partly to be attributed", notes Somerville, "to the Union between the two kingdoms, by which the trade of Jedburgh was, in a great measure, ruined, and the population of the town diminished of consequence: and partly to the union of farms, which has depopulated the country." In examining the effects of the 1707 union on the border region between England and Scotland, Somerville attempts to diagnose this demographic change as an unexpected effect. Since 1707, the lucrative trade in contraband goods had been hit hard since uniform taxes and commercial regulations had been imposed. Somerville cites this as an important reason for the fierce opposition to the Union that was voiced in the border regions,

²⁹⁵ *Statistical Account*, Vol 1, 1791, 2-3.

citing Daniel Defoe's contemporary *History of the Union* (1709) in a footnote.²⁹⁶ The difficult socio-economic conditions endured by the poor are carefully analysed as well, as Somerville goes into considerable detail describing the mechanism – instituted in 1742 – whereby the rural poor were maintained by taxes on land proprietors. As for the urban poor, the town of Jedburgh operated a similar plan, in this case under the auspices of the magistrates rather than the parish minister, thus rendering its calculations “more scanty and inadequate.”²⁹⁷

In a transition to the intellectual and cultural contemporary history of the parish, Somerville describes the rapid spread (throughout all of Scotland) of the Relief Church, which had been formed in Jedburgh after the schism of 1752. Although a member of the Popular party, Somerville reflects his Moderate leanings as he relates the recent history of the Kirk: “This sect, more accommodating to the spirit of the times, has quickly spread over Scotland, and, probably, comprehends the greatest part of the Scotch dissenters.”²⁹⁸ As Sinclair requested, Somerville dutifully attempts to describe the “manners and morals” of the Scots under his care. The common people still spoke with a harsh and guttural accent, still making use of “the old Scotch dialect”. With a note of pride, as well as a register of comparison with past and present which, as we shall see below, informs so many of the parish contributions, Somerville asserts that all ranks of people were less addicted to drinking than they were some years ago, and that crime has correspondingly declined: “It is, indeed, one of the most striking evidences of the progress of civilization, and one of the most pleasing effects of a regular government, that in a country, formerly the scene of depredating violence, fewer instances of crimes, or of punishments, have occurred during the last 50 years, than perhaps in any other district of equal extent in the

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 12-15.

kingdom.” Somerville’s account of Jedburgh, then, not only opens the project as a whole, but stands as one of its more richly constructed regional contemporary histories whose content reflects an emerging interest in representing a more expansive social and cultural past and present.

Past and Present

One of the most striking aspects of the *Statistical Account* is its extended comparison of past and present. As he wrote in the preface to the third volume,

[The] object is, to lay the foundation of a great, methodical, and complete survey of Scotland, and perhaps of England, which [I] hope will be undertaken by the government at the commencement of the ensuing century. If periodical surveys are afterwards taken, every 50 or 100 years, they will furnish the best means of ascertaining the progress of national improvement ...”²⁹⁹

Once again, the counterpointing of past and present, along with the prospective nature of the project, is most evident in this rich passage noted in the Introduction. Such a structure is fundamental to historical thought, and not just the cultural episode discussed in this study. One of the most significant points of comparison, as Sinclair tried to emphasize in the original questionnaire, was population data. Most of the parish accounts include population tables in varying degrees of detail, usually contrasting the population figures returned by Rev. Alexander Webster in his 1755 demographic survey with current numbers compiled by the parish incumbents. In his editorial gloss, Sinclair emplots the *Statistical Account* as, in one sense, the

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁹⁹ *Statistical Account*, Vol 3 (1792), xi.

story of an increase in Scottish population over the last 40 years, and asserts that such a narrative of social improvement can only be represented properly in works of such a nature:

there is one point which merits to be particularly attended to, namely, the proofs, which they contain, that the Population of Scotland, within these 40 years past, has considerably increased. Though the progress of improvement in the country, might have satisfied every individual, of that fact, yet, such is the bias in favour of former times, that nothing, but a fair comparison, founded on accurate surveys, at different periods, could have produced full conviction, in the minds of many.³⁰⁰

In asserting the need for such comparisons between past and present, Sinclair accorded an important role to his own collaborative project – a project that aimed to move from the regional analysis of the contemporary field to a universal or national field – in a manner far more successful than English county histories, for example. As he notes, “it will prove the completest survey of a kingdom, of which we have any knowledge; and at the same time, will not exceed, either in price, or bulk, the topographical accounts given of many individual counties in England.”³⁰¹

In terms of population data, the obvious point of comparison was with the earlier demographic work of Rev. Alexander Webster. The minister of Edinburgh Tolbooth Church from 1737 to 1784, Webster was a prominent leader of the Popular party during the mid-eighteenth century. From his position as Moderator of the General Assembly, he was able to obtain population data from the parish ministers.³⁰² In describing the parish of Edrom, for example, Rev. William Redpath contrasts a population table for 1790 with the 1755 results, and concludes that, because agriculture has flourished in the area, the population has grown

³⁰⁰ *Statistical Account*, Vol 2 (1791), v-vii.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

considerably in the past fifty years. This development was attended with a “very great alteration in the manners, customs, dress, and stile of living, of the inhabitants of [the] parish, within these 30 years. All ranks have more elegant or commodious houses, finer clothes, and better food.”³⁰³ The attention to manners and socio-cultural details is a notable occurrence throughout the *Statistical Account*, a point which will be discussed at length later in this chapter. Other accounts, such as Rev. David Milne’s contribution for the parish of Dallas in Elgin county within the Synod of Moray, demonstrate an even more richly comparative register. Milne contrasts three sources of population data – Webster’s 1755 returns, information from Lachlan Shaw’s *History of the Province of Moray* (1775), and his own calculations from 1778.

A quite long entry is provided by Rev. Harry Robertson for the parish of Kiltarn. After noting the more volatile changes in weather patterns in the last twenty years, the discussion turns to the smallpox epidemic of 1777-8 in which as many as 77 children died due to “the neglect of inoculation, to which the people are still averse, in spite of the earnest persuasion and example of their superiors, confirmed by a successful practice in almost every instance where it has been attempted.” Rheumatic disorders are again noted as increasing, although in this case the cause is attributed to a change in fashion over the past thirty years from flannel to linen.³⁰⁴ Citing George Buchanan as his authority, the author notes a tradition of Scottish local history from as early as the eleventh century.³⁰⁵ In contrasting past and present, Rev. Robertson describes the feudal militarism of the earlier periods of Scottish history: “In those rude and remote ages, when trade

³⁰² For a reprint of Webster’s 1755 manuscript, see *Scottish Population Statistics*, Edited by James Gray Kyd, Scottish History Society, Third Series, Vol 44 (Edinburgh, 1952); on Webster and the Popular party, see McIntosh, 40 and *passim*.

³⁰³ *Statistical Account*, Vol 1, 117.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol 1, 263.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol 1, 267.

and commerce were little attended to, men of an enterprising spirit had no other field for distinguishing themselves but by their superior skill in the use of arms." However, this clannish feudalism was finally suppressed with the defeat of the Jacobite rebellion in 1745-6, an obvious watershed date for many such temporal comparisons.³⁰⁶

Another interesting comparison of past and present is written by Sinclair for the parish of Portpatrick, based on materials sent to him by Rev. John McKenzie. Sinclair relates a wonderful description of the natural harbour at Portpatrick, the nearest point between Scotland and Ireland. The nature of the harbour required flat-bottomed vessels only, a peculiarity that allows the author licence to provide a kind of geohistorical contrast between the older history of the harbour and its current state:

[Past ages] were times of misery, though the inhabitants were the happiest of mortals. Their continued exertions in launching and drawing up their vessels, excited wonderful spirits, which they knew how to recruit when exhausted. Every day that a vessel either sailed or arrived was a festival.

There is now on the same spot one of the finest quays in Britain, with a reflecting light-house; and instead of a few flat-bottomed boats, above a dozen of trading vessels, of from 40 to 60 tons, which sail and return regularly, besides a number of vessels which occasionally come from other ports.³⁰⁷

Furthermore, in describing the packet boats delivering mail to Ireland, once again a story of past hardship is contrasted with rapid change and present ease: "Such is the origin and the progress of improvement, which is generally owing, whether in a great capital like Edinburgh, or a provincial town like Portpatrick, to the spirit and exertions of particular men, who seem born for the

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol 1, 268-9.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol 1, 38-40.

purpose of rousing the multitude from a state of ignorance or torpor, from which they are too often unwilling to be emancipated.”³⁰⁸

A few of the parish contributions do lapse into either a wistful and nostalgic remembrance of the past, or a condemnation of its barbarism in relation to a glorious present. Indeed, the latter was a familiar motif in eighteenth-century Scottish historiography.³⁰⁹ But many of the parish accounts avoid such judgments. One account in particular, written by Rev. Dugal McDougal for Lochgoil-head and Kilmorich in Argyll, explicitly cautioned against such nostalgic glows, particularly in terms of local oral traditions. As McDougal states, “The partiality in favour of former times, and the attachment to the place of their nativity, which is natural to old people, together with the indolence in which they indulged themselves in this country, mislead them in drawing a comparison between their past, and their present situations.”³¹⁰ This assessment is echoed by the Moderate clergyman and writer John Ogilvie in his account of Mid-Marr (Aberdeen): “The change that has taken place in the general manners of the inhabitants of this district ... during the last half of the present century, is marked by very striking circumstances. Old persons complain of this alteration, in the author’s opinion, without reason. They censure indiscriminately every deviation from antient practice, not as being culpable, but new ... Thus, changes that are prescribed by fashion, and the manners of the times, are termed extravagance and affectation; conversation somewhat enlarged, or any attempt to deviate, in discourse, from their own barbarous phraseology, are imitations of the talk and manners of gentlemen; an

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol 1, 42.

³⁰⁹ See Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past* (Cambridge, 1993).

³¹⁰ *Statistical Account*, Vol 3 (1792), 185.

advance towards improvement, by any new mode of agriculture, is an innovation that cannot be practised successfully ...”³¹¹

The parish accounts for the two large urban areas of Edinburgh and Glasgow provided further opportunities for the kinds of temporal contrasts that Sinclair was seeking to represent in his *Statistical Account*. Sinclair himself wrote the entry for Glasgow, based on information sent by several (unnamed) correspondents. Denying any claims to a complete history of the city, he “only intended to give a concise view of various particulars, tending to illustrate its ancient and present state; referring those, who wish to have a fuller account of its rise and progress ... to the histories of it already published.”³¹² Sinclair describes Glaswegian trade – a subject in which his background in contemporary British commercial history suited him well – as developing slowly but steadily from 1735 to 1750, using data and charts from 1771 taken from John Gibson’s *History of Glasgow* (1777). The American Revolution was an initial blow, but a resulting rise in the price of tobacco was an obvious benefit, and the material progress of the city was visibly evident: “The combined powers of foreign trade, coasting trade, and manufactures ... are plainly discernible, in the rapid increase of inhabitants and of new buildings; and bid fair to secure to its industrious and enterprising citizens, a growing and permanent fund of wealth and prosperity.”³¹³

A more explicit historical counterpoint was contributed by William Creech, Sinclair’s publisher, and was included as an appendix to the regular entry for the city of Edinburgh and the parishes of Canongate, St. Cuthberts and Leith. As in the case of Glasgow, the reader is referred to larger civic histories such as Maitland’s (1753) and Arnot’s, a second edition of which had

³¹¹ *Statistical Account*, Vol 2 (1791), 525-6.

³¹² *Statistical Account*, Vol 6 (1793), 488.

³¹³ *Statistical Account*, Vol 6 (1793), 498-501.

appeared in 1788.³¹⁴ Creech's appended *Letters Addressed to Sir John Sinclair* was a series of notes and remarks comparing the commerce, arts, manners and living conditions of Edinburgh at three different temporal points: 1763, 1783, and 1792. Written in 1792, it serves as a register of fashions, happenings, anecdotes and physical phenomena, all counterpointed between the three periods, and designed to illustrate the "Statistical Progress" of the capital. Unlike other contributors, however, Creech avoids any explicit conclusions or interpretations, and wishes his data to stand for itself: "I do not mean at present to draw any hypothesis or theory from what I have stated above, but merely to bring facts into one general view, and to induce others to make observations of the same kind."³¹⁵

A similar comparative register is provided by Rev. James Meek in his entry for the parish of Cambuslang. A series of cross tables compares the state of the parish – land values, modes of farming, labour wages, food prices, and types of clothing, to name but a few categories – in 1750 to present conditions in 1790. As Meek writes, "The difference in the state of the country, in the value of land and mode of cultivation, in the price of provisions and the wages of labour, in food and cloathing, between the years 1750 and 1790, deserves to be particularly recorded."³¹⁶ A particularly rich passage offers a historically sensitive contrast between past and present social conditions. In 1750, for example,

When a farmer's family went to the kirk, or to a market, he and his sons wore suits of home made cloth, plaiden hose, and blue or black bonnets; his wife and daughters were dressed in gowns of their own spinning, cloth cloaks and hoods, worsted stockings and leather shoes.

In 1790, however,

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol 6, 559.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol 6, 628.

³¹⁶ *Statistical Account*, Vol 5 (1793), 251-6.

He and his sons wore suits of English cloth, worsted or cotton stockings and hats; his wife and daughters were dressed in printed calico or silk gowns, scarlet or silk cloaks, silk bonnets, white thread stockings, and cloth shoes.³¹⁷

After these illustrations of present material conditions are contrasted with earlier periods – including three recent population tables to align against Webster’s 1755 data – Meek ends his contribution with a microhistorical contemporary history of his own: a brief “Historical View” of the evangelical wave that swept through Cambuslang in the early 1740s, culminating in George Whitefield’s sermon to over 30,000 people.³¹⁸

The contrast of contemporary prosperity with earlier hardship is also framed in more evocative and immediate ways using anecdotal narrative techniques. In the account for Kirkhill in Inverness, Rev. Alexander Fraser surveys the last 50 years of his parish:

[the people here] have made a greater progress in civilization within the last 50 years, than for several centuries before. This is owing, first, to the decline of the feudal system. Before the year 1745, that system had considerable influence. Every chief considered himself as an independent prince, who might commit depredations on his neighbours territories, as avarice or animosity dictated. The clans, like the subjects of independent states, living in the close neighbourhood of each other, were animated by constant jealousy and mutual hatred.³¹⁹

Another temporal touchstone that – like the ’45 – connects many of the parish entries is the famine which struck most of Scotland after the late harvests of 1782 and 1783. In Fraser’s contribution, the difference in famine relief between 1783 and the late seventeenth century is evocatively captured by an account of a local episode during the earlier period:

I am informed by a man in this parish, that his father told him, that during the scarcity, four families ... subsisted for two years on the herbs they could collect in summer, and gathered the seed of the wild mustard ... and ground it into meal, so as to afford them a scanty subsistence in winter. But the third crop failing, they could subsist no longer: Accordingly, they deserted their habitations

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 255-6.

³¹⁸ Devine, 76.

³¹⁹ *Statistical Account*, Vol 4 (1792), 119-20.

in one body, and came down to the plain below, where they set upon lamentable howling; and having wept till they had no further power, they dispersed themselves to beg or serve, as they should find a reception, the wife separating from the husband, the mother from the children.”³²⁰

In the account for Holyrood in Dumfriesshire, Rev. Bryce Johnston proudly relates how the more fortunate farmers of his parish distributed a great deal of their harvest to the poorer labourers, taking a clear financial loss, in this instance “preserving their poor parishioners from the general calamity of the country” in 1782-3.³²¹

MANNERS AND CUSTOMS

In accordance with Sinclair’s editorial guidance – as well as the wider historical interest of the period – most of the parish accounts provide interesting snapshots of contemporary manners and customs. Once again, the emphasis is on a clearly perceived change in the social and material conditions of Scotland. Sinclair’s account of Glasgow, for example, demonstrates the wider diffusion of wealth and its socio-cultural consequences in the rapidly expanding commercial centre:

This has made an alteration in the houses, dress, furniture, education, and amusements of the people of Glasgow within a few years, which is astonishing to the older inhabitants; and has been followed by a proportional alteration in the manners, customs, and stile of living of the inhabitants ... The strict severity and apparent sanctity of manners, formerly remarkable here, have yielded to the opposite extreme. There is now a great deal more industry on six days of the week, and a great deal more dissipation and licentiousness on the seventh.³²²

³²⁰ *Statistical Account*, Vol 4 (1792), 121-2.

³²¹ *Statistical Account*, Vol 1 (1791), 35-6.

Elsewhere, the Rev. James Playfair (1738-1819), in a tone of enlightened confidence, reports that in 1745 “the state of this country was rude beyond conception ... The education, manners, dress, furniture, and table of the gentry, were not so liberal, decent, and sumptuous, as those of ordinary farmers at present.” Scottish contemporary history since the ’45 has been a “fortunate epoch” in general, where almost every improvement is “of a late date.”³²³ Playfair wrote accounts for three parishes, and would later write his own statistical survey based on the Sinclair model.³²⁴

Remarks on contemporary social and cultural life in Scotland abound throughout the *Statistical Account*. In describing “miscellaneous observations” in Ayton, Rev. George Home notes that since taking up his living, “there is a very visible change in [his parishioners’] mode of living and dress. Though the farms are much higher rented than formerly, yet the tenants are, in every respect, much more expensive than they were 15 years ago. Tradesmen and labourers in the village are addicted to the pernicious habit of using tea. Of late, also, from the low price of whiskey, the execrable custom of *dram-drinking* is gaining ground, even among the women of the lower class. Habits so inimical to health, industry, and morals, ought to be checked if possible.”³²⁵ On the same subject, another parish minister relates that “the advanced duties on malt have almost entirely abolished the practice of brewing. Ale-houses no longer exist; but dram-houses have been substituted in their place, which the cheapness of whiskey, and the

³²² *Statistical Account*, Vol 6 (1793), 534-5.

³²³ *Statistical Account*, Vol 1 (1791), 513.

³²⁴ *A Geographical and Statistical Description of Scotland*. 2 vol, 1819. In his survey, Playfair establishes a further temporal counterpoint to Webster in 1755 and Sinclair in the 1790s, before the Second Statistical Account began to appear in the 1830s.

³²⁵ *Statistical Account*, Vol 1 (1791), 85.

contraband trade in foreign spirits carried on in this country, tempt the people to frequent too much."³²⁶

In describing Bathgate, Rev. Walter Jardine notes a "great alteration in the manner of living [that] has taken place in this parish within the last 40 years." Along with the consumption of tea, the eating of meat and wheat bread has increased. In terms of clothing, once again a shift from modest homemade tartans and hosiery to more expensive fabrics like cloth, cottons, and silk is carefully noted. In the entry for Galston, the marriage custom of "creeling" is vividly described:

When a young man wishes to pay his addresses, instead of going to her father's, and professing his passion, he goes to a public house; and, having let the land-lady into the secret of his attachment, the object of his wishes is immediately sent for, who never almost refuses to come. She is entertained with ale and whiskey, or brandy; and the marriage is concluded on. The second day after the marriage, *a creeling*, as it is called, takes place. The young wedded pair, with their friends, assemble in a convenient spot. A small creel or basket is prepared for the occasion, into which, they put some stones: The young men carry it alternately, and allow themselves to be caught by the maidens, who have a kiss when they succeed. After a great deal of innocent mirth and pleasantries, the creel falls at length to the young husband's share, who is obliged to carry it generally for a long time, none of the young women having compassion upon him. At last, his fair mate, kindly relieves him from his burden; and her complaisance, in this particular, is considered as a proof of her satisfaction with the choice she has made.³²⁷

Another particularly rich entry is provided by John Naismith for the parish of Hamilton. After describing the appearance of an apparently new disease in his parish around 1771, Naismith moves to a comparison between his 1791 figures and Webster's 1755 data, offering a comparative view since mid-century of an increase in population and industry. The conditions

³²⁶ *Statistical Account*, Vol 1 (1791), 168.

³²⁷ *Statistical Account*, Vol 2 (1791), 80-1.

that explained this development, according to Naismith, were its proximity to Glasgow, its access to water and cheap coal, and its “exemption from the disturbances of election politics”.³²⁸

In terms of manners, once again we see the familiar lament concerning the abuses of intemperance: “Whiskey, which inflames its votaries with fury, or debases them into the grossest stupidity, is become a common beverage; and people too often forget every sense of duty, when indulging the bewitching draught.” As the material fortunes of the parish have improved since mid-century, the work ethic of the people had suffered the effects of luxury and increased wages: “Thus are the social and domestic duties too often neglected, by those, whose existence depends upon their application to labour. Habits of laziness gain ground; and a day of idleness or riot is sometimes closed by a night, either employed in wanton mischief, or in supplying the deficiency of industry by pillage; so that no kind of property, which is necessarily exposed to depredation, is any longer safe.”³²⁹ Naismith ends his contribution with a brief discussion of some eminent men of the parish, including the physician William Cullen and John Millar, “now Professor of Law at Glasgow”. It is interesting to note the similarities between Naismith’s condensed parish entry, and Millar’s sustained political and cultural history of Scotland that opens the third volume of his *Historical View of the English Government* (4 vol, 1803), as well as the even more contemporary reflections included in the fourth volume.

Millar’s discussion of Scottish history moves from a political and constitutional narrative to a wider description of cultural and intellectual history in England and Scotland. In the third volume of the *Historical View*, this examination of Scottish manners is related within the chronological confines of Millar’s narrative from 1603-1688. Towards the end of the Scottish

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 194-7.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol 2 (1791), 199-201.

chapter, however, Millar enters into a general discussion of the national character of his country. Millar frames the discussion in terms of a particularly English view of North Britons: “The shrewdness, cunning, and selfishness, imputed to the people of Scotland, are merely the unfavourable aspect of that intelligence and sagacity by which they are distinguished above the mere mechanical drudges in the southern part of the island ...”³³⁰ Millar also echoes Smollett’s description – in the *Continuation of the Complete History of England*, the *Briton*, and the *History of an Atom* – of the English backlash against the apparent patronage abuses during the Bute ministry in the 1760s. “The national spirit of Scotchmen has been much taken notice of”, writes Millar, “insomuch that they are supposed to be all in a confederacy to commend and extol one another. We may remark, that, as candidates, either for fame or profit, in the London market, they are greatly the minority; and it is not surprising, that in such a situation they should feel a common bond of union, like that of strangers in a hostile country.”³³¹

Millar’s fourth volume, included for the first time in the 1803 edition edited by John Craig, is titled “Of the English Government from the Reign of William III, to the Present Time.” In addition to the history of constitutional development, however, the bulk of the volume is devoted to a cultural, social, economic and literary history of Britain during that period. As mentioned earlier, it can therefore be seen as an important example of a transformed Thucydidean contemporary history that is no longer concerned solely with the political and military narrative of the recent past, or even just the history of the English constitution that is so central to the varieties of eighteenth-century Whiggism. Millar’s discussion of “sobriety” and “temperance”, in this respect, resonates with the parish histories of manners that include

³³⁰ John Millar, *Historical View of the English Government*, Vol 3 (London, 1803), 94.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 95.

sustained treatments of drinking habits. While affecting all ranks of society, Millar comments on the socio-cultural consequences of drinking among the labouring classes that echoes Naismith and so many of the parish ministers:

It affords, indeed, a healing balsam to their toils and cares; and our fellow-feelings must reclaim against that rigid severity which would altogether deny this consolation to a class of men, by whose painful exertions the prosperity of every state is principally supported, and the rest of the society maintained in ease and affluence. But their excesses in this particular are so pregnant with mischief, so destructive of all industry and domestic attention, and lead so directly to complete dissipation, and shameless profligacy, that sobriety, or temperance in the use of intoxicating liquors, has been justly regarded as the leading virtue of the populace, and the contrary, if not the most inexcusable vice, at least the great inlet to every sort of immorality.³³²

Interestingly enough, Millar's historical scheme relates "a change of manners which, in later times", has occurred in England and is being rapidly followed in Scotland.³³³

Returning to the *Statistical Account*, more favourable accounts of contemporary manners are evident in other contexts. In a vivid representation of the waning of Highland culture in the parish of Kincardine, Rev. Andrew Gallie seems concerned to record this character – despite its faults – for posterity before it is irrevocably lost. He describes them as

hospitable of quick parts, of great agility, inquisitive and fond of information, and extremely patient under hunger, cold, and other distresses, from which their southern neighbours would shrink with horror ... They still retain a sacred regard for the clan and family they are sprung from; but it must be allowed, that this feeling is on the decline. The tale, the song, and the dance, do not, as in the days of their fathers, gild the horrors of the winter night. If those of the present age have not all the blemishes of their forefathers, neither have they the whole of their good qualities. The moderns seem, both with regard to bodily and mental faculties, to be declining. One cause, and perhaps the chief, is, the abundance of whiskey introduced by the late distilling act.³³⁴

³³² *Ibid.*, 209.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 213-14.

³³⁴ *Statistical Account*, Vol 3 (1792), 516.

In the urban region of Montrose as well, “the times are happily changed”. Religious turmoil had lessened, commerce and manufactures had increased, and new public buildings had been recently erected (such as the flourishing public library established in 1785).³³⁵

Finally, one of the most interesting contemporary histories of the social and cultural field in the Scottish parishes was contributed by Rev. Alexander Carlyle, whose friendship with Smollett and his own anecdotal biography were discussed in Chapter 3. Indeed, within his account of Inveresk in Mid-Lothian county, Carlyle’s footnote to manners is longer than the main text itself. As he notes, “No change has ever been more complete and rapid, than that of manners, in many respects, within these last 40 years.”³³⁶ The causality for such social and cultural change varies from account to account, from the favourable social effects of self-interest, to the political and religious stability that followed the suppression of the ’45. What is more significant to note, though, is not the story of improvement, but the overriding concern with providing an accurate representation of the contemporary social and cultural field as an important representation of the present to be contrasted with both the recent and remote past.

Moreover, it was precisely this kind of social and demographic information that Sinclair thought should be the concern of the British political elite. For Sinclair, a properly national contemporary history of Scotland would include such contemporary data, and it would be a work in which the “political circumstances” of a country have more to do with demography, its commercial landscape, and its social makeup than with political intrigues and narratives of war and diplomacy. Many of Sinclair’s contributors echoed this position. In one of the most historically-minded contributions to the *Statistical Account*, Rev. John Grant notes that “our

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol 3, 34-39. A short history of trading companies is provided by Rev. Alexander Molleson, including a shippage and tonnage chart.

historians, it is true, chiefly employ themselves in retailing legendary stories, or giving inaccurate accounts of foreign or domestic wars, and political contests, overlooking, unfortunately, the more important details of industry, trade, and population. In an investigation of this nature, therefore, scattered facts must be collected, and casual and contingent sources of information relied on.³³⁷

Rev. John Graham is even more explicit in his account of Kirkinner, advocating the direct political relevance of the kind of social, cultural and economic information that was being compiled by the Scottish clergy:

It is thus, methinks, that the ministers of a benevolent religion should preach to senators and to statesmen ... Could our Legislators be conducted through this parish in the winter months; could the Lords and Commons, during the Christmas recess, visit the cottages of the poor through these parts of the united kingdom, where nature hath refuted coal, and *their* laws have more than doubled the price of it, this would be Shakespeare's 'wholesome physic;' and would, more than any thing else, quicken their invention ...³³⁸

Sinclair himself promoted this aspect of the project quite vigorously in his editorial glosses that surrounded the contributions themselves. In seeking to represent the "real state of mankind" and the "the internal structure of society", he emphasizes the forward-looking and prospective nature of such projects repeated at various intervals. In "ascertaining the present state", statistical histories staked a claim to a political audience once reserved only for Thucydidean political histories. "Real statesmen, and true patriots", wrote Sinclair in 1792, "no longer satisfied with partial and defective views of the situation of a country, are now anxious to ascertain the real state of its agriculture, its manufactures, and its commerce."³³⁹

This aspect of Sinclair's project was noted upon by William Playfair in the second volume of his *Political Portraits* (1814), a series of biographical anecdotes discussed in Chapter

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol 16 (1795), 37.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol 5 (1793), 5.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol 4 (1792), 146-7.

3. The brother of the eminent geologist and mathematician John Playfair, William was a statistician in his own right, as well as a key figure in the history of graphs and quantitative representations.³⁴⁰ In his biographical sketch of Sinclair, Playfair provides the following assessment of Sinclair and his great project:

Had this public-spirited baronet acted like those writers who are so ready to criticise him, he would have amused the world with imaginary, or at best, inaccurate statements, dressed in high-sounding language, instead of toiling years to collect facts, and then giving them unostentatiously to the whole world.

Sir John is the first, and as yet by far the best statistical writer in this country; and it would be well if that great writer, Adam Smith, had been equally attentive to the authorities on which his theories were founded.³⁴¹

And in 1794, while the volumes of the *Statistical Account* were steadily appearing, Robert Heron -- historian and assistant to Hugh Blair -- dedicated his *New General History of Scotland* to Sinclair as a promoter of “the true interests of his country”.³⁴²

After *The Statistical Account*: Statistics and History, c1800-1835

In 1825, Sinclair published his *Analysis of the Statistical Account of Scotland*. As a preface to this work, however, Sinclair again adopts the formal role of the contemporary historian with a brief “General View of the History of Scotland”, the last part of which provides a narrative from 1707 to 1824. As was discussed earlier, Sinclair began the major part of his literary career as a contemporary historian, with his *History of the Public Revenue*. The 1707-

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol 3, xi-xiii.

³⁴⁰ See Patricia Costigan-Eaves and Michael Macdonald-Ross, “William Playfair (1759-1823)”, *Statistical Science* 5 (1990): 318-26.

³⁴¹ William Playfair, *Political Portraits*, 358-9.

1824 section of Sinclair's "General View" is introduced as the period "which is most pleasing to contemplate", another marker of the attractiveness that contemporary history held during the period. Much of its attractiveness rested in its illustration of improvement. Writing in the polished and polite style of eighteenth-century historiographical convention, Sinclair begins with the Thucydidean rubric of "Warlike Incidents". In another example of the expansion and transformation of the Thucydidean genre that was discussed in Chapter 3, however, Sinclair's narrative moves on to longer and more detailed discussions under the following heads that clearly echo the questionnaire structure of the *Statistical Account*: Agriculture, Gardening, Roads and Canals, Commerce, Fisheries, Manufactures, Refined Arts, Laws, Literature, Useful Establishments, Daring Enterprises, and finally, "Political Economy, and Statistics" (it is interesting to note that the latter two are seen as related, but not yet integrated). Aside from being a short and prefatory work, these parallel narratives bear a formal resemblance to Robert Henry's *History of Great Britain* (1771-93), the chapters of which offered full chronological narratives – under thematic headings – to the beginning of the Tudor period. The "General View", however, only uses this formal division in its narrative of the contemporary period: the story to 1707 is uninterrupted, and adheres more closely to the more traditional Thucydidean politico-military subject matter. As was demonstrated in Chapter 3, a similar reworking of the Thucydidean framework is discernable when comparing Smollett's *Complete History* to the *Continuation*.

In the manner of Hume's appendices to the *History of England*, as well as the longer and more integrated cultural history narratives of Smollett and Millar, Sinclair moves through these rubrics in turn – from Lord Kames' 1778 work on husbandry, to Thomas Telford's engineering feats, to the herring industry, to the paintings of Henry Raeburn and David Wilkie, and through

³⁴² Quoted in David Allan, *Virtue, Learning and the Scottish Enlightenment*, 195.

the bright lights of Scottish Enlightenment science, medicine and literature. Particular attention is paid to the historiographical achievements of Hume and Robertson, as well as “the laborious and intelligent” Robert Henry, while Thomas McCrie’s *Life of John Knox* (2 vol 1813) is identified as a superior example of “biographical history”. Smollett is presented as the “predecessor” to Walter Scott, a clear recognition of his centrality in mid-eighteenth-century historical fiction. After some mention of the disproportionately Scottish involvement in “Useful establishments” such as exploration and cartography, the political economy of Sir James Steuart and Adam Smith is applauded.³⁴³

In concluding the contemporary section of his “General View” of Scottish history, Sinclair sets up his subsequent analytical digest of the 1790s *Statistical Account* as an even more pronounced prospective dimension to the contemporary snapshots provided in the parish accounts. As he notes,

Upon the whole, it is evident, that there has been no period in the history of Scotland, during which its inhabitants, notwithstanding the pressure of taxation, have had more reason to be satisfied with their condition, than since the House of Brunswick ascended the British throne. The means of improving that condition will be investigated in the succeeding pages, and when pointed out, are likely to meet with attention, as there seems every disposition on the part of the Sovereign, the Legislature and the Government, to advance the prosperity of a country, whose inhabitants ... furnish as little ground for reproach, as any known in history ...³⁴⁴

Sinclair also looks back, moreover, to the history of such projects. Early in the *Analysis*, he offers a genealogy of other European surveys, political arithmetics and antiquarian enterprises that could be seen as bearing a relation to his work. It is clear that Sinclair views these as failures relative to the Scottish *Statistical Account*, but his recognition and description of them is further

³⁴³ *Analysis of the Statistical Account of Scotland*, Vol 1 (1825), 45-56.

evidence of the historiographical dimension of his project – an element of the statistical impulse of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century that, as mentioned in the Introduction, has not been addressed by historians of statistics and political economy.

After briefly discussing antecedent projects in Spain, Sweden, and France, Sinclair establishes the German “science of state” from which he borrowed the term “statistics”. In turning to England, however, Sinclair establishes the antiquarian heritage that contributed to the contemporary survey (a tradition, as seen earlier, that was of clear significance to Lord Buchan in the early days of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland). Sinclair cites the English antiquarian Richard Gough’s *British Topography* (1780) and its historical account of various county histories and surveys, as well as John Campbell’s *Political Survey of Britain* (1774), but laments their overall lack of sufficient detail.³⁴⁵ Indeed, Sinclair’s hopes for a more fully British statistical survey were tied to the establishment of the Board of Agriculture in 1793. In the appendix to the final volume of the *Statistical Account* (1799), Sinclair describes his intentions and hopes:

When I moved for the establishment of that Board in Parliament, I pressed much the idea, that it might be the means of containing a Statistical Account of England, and consequently of explaining the real situation of the country in every point of view, that could possibly be wished for by a Patriot or Statesman.³⁴⁶

By the time Sinclair is writing the *Analysis*, however, this ideal had been thwarted. As he reflects, “after every arrangement had been made for carrying on parochial surveys, similar to those of Scotland, the plan was abandoned, and the system of county reports adopted in its

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 67-8.

³⁴⁶ *Statistical Account of Scotland*, Vol 21, lxxvi-lxxvii.

room.”³⁴⁷ Sinclair’s vision of a similarly broad and social contemporary survey of England did not come to fruition.

Sinclair does provide, however, a detailed genealogy of past Scottish attempts to construct surveys of contemporary Scotland. Beginning with Sir Robert Sibbald at the outset of the eighteenth century, Sinclair discusses Walter Macfarlane’s collection which was noted earlier in this chapter, as well as William Maitland’s attempts to coax parochial accounts from the parish clergy. As we saw earlier, however, Maitland’s queries did not provoke a large response. Sinclair identifies Webster’s 1755 census as the first successful measure for historical comparison, even if limited to demographic information: “it furnished data, for making a comparison, between the population of that period, and that of the present times. Without such a document, it would have been hardly possible to have satisfied the public, that the number of the inhabitants of Scotland had so greatly increased.”³⁴⁸ The Englishman Thomas Pennant is also cited for his attempts to prompt the Scottish clergy to provide parochial accounts, in addition to his own descriptions in his travel writings. Finally, Sinclair notes the attempt by Lord Buchan’s Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, citing the fragments of parish accounts that appeared in the pages of their transactions which were examined earlier in this chapter. Again, however, this genealogy is presented as a set of well-intentioned yet failed enterprises, particularly in relation to his own project in the 1790s.³⁴⁹ Indeed, Sinclair sees a large part of the success of his project

³⁴⁷ *Analysis*, Vol 1, 68.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

³⁴⁹ Charles Withers, in his important analyses of the history of Scottish historical geography, has astutely pointed out that Sinclair’s project is not the beginning or end of eighteenth-century national surveys, and he has reconstructed this pedigree from 1682-1830. Withers’ work has been invaluable in tracing this wider project in a much more detailed manner than Sinclair himself provides in his genealogy. However, while Withers establishes valuable contexts for the ways in which historical geography took shape in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Scotland, these texts

in his ability to persuade a rural (and ministerial) gentry to provide a sense of the mass of social and economic contemporary data that surrounds them. Sinclair concludes with an approving remark by Thomas Malthus on the role of the clergy in performing this kind of collaborative work, a picture of contemporaneity that is superior to any other national project: “[T]he very valuable accounts collected in the statistical volumes, will ever remain an extraordinary monument of the learning, good sense, and general information of the Clergy of Scotland; and ... these volumes exhibit a better picture of the internal state of a country, than has yet been presented to the world.”³⁵⁰ Seen from this perspective, the statistical survey needs to be seen not only a key genre in the history of British geography, political economy and sociology, but also as an overlooked facet of the historical sense of the period. The sustained comparison between past and present – and the prospective look to the future – is not only a central aspect of historical writing itself, but constitutes part of the cultural episode I have been describing throughout this study.³⁵¹

As noted above, Sinclair’s vision of a statistical account of Britain – accomplished via the Board of Agriculture – did not come to pass. The newest part of the kingdom, however, did emulate the Scottish model. William Shaw Mason (1774-1853), since 1810 the Secretary to the Commissioners for Public Records In Ireland, was encouraged by Sir Robert Peel (as Chief

should also be repositioned as contributions to a **historiographical** mapping of the contemporary period, as well as examples of nascent geography, sociology and political economy. See Withers 2001 and “How Scotland Came to Know Itself”, *Journal of Historical Geography* 21 (1995): 371-97.

³⁵⁰ *Analysis*, Vol 1, 70.

³⁵¹ This historiographical element of eighteenth-century British “statistics” has not been sufficiently recognized in the most recent work on the subject, especially Mary Poovey’s *A History of the Modern Fact* (Chicago, 1998); Michael Cullen, *The Statistical Movement in Early Victorian Britain* (Harvester Press, 1975); Philip Abrams, *The Origins of British Sociology, 1834-1914* (Chicago, 1968).

Secretary to the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland) to undertake a an Irish statistical survey along the lines of Sinclair's project. Dedicated to Peel as providing "accurate and authentic details of the present state of Ireland", the first volume appeared in 1814, followed by two more in 1816 and 1819, respectively.³⁵² Mason explicitly adheres to Sinclair's model, and much of his editorial gloss cites him directly. As Sinclair did, Mason saw himself as coordinating an historiographical account of Ireland's past and present, along with a prospective look into the future. In one long footnote to his preface, Mason quotes a letter from Sir John Newport, a civic representative of the city of Waterford, which commends the author for having "undertaken the highly useful task of becoming the parochial historian of Ireland".³⁵³

Mason, again echoing Sinclair, also included a brief genealogy of previous Irish projects, from the seventeenth-century surveys of Sir William Petty, to more recent eighteenth-century enterprises. In particular, Mason implicitly identifies the antiquarian and historiographical nature of these precedents, such as the "Physico-Historical Society" that was formed in 1744. Under its auspices, the "most eminent literary characters of the day" produced "histories" of Cork, Kerry, Waterford and Down.³⁵⁴ After those early fragments, the Dublin Society initiated a project in 1773 that circulated a list of queries to the parochial clergy – the only fragment, however, is a "statistical account of the parish of Roscommon, sent in by Charles O'Connor, grandfather of the present well known Irish Antiquarian." Following this, the Dublin Society adopted a country model in place of a parochial one, a shift that resulted in less "minute details", according to

³⁵² William Shaw Mason, *A Statistical Account, or Parochial Survey of Ireland*, 3 Vols (Dublin, 1814-19), Vol 1 (1814), v.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, xii.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, xiv.

Mason.³⁵⁵ A third project is identified as having begun in 1793 by the Royal Irish Academy. Again, it is antiquarianism which is identified as animating the project, the only surviving fragment being contributed by Edward Ledwich (1738-1823).

A noted antiquarian who corresponded with Richard Gough, Ledwich was instituted vicar of the parish of Aghaboe (Queen's County) in 1772. He became best known for his *Antiquities of Ireland* in 1790, as well as his edition of Francis Grose's work of the same title in 1791. In 1796, Ledwich wrote his *Statistical Account of Aghaboe* for the Royal Irish Academy, and Mason includes this in his 1814 *Statistical Account* as both a chief contribution and a template for others to emulate. Importantly, Mason explicitly notes Ledwich's shift from antiquities to the contemporary survey, as he writes:

the fire of enthusiasm which enlightened his youthful steps through the Cimmerian darkness of Irish Antiquities, still guided his matured judgment to aid in laying open its present state for the instruction of the Philosopher and Statesman, and to the incalculable advantage of the country itself ...³⁵⁶

In his account of Aghaboe, Ledwich begins with a physical description of the parish replete with historical, antiquarian and demographic details. Indeed, it is heavily footnoted, with references to earlier surveys such as Sir William Petty's Down survey, Edmund Spenser's *View of the Present State of Ireland* (1596), as well as more recent texts such as Hume's *History of England*.³⁵⁷ Also included are examinations of recent events, such as poor relief in the 1770s.³⁵⁸ Ledwich's contribution provides a template that, along with Sinclair, establishes the general pattern of Mason's Irish statistical account. What becomes of this interplay between statistics and

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, xv.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, xvi.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 17-52.

contemporary history? This is a question that can be addressed as the starting point of the concluding portion of this study.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 52-3.

CONCLUSION:

THE STRANGE DEATH OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORY REVISITED

By the time William Shaw Mason was writing the Preface to the second volume of his own statistical account in 1816, he already seems aware of a fundamental shift that was taking place in relation to the writing of statistical history. In discussing a recent statistical survey from Napoleonic France, a long footnote comments that the prospective nature of the contemporary survey, which as we have seen was such an important aspect of the kind of historiographical counterpointing being done in such works, was beginning to be emphasized over the analysis of the present: in particular, "more stress is laid on future hope than on present experience."³⁵⁹

As stated in the Introduction, the fluidity between statistics and contemporary historical thought begins to change in the nineteenth century, particularly during the 1830s. By this time, statistics appears less as a possibility for representing the historical present. The interest in futurity overrides the comparison between present and past, particularly in terms of the amelioration of social and demographic problems such as poverty and public health. Early in the 1830s, however, the historical interest of the contemporary survey still seemed evident, as can be seen from a brief look at the early days of the Statistical Society of London. In 1833, a great deal of its initial membership shared clear historical interests, particularly Thomas Malthus, Richard Jones, and the historian Henry Hallam. Malthus died the following year, but Jones and Hallam helped to articulate its early research programme, particularly in Hallam's 1834 "Prospectus" for the Society.

In Hallam's "Prospectus", once again the explicit mandate is to "compare the present condition and future progress of the empire." In doing so, four classes of statistical knowledge were outlined: "Economical Statistics", including the natural productions, agriculture, manufactures and commerce of the nation; "Political Statistics", including the size of the electorate and military and civil expenditures; "Medical Statistics", under which population was now to be included; and "Moral and Intellectual Statistics", including literacy, education, ecclesiastical establishments, and crime. Again, an appeal is made to the collecting industry of a broad social network – not just the clergy, but the ideal type of the "intelligent Englishman" who would, presumably, constitute the ranks of the new Society.³⁶⁰ Hallam's involvement with the Society lasted longer than most of the early founders, but after 1835 his advanced age limited his actual contributions.³⁶¹

Richard Jones, on the other hand, was noted for his historically sensitive political economy. However, in his "Introductory Lecture on Political Economy" delivered at King's College, London in 1833, Jones echoes the general thrust of the decade to come when he described two different sets of facts that form the basis of political economy, characterized as "two sources of knowledge – history and statistics, the study of the past and a detail of the present condition of the nations of the earth."³⁶² Here we see an important articulation of history and statistics being set at a formal remove from each other in an era of historicism and increased specialization in the social sciences during the 1830s. Ten years earlier, a kind of generic instability and hybridity still surrounded statistics in relation to history and political economy, as

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol 2 (1816), viii.

³⁶⁰ Henry Hallam, "Prospectus", 1834, 1-3.

³⁶¹ Cullen, 92-101.

is evident in this extract from J.R. McCulloch's well-known *Discourse on the Rise, Progress, Peculiar Objects and Importance of Political Economy* (1824):

Besides being confounded with Politics, Political Economy has sometimes been confounded with Statistics; but they are still more easily separated and distinguished. The object of the statistician is to describe the condition of a particular country at a particular period; while the object of the political economist is to discover the causes which have brought it into that condition. He is to the statistician what the physical astronomer is to the mere observer. He takes the facts furnished by the researches of the statistician, and after comparing them with those furnished by historians and travellers, he applies himself to discover their relation.³⁶³

Until the late mid to late 1830s, then, the interplay between "statistics" and "history" provided an important framework in which the British interest in contemporary history could be represented in the non-narrative, "survey" genres discussed in the preceding chapter.

This interplay reflected, as well, a kind of Baconian optimism in the possibility of the totality of contemporary historical knowledge. As we saw earlier in the initiatives of Buchan, Smellie and Sinclair, one of the central ideals is the movement from the collection of information at the local and regional level, to a broader and more universal national (and historical) framework. The sense is given that the contemporary historical narrative will emerge, naturalistically, from the collection of the data. An interesting expression of this ideal is provided by John Playfair, the eminent Scottish geologist and parish minister. In discussing geological knowledge in the *Edinburgh Review* (1811), Playfair uses language that is clearly evocative of Buchan and especially Sinclair's collaborative parish project:

All this tends to show the necessity of setting many hands to work ... for attaining this object nothing is of such consequence as the description of particular counties, and an accurate

³⁶² Quoted from Lawrence Goldman, "The Origins of British 'Social Science': Political Economy, Natural Science and Statistics, 1830-1835", *Historical Journal* 26 (1983), 596.

³⁶³ Goldman, 611.

exposition of the facts which they exhibit. Indeed, if the face of the earth were divided into districts, and accurately described, we have no doubt that, from the comparison of these descriptions, the true theory of the earth would spontaneously emerge without any effort of genius or invention. It would appear as an incontrovertible principle, about which all men, the moment that the facts were stated to them, must of necessity agree.³⁶⁴

In carrying out such inquiries, historical or geological, “all men of sense and information” were contributing to this Baconian historiographical project.

In a wider sense, this study has attempted to track a preoccupation with the representation of the historical present across an apparently disparate mass of texts and authors. The study has been carried out with the conviction that a scholarly neglect needs to be addressed. Contemporary history in all of its shapes has not been recognized as a substantial part of the historiographical landscape of eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Britain, even though it ran parallel to other forms of historical-mindedness. The shapes of contemporary history that comprise this study have been conventional history, the novel, anecdotal biography, the “historical register”, the “present states” genre, and the early social science of statistics, at least in its British shape. In the various forms of writing that have been examined, there appears to be an historiographical re-orientation towards representing contemporaneity. As noted in the Introduction, this trans-generic impulse does not fit within the literatures and interpretative frameworks that have served to describe not only the history of British historiography, but the history of British social science as well. It is hoped that the shared historical links between these texts – perhaps once believed to be tenuous – can now be seen from a new perspective that can further enlarge our map of early modern British historical thought and writing. Moreover, it is hoped that this study will

³⁶⁴ John Playfair, “Review of the Transactions of the Geological Society of London”, *Edinburgh Review* XIX (1811), 209.

contribute to a re-examination of the historicist frameworks of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: frameworks which are as much British as German.

Central to all of the genres outlined in this study is a sustained comparison between past and present, as well as a prospective nod to futurity. Contrary to the assertions of other historians, the period from 1750-1835 was not marked by a pronounced shift to the remote past. Rather, the Thucydidean contemporary history was stretched to new limits as it became a vehicle for representing social and cultural action in addition to the traditional political and military subject matter. In addition, the neoclassical decorum of the Thucydidean genre became less pronounced as the possibilities of contemporary history for narrative immediacy and sympathy were recognized. The argument presented in this study, then, posits that a neglected feature of British historiography from 1750 to 1830 was an important reworking and transformation of the Thucydidean tradition of contemporary history.

Additionally, in mapping the broad contours of contemporary history during this period, a set of writings not normally seen as historiographical have been re-positioned within this framework. The object has not been to deny or subvert their clear relationship to the emerging human sciences of sociology, political economy and geography, but rather to re-position them as complicated texts that display the ambiguity and hybridity of the period. Indeed, while the non-narrative survey genres rely on a more implicit narrative in their collaborative projects, they too demonstrate the sustained temporal interplay between the past, present and future that is a fundamental index of the historical sense. It does, indeed, comprise Bloch's "solidarity of the ages".

In short, the death – strange or otherwise – of contemporary history in its narrative and non-narrative shapes has been greatly exaggerated. On the contrary, the period from 1750 to 1830

displays a rich variety of contemporary historical inquiries. The period after 1830 displays a continuation of contemporary history, but it seems harder to track. On the one hand, the generic fluidity between statistical and historical inquiries clearly begins to wane. At the same time, a version of historicism that valorizes perspective and temporal distance has tended to shape the frameworks within which we discern the history of historical thought and culture since the nineteenth century.

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