

ABSTRACT

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REPRESENTATIONS OF ORATORS IN THE
LONG EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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This dissertation tracks representations of orators in a constellation of British texts throughout the long eighteenth century, ranging from plays, novels, and poems to religious, scientific, and pedagogical texts. These colorful and persuasive orators are linked to the disruptive power of mass persuasion, the slipperiness of the spoken word, and the apparent failure of rhetoric as a discipline. From the order of the Restoration to its re-establishment after the Glorious Revolution to the emergence of a Georgian polite culture characterized by its moderation, privileged stakeholders announced both a current and future stability that orators continually threaten. My chapters focus on four discourses in which real and fictional orators play a central role: experimental philosophy, attacks on Methodism, Alexander Pope's poetry, and Scottish Enlightenment rhetorical treatises. I locate an imperative to limit the potential power of the orator, which echoes a general cultural move to "neuter" rhetoric of its affective capabilities and to regulate the troubling instabilities of language. *Neutered Rhetoric* interrogates the

traditional critical narrative of British rhetoric in the period by considering the resurgence of rhetorical theory in the 1750s as both a reaction to and a revision of the vexed cultural status of the orator as presented in literary texts. In charting literary representations of orators and their relationship to the shift in rhetoric from an oral to a written discipline, I present a new avenue for exploring the changing shape and influence of rhetorical theory during the period. I argue that representations of orators – whether real or fictional – can be read as theories about the nature of rhetoric, its inherent value and the problems of its effects. Whenever orators speak, they both represent and provoke cultural responses to rhetoric: its tradition, propriety, integrity, and future in a polite society.

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EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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Dedication

For Christine:

There is a comfort in the strength of love;
'Twill make a thing endurable, which else
Would upset the brain, or break the heart:

- William Wordsworth

Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without the contributions of my mentors and colleagues, and in particular my committee. Though I met Vin Carretta too late for my liking, he was a constant source of encouragement and suggestions, as well as a model of the humility necessary for serious inquiry. His exhaustive comments and helpful critiques sharpened the project and gave me many thoughts for future directions. I never left Laura Rosenthal's office without being energized, feeling better about what I was doing and why I was doing it. Having been struck by her contagious joy, I can only hope to share it with every student I meet. Vessela Valiavitcharska gave me words of affirmation for my ideas when I visited Maryland as a prospective student in 2008, and she has not stopped since. By coming on at a crucial point in this project, even despite her own busy schedule, she made its completion possible. I join a growing group of devotees who cannot mention Vessela's name without following with some story of her kindness. Further, I thank current and former faculty members such as Jeanne Fahnestock, Jonathan Auerbach, Linda Kauffman, Kandice Chuh, Sandy Mack, Kellie Robertson, and Jessica Enoch for being models of generosity and intellectual seriousness.

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In thinking of a way to thank Tita Chico for her support as the director of this dissertation, I have surveyed but found inadequate the powerfully elevated language that drew me to study the eighteenth century. From Hobbes' praise for the Cavendishes to Boswell's multi-volume encomium of Johnson, I have yet to find a comparable level of poetic or prosaic appreciation as I have for Tita's generosity, encouragement, and unfailing optimism. She has met doubt with determination. She has found an argument where I did not know I was making one. In the midst of an encomium, the authors I chronicle often find a way to remind readers of their own accomplishments, and I do not want to do that here. In the act of acknowledging Tita as the most important mentor I have ever had, I celebrate nothing less than the possibilities of academia, serious scholarship, and critical discourse itself.

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Introduction

An Age of Orators

In a 1759 essay in the *Critical Review*, Oliver Goldsmith pontificates, “We all would be orators: our very tradesmen are orators: we live in an age of orators. Were it not worthwhile to ask what oratory is?”¹ When he posits the eighteenth century as an “age of orators,” Goldsmith writes ironically. His rhetorical question comes in the middle of a fairly damning review of John Ward’s *System of Oratory* (1759). Bored by the “disgusting dryness of names and definitions,”² Goldsmith claims that Ward merely repeats the exhaustive (and exhausting) precepts of classical rhetoric without considering their propriety in contemporary settings. For Goldsmith, orators are not, as Cicero would define them, specialized masters of eloquence who are the products of a dynamic program of rhetorical training. Rather, orators are *everywhere* – in shops, taverns, and coffeehouses - and they do not need a classical training program to be persuasive.

Like Goldsmith, we can ask “what oratory is” by looking more carefully at those who practice it. It would not be an overstatement to call the literature of the long eighteenth century a chronicle and representation of an “age of orators.” However, as Goldsmith implies, orators are more often problems than solutions; they provoke the worst more than they bring out the best. Orators are frequently sources of a dissonant noise that needs to be silenced. From the Restoration to the French Revolution, we can find orators up to no good. In John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667), for instance, before

¹ Oliver Goldsmith, *Collected Works*, ed. Arthur Friedman, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 1:168.

² *Ibid.*, 1:169.

Satan delivers the speech that will convince Eve to betray God's order, the narrative voice is explicit in putting him firmly in the rhetorical tradition:

As when of old some orator renowned,
In Athens or free Rome, where eloquence
Flourished, since mute! to some great cause addressed,
Stood in himself collected.³

With the skill of Athenian orators, this persuasive speaker destabilizes a paradise that is characterized by both its physical beauty and its stringent moral code. After Satan's speech, Eve will praise his words as "plain,"⁴ viewing deception as cool, detached reason. Earlier in *Paradise Lost*, we meet an orator whose persuasive ability rivals Satan's. When the grandiloquent Belial appears in Pandaemonium, his words are preceded by this description:

. . . his tongue
Dropped manna, and could make the worse appear
The better reason, to perplex and dash
Maturest counsels: for his thoughts were low--
To vice industrious, but to nobler deeds
Timorous and slothful. Yet he pleased the ear.⁵

Belial will proceed to persuade his audience to accept the "slothful" virtues he exemplifies, arguing that his devilish companions should merely relax and get used to hell rather than wage war against heaven. In 1747, Samuel Richardson has Clarissa Harlowe invoke Milton's description of Belial to describe the silver-tongued John Belford.⁶ Of course, Belford will not become the Satan to Clarissa's virginal Eve; that would be Robert Lovelace. After casting Belford as a Belial figure, Clarissa notes that

³ John Milton, "Paradise Lost (1674)," In *The Riverside Milton*, ed. Roy Flannagan (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 297–711.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa: Or the History of a Young Lady* ed. Angus Ross (New York: Penguin Classics, 1986), 545.

Lovelace possesses an even greater “deceiving sweetness which appears in his smiles, in his accent, in his whole aspect and address.”⁷ Like Belial, Lovelace “pleases the ear,” which Clarissa decides is evidence of his dignity, leading her to have “hope of seeing him a reformed man.”⁸ As the reader will realize, Clarissa should have trusted the impression that led her to recall Milton. The Belial allusion foreshadows Lovelace’s actions – he will “dash” Clarissa’s “maturest counsels” with eloquently presented lies.

Deceitful but eloquent, Belial, Lovelace, and Satan are examples of what Richard Lanham has called *homo rhetoricus*, one who has “a natural agility in changing orientations” and for whom “what is accepted as reality” is interchangeable with “what is useful.”⁹ This “rhetorical man” is “committed to no single construction of the world; much rather to prevailing in the game at hand.”¹⁰ In *Paradise Lost*, Belial and Satan are perfect foils to the inhabitants of Eden, who practice a prelapsarian “unmeditated eloquence.”¹¹ Richardson presents a similar opposition as Clarissa desires to “let my actions, not my *misrepresentations* . . . speak for me,”¹² while Lovelace thrives on misrepresentations, linguistic and otherwise. Richardson links Lovelace’s persuasion not merely to oratory, but to rhetoric of the most pernicious kind.

Uncontained and unbound by a guiding ethics, orators thrive in a disordered state that they help to create. Richardson and Milton depict the orator acting with liberty and ingenuity: freedom of speech at its worst. Unless they are controlled or silenced, the effects of these fictional persuasive voices lead to tragedy. In her 1668 play, *The Bridals*,

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹Richard A. Lanham, *The Motives of Eloquence: Literary Rhetoric in the Renaissance* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004), 4.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Milton, “Paradise Lost (1674).” 5.149.

¹² Richardson, *Clarissa*, 93.

Margaret Cavendish puts forward the possibility that orators can be controlled and dismissed before they achieve their harmful goals. Set apart from a group of feuding bridals, the secondary character of Mimick aspires to be a professional orator. Mimick is “rather a knave than a fool,”¹³ but he longs to develop and model persuasive skills so great that he will create cuckolds through speeches that will “make the two Poles meet in the very forehead of the Torrid Zone of a Man’s head.”¹⁴ Though Mimick’s rhetorical gifts are questionable, his ambitions are even more suspect. He longs to be like Orators who “gain more renown by those that do not hear them, but only see them.”¹⁵ Mimick’s professional ambition is guided by his recognition of the grim state of rhetoric as a discipline; in short, to be a successful orator, one does not have to be particularly gifted at oratory. Though Mimick’s desires are potentially destructive, his effects are nothing of the sort. His objectionable orations are quickly dismissed by the intelligent and witty bridals who hear them. The audience who laughs Mimick off the stage joins in this act of critical judgment. *The Bridals* presents a fictional space in which the deleterious effects of rhetoric can be isolated and ignored. Reason and good sense clearly and adamantly triumph over empty words and divisive sentiments, both in the romantic plot that drives the play and when confronted by the potential threat the devious orator poses. Within the fiction of the play, Mimick is contained by the intelligent audiences who reject him. However, Cavendish’s dramatization (which, as I will argue, is connected to her political and scientific imperatives) also suppresses the symbolic persuasive voice that Mimick represents. For Cavendish, Mimick’s failure becomes the triumph of aristocratic privilege

¹³ Margaret Cavendish, “The Bridals,” in *The Convent of Pleasure and Other Plays*, ed. Anne Shaver (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1999), 191. Since the Johns Hopkins edition does not have line numbers, these citations are by page number.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 191.

and order through which selfish motives are revealed by rather than hidden within the orator's speech.

The posh socialites of *The Bridals* have no desire to integrate the orator into their circle. Yet Tobias Smollett's 1771 novel *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* offers the possibility of conciliation and reform that Richardson's *Clarissa* imagines but does not achieve. Humphry Clinker, a penniless fellow with an immaculate moral compass and a gift for preaching, is taken in as a footman by the traveling party of Matthew Bramble. Frustrated when Clinker bursts into an extempore sermon against swearing before a poor crowd at the Court of St. James, the splenetic Bramble opines, "if you should have eloquence enough to persuade the vulgar, to resign those tropes and figures of rhetoric, there will be little or nothing left to distinguish their conversation from that of their betters."¹⁶ Later, when Bramble finds Humphry preaching "at a kind of a methodist meeting," he interrupts and upbraids him further.¹⁷ Bramble's suspicion of Humphry's methods reflects a general anxiety toward the increasing power of real-life Methodists such as George Whitefield. Like Whitefield, Humphry is particularly skilled at drawing in female audience members. Yet as the novel ends, Humphry is folded into the polite and rational society that the traveling party represents. When Humphry is revealed to be Bramble's illegitimate son, Smollett presents his redemption in his integration to the more moderate standards of religious practice as represented by Bramble and his company.¹⁸ Milton and Richardson present the catastrophic effects of persuasive speech. Yet Cavendish and Smollett offer fantasies of assimilation and containment, of the

¹⁶ Tobias Smollett, *Humphry Clinker*, ed. Thomas L. Preston (Athens: Georgia UP, 1990), 98.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 134.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 306–07.

triumph of British rationality and community – even with all its quirks and flaws – as a way to contain the specter of the orator.

From *Satan to Lovelace*, from *Mimick* to *Humphry Clinker*, the literature of the eighteenth century abounds with orators. On one hand, the orator sets his devious sights on using speech to unsettle and challenge the judgment. On the other, auditors use their judgment to control these potentially dangerous effects. By examining what the orators can do, should do, and also what should be done about them, these writers present meditations about rhetoric, its inherent value and the problem of its effects. These orators not only channel and are informed by rhetorical theory, they are themselves *theories of rhetoric*.

What Happened to Rhetoric in the Long Eighteenth Century?

The fate of the orator is part of a larger narrative about the practice and theory of rhetoric in the eighteenth century. As writers from Milton to Smollett address the power of the orator, rhetoricians of the period debate the direction that rhetorical theory should take. In a period in which the discipline was marked by internal dissension and external criticism, no major works on rhetoric were produced in England between 1660 and 1750.¹⁹ During this period, the primary texts that dealt with rhetoric, such as the anonymous *Some Rules for Speaking and Action* (1716) or John “Orator” Henley’s *Oratory Transactions* (1728-

¹⁹ For a list of some of the works produced during this period, see Wilbur Samuel Howell, *Eighteenth-Century British Logic and Rhetoric* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971). From 1660 to 1690, the French composed the most rhetorical treatises. From 1690 to 1740 in England, the primary movement focused on delivery and pronunciation and was termed (by its contemporaries) “The Elocutionary Movement.” About this period, Howell writes, “the practices which the elocutionists encouraged inevitably led to declamation without sincere conviction and earnest feeling, as students recited discourses devised and organized by someone else. And when these practices came to stand in the public mind for the whole of rhetorical doctrine, rhetoric came to mean empty and insincere speaking . . . for artificial elegance of style” (145-46). For a recent revisionist take on the Elocutionists, see Dana Harrington, “Remembering the Body: Eighteenth-Century Elocution and the Oral Tradition,” *Rhetorica* 28, no. 1 (2010): 67–95. On rhetoric in France, see Peter France, *Rhetoric and Truth in France: Descartes to Diderot* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

29), focused on delivery alone and more or less ignored the other great canons of classical rhetoric: invention, arrangement, style, and memory.²⁰ About the period, Walter Ong claims, “The demise of rhetoric marked probably the greatest break with the past which Western culture had ever experienced.”²¹ Yet despite the “demise,” orators were ubiquitous. The conflicted status of rhetoric is the intellectual backdrop against which the orator speaks. Orators must not only make a case for the subjects of their persuasive speeches, but also the art of persuasion itself. And often, as we will see, in their audiences’ eyes they fail.

The eighteenth century marks a sharp shift in the moral configuration of orators. The classical rhetoricians imagined the orator as a heroic, civilizing figure. In Cicero, the orator unites wisdom and eloquence, and becomes a civilizing force in the marshalling of language to pursue and animate civic virtue. Quintilian writes that “justice and truth . . . have a peculiar relation to the art of oratory.”²² The orator is “such a man as may be called truly wise, not blameless in morals only . . . a character such as, perhaps, no man ever was.”²³ For these influential Romans, rhetorical education offers a system of training not only in speaking, but also in virtue, ethics, and epistemology. As Jeanne Fahnestock notes, rhetoric “represents the discipline that virtually constituted higher learning in antiquity, and it remained a major portion of the university curriculum from the Middle Ages through the eighteenth century.”²⁴ In the sixteenth and early seventeenth century, a number of treatises were published that celebrated both the power of orators

²⁰ On *Some Rules for Speaking and Action*, see Howell, *Eighteenth-Century British Logic and Rhetoric*, 190–98; on Orator Henley, see Graham Midgley, *Life of Orator Henley* (Oxford UP, 1973).

²¹ Walter J. Ong, “Review of Eighteenth-Century British Logic and Rhetoric by Wilbur Samuel Howell,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (October 1972): 641.

²² Quintilian, *Quintilian’s Institutes of Oratory: Or, Education of an Orator*, trans. John Selby Watson (London: George Bell and Sons, 1907), 4.

²³ *Ibid.*, 6–7.

²⁴ Jeanne Fahnestock, *Rhetorical Figures in Science* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002), viii.

and the classical methodology that could produce them. Linking classical technique with protestant theology, Thomas Wilson used his 1553 *Arte of Rhetorique* to reconceive Ciceronian eloquence as a gift from God, who “stirred up his faythfull and elect, to perswade with reason, all men to societie.”²⁵ The connection between protestant morality and persuasive skill authorized the orator to do great things in God’s name. Because of the assurance of divine providence, Henry Peacham could describe the orator without irony or qualification as “the emperor of men’s minds and affections and next to the omnipotent God in the power of persuasion by grace and divine assistance.”²⁶

Yet after the English civil wars, rhetoric became the subject of disdain and suspicion. After all, orators got them into that mess in the first place. “Specious Tropes and Figures,” scoffs Thomas Sprat in *The History of the Royal Society* (1667), condemning the seemingly benign stylistic devices for “the evil . . . now so inveterate, that it is hard to know whom to *blame*, or where to begin to *reform*.”²⁷ John Locke calls rhetoric “the perfect cheat,” allowable in civic address but having no place within serious philosophical discourse.²⁸ To personify the dangers of rhetoric, writers often turn to the vexed figure of the orator to represent the problem of its misuse and the excesses of the discipline. For instance, Thomas Hobbes complains that the orator was a “favorite of sovereign assemblies,” who had “great power to hurt, but little to save.”²⁹ When Jonathan Swift’s Gulliver rebukes lawyers as those who are trained in the “art of proving by words multiplied for the purpose that *White is Black*, and *Black is White*, according as

²⁵ Thomas Wilson, “The Arte of Rhetorique,” in *The Rhetorical Tradition*, 703.

²⁶ Henry Peacham, “The Garden of Eloquence,” in *Renaissance Debates on Rhetoric*, ed. Wayne Rebhorn (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2000), 226.

²⁷ Thomas Sprat, *History of the Royal Society*, ed. Jackson I. Cope and Harold Whitmore Jones (St. Louis: Washington UP, 1958), 113.

²⁸ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1979), 508.

²⁹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*. ed. John Charles Addison Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), 125-26.

they are paid,”³⁰ he not only describes the deplorable contemporaneous state of forensic oratory, but he also echoes one of the earliest criticisms of ancient rhetoric – that it makes the worse appear the better. At the other end of the period, Immanuel Kant dismisses the orator as one who “gives something which he does not promise,” but “fails to supply what he did promise.”³¹ While Kant’s description emphasizes the flawed “promise” and questionable motives of an “art” dedicated to persuasion, other writers depicted deceptive speakers who manipulate judgment as a sculptor does clay. Rhetoric in the eighteenth century was viewed by some as a trivial, even useless discipline pursued by stodgy antiquarians and laughable elocutionists. Yet as Sprat and Hobbes assert, an art dedicated to persuasion recalled the animated speakers who stimulated dissent and whose fiery speeches invited the civil war.

To say that *all* public speakers were denounced would be an overstatement, but calling someone an orator often amounted to an insult. Though the usage of the term varies, an orator was a speaker whose pomposity was reflected by a reliance on rhetorical conceits. Many who openly practiced rhetoric were often mocked or criticized, as in Henry Fielding’s and Alexander Pope’s satirical caricatures of the popular lecturer and elocutionist John “Orator” Henley. In *The Dunciad* (1729), Pope puts Henley in the gallery of exultant dunces, where he appears “Tuning his voice, and balancing his hands / How fluent nonsense trickles from his tongue! / How sweet the periods, neither said nor sung!”³² In Fielding’s *The Author’s Farce* (1730), the barely concealed caricature “Dr.

³⁰ Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 231.

³¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique Of Judgement*, trans. J.H. Bernard (New York: Prometheus Press, 2000), 207.

³² Alexander Pope, “The Dunciad.” *The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. James Sutherland. 11 vols. (London: Routledge, 1967), 5. 195-198.

Orator” pursues the hand of the Goddess of Nonsense.³³ Plays such as Charles Macklin’s *The Man of the World* (1781) and Samuel Foote’s *The Orators* (1777) also presented elocutionists as buffoons and scam artists.³⁴ Alternately, as in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, orators also often produce unease about their potential to propel the wrong passions and disrupt ordered scenes. In Thomas Gordon and John Trenchard’s *Cato’s Letters* (1722), the orator “rouses all that is human in you, and makes your own heart conspire against you! In this magical and outrageous tempest, you are at the entire mercy of him who raised it.”³⁵ The too-malleable human passions are at the “entire mercy” of an orator who uses calculated language to make something appear what it is not. In earlier essays, “Cato” also celebrates the potential of orators throughout history, but here he views them as provoking a destructive linguistic “tempest.” These competing representations – that is, as either trivial or terrible – together reveal the attitudes toward language and persuasion that underwrite the surge toward progress and politeness that were defining an increasingly modernized society.

Having fallen from prominence after the Restoration and the scientific revolution, rhetoric would reemerge in the 1750s with a new credibility following the publication of several major rhetorical treatises and important lecture series. In the work of Scottish Enlightenment figures such as Adam Smith, Hugh Blair, and George Campbell, rhetoric began to matter again. However, their focus had largely shifted from oral to written discourse and from production to reception. This emergence of what is

³³ Henry Fielding, *The Author’s Farce*. ed. Charles B. Woods (Lincoln: Nebraska UP, 1966).

³⁴ Charles Macklin, “A Man of the World,” in *Four Comedies by Charles Macklin*, ed. J. O. Bartley (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1968), 199-268; Samuel Foote, *The Orators. A Comedy. As It Is Acted at the Theatres-Royal in Drury-Lane and Convent-Garden*. (London, 1777). Macklin’s “Man of the World” is a parody of Thomas Sheridan, while Foote ridicules Macklin, who also lectured on elocution.

³⁵ John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, *Cato’s Letters*, ed. Ronald Hamowy, 2 vols. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1995), 738-39.

often called a “new” rhetoric largely replaced orthodox approaches to classical methodology that had prevailed in the university. As I will discuss in more detail in chapter four, these texts generally overlook the orator and even exhibit a suspicion toward the spoken word.

Though rhetoric proved malleable enough to be reshaped, these shifts in practice and theory signaled the polite distinctions of the changing culture. Despite this dynamic backdrop, no thorough critical study explores the correlation between rhetoric’s contested status and the literature of the period. Even if the lead-up to the new rhetoric is a period that seems unproductive for rhetorical theory, the presence of orators provoked representations that take on the role of theory Raymond Williams defines as “an interaction between things done, things observed, and (systematic) explanation of these.”

³⁶ Representations of orators are far from systematic, but they are explanations of the operations of speech and its ability to influence. By considering the relationship between the fate of rhetoric and representations of persuasive speakers, I explore the resilience of the spoken word in a period when its stability and efficacy were being challenged.

Critical Survey

Throughout this project, I use the term rhetoric to describe a discipline and a practice. For Aristotle, rhetoric is the pursuit of an art of oral persuasion;³⁷ for Quintilian, it is “the art of speaking well.”³⁸ Both influential classical theorists emphasize rhetoric as a primarily oral discipline, one that takes place in public settings. Yet I also use the term “rhetoric” as a stand-in for a disciplinary history. By attacking or endorsing rhetoric, long

³⁶ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985), 317.

³⁷ Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, trans. George A. Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991).

³⁸ Quintilian, *Quintilian’s Institutes of Oratory*, 4.

eighteenth-century thinkers consider both practice and tradition. When Sprat denounces “the colours of Rhetorick,”³⁹ he at once attacks the practice of figurative language and a discipline dedicated to teaching and applying them. Also, while “rhetoric” and “oratory” are often used problematically in the period to refer to the same thing, I use “oratory” to refer to the specifically oral practices that my study explores. Yet as a discipline, rhetoric was in large part dedicated to training orators for speaking in deliberative, judicial, and ceremonial settings, though this emphasis shifted after the mid-1750s, a moment I will discuss as profound for its implications about both the spoken and written word as well as the integral figure of the public speaker. While the figure of the orator was often used as a literary representative for rhetoric as a whole, rhetoric had become and was further becoming about more than oratory. So for my study, “rhetoric” represents both a thing that takes place – the art of persuasion – and a thing that has taken place – as an institution and a tradition. Since part of my inquiry concerns writers who, through their texts, attempt to resist and yet still embody the same tensions that underlie the integrity of oral performance, I am interested in rhetoric as a persuasive performance, whether that act is written or oral.

This project draws upon and contributes to both eighteenth-century literary studies and works that more specifically focus on eighteenth-century rhetorical theory. Studies of rhetoric in the long eighteenth century generally focus on theory, and overlook practice. As H. Lewis Ulman’s remarks on the scope of his reading of eighteenth century rhetoric theory, such readings are “case studies” of “philosophies of language and

³⁹ Sprat, *History of the Royal Society*, 60.

theories of rhetoric.”⁴⁰ As the title of his *Things, Thoughts, Words, and Actions: The Problem of Language in Late Eighteenth-Century British Rhetorical Theory* suggests, Ulman views rhetorical theory as providing solutions to problems of language. Lockean semantics set in motion a skepticism toward the possibility of language to attain an adequate level of purity or clarity, as signification will always connote multiple meanings. Particularly in philosophy, the problem of representation is bound up in the nature of interpretation. In Locke, philosophical discourse must avoid rhetorical conceits, even as it cannot avoid ambiguity altogether. For Ulman, theorists informed by Locke take into account the murkiness of language through an emphasis on perspicuity and clear communication. In chapter four, I address these imperatives and their effects on orators.

Because later rhetoricians respond to “problems” of language, there is a tendency to read their intervention as part of a grander narrative of a victory for enlightenment epistemology. Any student of long eighteenth-century rhetoric must take into account Wilbur Samuel Howell’s exhaustive and magnanimous 1971 study *Eighteenth-Century British Logic and Rhetoric*. Howell offers a thorough reading of the theory of the thinkers he deems the “new” rhetoricians, and argues the necessity of its implementation in light of emerging philosophical and scientific innovation. In a summative sentence, Howell claims the state of the discipline “was not so much in need of repair as replacement. And so they formulated a new rhetoric to replace the old.”⁴¹ For Howell, this transition was necessary and successful, a triumph of progressive thinking in making rhetoric matter again. Because of the fifteenth-century reforms of Peter Ramus and the suspicion of natural philosophers, Howell describes the “old rhetoric” as “no longer [having] anything

⁴⁰ H. Lewis Ulman, *Things, Thoughts, Words, and Actions: The Problem of Language in Late Eighteenth-Century British Rhetorical Theory* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1994), 6–7.

⁴¹ Howell, *Eighteenth-Century British Logic and Rhetoric*, 193.

of real importance to say or do.”⁴² Instead of addressing the philosophical innovations of Locke and Descartes, rhetoricians had to “content [themselves] with enumerating in pedantic detail the names, derivations, and literary applications of the tropes and the figures . . . and with issuing the commands of a drill master about the use of voice and gesture in delivering a speech.”⁴³ Howell offers a valuable survey of the changing shape of rhetoric in the long eighteenth century, yet it is colored by his valorization of the new rhetoricians and his denigration of classical theories of invention and arrangement. His motivation is clear when attacks his contemporaries in the 1960s and 1970s who were still relying on classical commonplaces as generative prompts:

[R]hetoric in a culture permeated by the standards of scientific and scholarly proof must become scientific and scholarly itself, and must argue from the facts of the case, not from suppositions that may represent mere popular misconceptions and prejudices. I am not saying that the eighteenth-century British authors of the new rhetoric won a permanent victory on this point. But they resolutely tried for victory, and it is a calamity for twentieth-century rhetoric that they did not completely prevail. The theory that valuable arguments emerge from commonplaces unfortunately continues still to have currency, even in circles presumably dedicated to high rhetorical standards.⁴⁴

Howell shares the Enlightenment ideology that scientific innovation made the classical theories of invention untenable. Like the thinkers he celebrates, he sees Enlightenment innovation as necessitating rhetoricians to read classical texts more critically and reject premises that no longer applied. Positing the “calamity” as a failure for his contemporaries to learn the lessons of the eighteenth century, Howell reveals his shared belief with the new rhetoricians that a classical approach centered on probability and practical wisdom was no longer productive in light of new scientific understanding. To

⁴² Ibid., 78.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 443.

Howell, new rhetoricians are the ones who originally posited this argument and made the appropriate changes, while the old rhetoricians are relegated to a regressive mode of thinking. To accept this narrative of progress, realized in a “permanent victory,” is to value the new over the old.

What Howell overlooks are the cultural circumstances to which both critics and practitioners of rhetoric respond. As Kenneth Burke notes, rhetoric happens in “the flurries and flare-ups of the Human Barnyard.”⁴⁵ The forces that aim to organize language are not abstract ideas, but are specific relations to the function of oral performance in a given context. After all, during this time, England welcomed a thriving print culture that emphasized the superior formality of written language as well as a paradigmatic empirical philosophy that questioned the efficacy of rhetorical performance. In Jurgen Habermas’ analysis, this is the period in which a public sphere both evolves and collapses.⁴⁶ Consequently, as Paula McDowell notes, British thinkers developed “a distinctly new degree of self-conscious reflection on oral communication and its actual and potentially threatening intersection with an unrestrained press.”⁴⁷ This fixation on orality did not merely happen in the abstract realm of philosophy. Experimental philosophers seemingly banished rhetoric from protocols of the laboratory. Religious writers denounced preachers who aimed their sermons at passionate rather than rational response. Writers who were mastering the tools of the emerging print culture challenged

⁴⁵ Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*. (Berkeley, California UP, 1969), 23.

⁴⁶ Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Trans. Thomas Burger. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991). For challenges to Habermas’ narrative see Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” *Social Text* no. 25/26 (1990): 56–80; Anthony Pollock, *Gender and the Fictions of the Public Sphere, 1690-1755* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Michael Warner, “Publics and Counterpublics,” *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 49–90.

⁴⁷ Paula McDowell, “Mediating Past and Present: Toward a Genealogy of ‘Print Culture’ and ‘Oral Tradition,’” in *This Is Enlightenment*, ed. Clifford Siskin and William Warner (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2010), 236.

the value of oral media. Even rhetorical theorists questioned the integrity of the contemporary oral culture. When Goldsmith calls his milieu an “age of orators,” he calls attention to the ubiquity of persuasive voices. This project recognizes their persistent presence and the confrontations that arise.

Building on Ulman, I consider the way the problem of language is inextricably linked to the presence of orators such as those whom Milton, Richardson, Cavendish, and Smollett address through their literary representations. Because orators are so ubiquitous and present such a threat, writers respond by developing competing theories of persuasion and language in an attempt to counter and control the effects of rhetoric. Theory results even when its creators do not set out to make it. By considering scientific, religious, and poetic discourse, and finally eighteenth-century rhetorical theory itself, I argue that representations of orators reveal that the contested attitudes toward speech and language were endemic throughout the period. In each case, theory comes into conflict with practice, as practice first resists and ultimately challenges theory. Though they offer no clear or familiar theoretical language, these representations are an interposition into the potential and actual problems of persuasive speech. Teasing theory out of representations of orators allows for a better understanding of the nature of performance, affect, individual volition, and mediation in the long eighteenth century.

Though no study particularly focuses on the eighteenth-century orator,⁴⁸ critical accounts reveal a culture wrestling with the necessity, integrity, and efficacy of rhetorical

⁴⁸ A helpful precedent to my work has been Brian Vickers, “‘The Power of Persuasion’: Images of the Orator, Elyot to Shakespeare” in *Renaissance Eloquence*, ed. James J. Murphy (Berkeley: California UP, 1983), 411-35.” Despite the optimism toward rhetoric in humanistic treatises, with their almost exclusively Ciceronian focus on the qualification that a good speaker must also be a virtuous individual, its most paradigmatic writer contradicts such good vibrations at every opportunity. In Shakespeare, Vickers notes, talented rhetors are often devious, deceptive, even psychopathic (Iago, for instance). Vickers offers an

performance. Because many rhetorical practices were viewed to be inappropriate to a polite culture, its traditional theory was often deemed dangerous in the passionate response it had traditionally aimed to provoke. As Adam Potkay argues throughout *The Fate of Eloquence in the Age of Hume*, the classical program of “eloquence” was unsuited to this “age that does not want its passion inflamed.”⁴⁹ This concern is part of what Paula McDowell calls a “self-conscious reflection on oral communication” that grows out of an “extended meditation upon the problems and possibilities of print.”⁵⁰ As McDowell notes, all the belching and droning and braying in works such as Swift’s *Tale of a Tub* (1704) and Pope’s *Dunciad* are representative of the oral improprieties that must be tamed.⁵¹ Arguing from slightly different perspectives, Potkay and McDowell posit the evolution of a polite oratory and the ethics of print culture as a response to the dynamic and forceful primacy of orality. Scholars such as Walter Ong and Marshall McLuhan have elaborated the means by which orality and literacy are powerful technologies that affect cognition, that are what Elizabeth Eisenstein calls “agents of change.”⁵² In McLuhan, such change results in a “world” characterized as “alien to the resonating diversity of spoken words.”⁵³ While Potkay locates a polite style of alleviation rather than arousal, Paul Goring makes a compelling, possibly even competing case that the sustained popularity of oratorical performances reveals “that the bodies of orators were

example where the theory proves discordant with cultural representations. Vickers’ essay ends chronologically with Shakespeare.

⁴⁹ Adam Potkay, *The Fate of Eloquence in the Age of Hume* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994), 2.

⁵⁰ McDowell, “Mediating Past and Present: Toward a Genealogy of ‘Print Culture’ and ‘Oral Tradition,’” 238.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁵² Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 2012); Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 1962). Elizabeth L Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979).

⁵³ McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*, 136.

important to the growth of politeness because they occupied supremely public positions in eighteenth-century life.”⁵⁴ Studies of Restoration and eighteenth-century drama also note the development of a “rhetoric of the passions” that Joseph Roach describes as “hav[ing] the power of utterly deflecting the psyche and physique from their natural course,”⁵⁵ a phrase that could be applied to an orator as well. Roach’s description of affect recalls the scene in *Tom Jones* (1749) when Partridge responds to David Garrick in the role of Hamlet, saying “when I saw the little man so frightened himself, it was that which took hold of me.”⁵⁶ The ability for persuasive speakers to take “hold” over the baffled and entranced audiences full of Partridges is an anxiety that I will continue to unpack. In the dramatic emphasis on disguise and performance, Lisa Freeman adds that performing the passions “diminished the significance of interiority and privileged the role of exteriority in the presentation and reception of an actor’s performance.”⁵⁷ The theatrical emphasis on show over substance is celebrated, while the same values in rhetoric are critiqued. As actors such as Macklin and Thomas Sheridan also contributed to elocutionary discourse, they attempt both an emotional rhetoric and to extrapolate a rhetoric of the emotions.

The broad range of critical opinions shows the period to be at once an age of reason and an age of passion. Rather than see such evidence as oppositional, I argue that these tendentious attitudes are entangled in the deliberations of an intellectual elite whose moderating ambitions toward various levels of popular culture fail to be realized in public

⁵⁴ Paul Goring, *The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), 23.

⁵⁵ Joseph R. Roach, *The Player’s Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 1985), 27.

⁵⁶ Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, ed. John Bender and Simon Stern (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996), 753.

⁵⁷ Lisa A. Freeman, *Character’s Theater: Genre and Identity on the Eighteenth-Century English Stage* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania UP, 2002), 35.

protocol. Potkay and Goring analyze the rise of polite culture, what it rejects and what it integrates, and the way it can be articulated as a desirable sociable ethos. Admittedly, the term “polite” has many different suggestive meanings, both for modern critics and those who used the term in the eighteenth century. Tellingly, when Samuel Johnson wrote Hester Thrale that he was feeling “quite polite,” a confused Ms. Thrale responded, “That the Dr. was quite polite to Day – we never knew what he meant exactly.”⁵⁸ Johnson most likely uses “polite” to describe a positive state, just as many writers would apply the term to describe a polished decency. Politeness has deep connections to wealth, taste, and manners. Paul Langford explains, “The essence of politeness was often said to be that *je ne sais quoi* which distinguished the innate gentleman’s understanding of what made for civilized conduct, but this did not inhibit others from seeking more artificial means of acquiring it.”⁵⁹ For those “seekers,” politeness is a style and a social posture more than a deeply ingrained virtue. Critics of politeness might use the term to indicate its artificiality and its social presentation. In Henry Mackensie’s *Man of the World* (1773), a character describes the French as “the politest enemies in the world,” just before they throw him in a “dungeon dark, damp, and lonesome.”⁶⁰ Even the vile and free of virtue may adopt the manners of politeness. The double-meaning, as something attained that is presented as innate, is embedded in discussions of sociability and appropriate practices. Depending on who uses the term, “polite” can be an insult or a compliment, a way of emphasizing the artificial or idealizing the refined. Ironically, even the progenitors of politeness were also some of its most vocal critics; we will see this particularly in the case of Alexander Pope.

⁵⁸ Thrale’s response appears in Samuel Johnson, *The Letters of Samuel Johnson. The Hyde Edition.*, ed. Bruce Redford, 3 vols. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), 3:50n1. Thrale gave this annotated presentation copy to Sir James Fellowes, titled “Letters to and from the Late Samuel Johnson, LL.D., 1788.”

⁵⁹ Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989), 71.

⁶⁰ Henry Mackensie, *The Man of the World*. (New York: Garland, 1973), II:200.

As Langford notes, politeness also refers to the “infiltration of metropolitan mores into ever corner of the land and every social class.”⁶¹ As a program, politeness can be located in the attempts of an intellectual elite to describe and disseminate itself. Potkay describes the polite style as one that “seeks to placate or stabilize rather than, as with eloquence, to make things happen.”⁶² In those aims, rhetoric becomes pivotal in the way it both contains those values and allows writers to articulate them.

The work of Potkay and Goring conveys a point that this project takes as fact: orators continued to speak even though many wished they would *just shut up*. Despite their inappropriate desire to ignite passions, orators continued to do just that, threatening the stability of discourses that their participants saw as possible: politeness evolved either, as Potkay suggests, in spite of eloquence or, as Goring argues, by way of it. The continued presence of popular rhetorical figures such as Orator Henley, Thomas Sheridan, Charles Macklin, and Methodist preachers unsettled various intellectual and artistic cultures that longed to replace the orator with a more appropriate mediator, leading to representations of orators who should be ignored for their spurious or dangerous content. These representations can be read as theories about the nature of rhetoric, and thus participate in the significant discourse of “reflection” that Paula McDowell analyzes. For instance, writers such as Swift and Pope often reflect on the emerging tools of the print culture and the way it displaces the primacy of orality. Also, because of lamentations by critics such as Goldsmith and David Hume, there were efforts to stimulate oral practices that ranged from improving pronunciation to producing

⁶¹ Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, 71.

⁶² Adam Potkay, *The Fate of Eloquence in the Age of Hume*. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994), 5.

orations.⁶³ These thinkers were concerned with the effects of changes in media not only on the production and consumption of literary texts, but also on cognition. Again, reflections on orality, even if seemingly in the abstract, were prompted by material and cultural circumstances.

Scholars of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries also find discord between rhetorical and linguistic theory and oratorical practice.⁶⁴ This conflict is played out in representations of speaking bodies of orators. When writers depict persuasive speakers, they contain them in a derisive, often caustic language. Through these representations, they evaluate the questionable necessity yet obvious persistence of the discipline, as well as the refusal of orators to submit to polite order. In some sense, my overarching question is a paradigmatic one: what happens when practice resists theory? Ideally, rhetorical theory should be the abstract vehicle for protocols that shape linguistic and cultural practices. Yet when attempts to enact procedural order fail, do the residual practices force theory to reshape itself?

While my study is chronological, I will avoid the teleological impulse that many studies of rhetoric in the period adopt. I address these tensions more specifically in my fourth chapter, but the “rise and fall” narrative is a familiar one that I challenge through the kind of cultural analysis many of these studies overlook. For example, in their anthology *The Rhetorical Tradition*, Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg write, “Within a

⁶³ David Hume, “Of Eloquence,” in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller. (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985), 97–110; Goldsmith, *Collected Works*, (1:169-71).

⁶⁴ See Robert Markley, *Fallen Languages: Crises of Representation in Newtonian England 1660-1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994); John Guillory, “Enlightening Mediation” in *This is Enlightenment*; Brian Vickers and Nancy S. Struener, *Rhetoric and the Pursuit of Truth: Language Change in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Los Angeles: Clark Memorial Library, 1985). Anthony Pollock, *Gender and the Fictions of the Public Sphere*.

hundred years of Sprat's strictures, rhetoric's estate was considerably improved.”⁶⁵ This statement recalls Howell, who links the movement of “old” to “new” with the most uncritical narratives of the Enlightenment: that through philosophical progress and a reason aided by science, a valorized group of thinkers inaugurated a progressive modernity. Mapping the fall and rise of rhetoric onto a traditional enlightenment narrative, Howell presents Hugh Blair and George Campbell as solving a problem that Sprat and Locke created by tempering the old-fashioned classical improprieties of Cicero and Quintilian. This is, I find, a reductive reading of rhetorical theory rather than a consideration of the means by which practice and theory intersect. Rather, following the project that Clifford Siskin and William Warner lay out in *This is Enlightenment*, I see the emergence and disappearance of rhetorical theories as events in the history of mediation. Warner and Siskin define mediation as “everything that intervenes, enables, supplements, or is simply in between.”⁶⁶ In other words, “media of some kind are always at work.”⁶⁷ Theories of communication and persuasion do not merely work to assist mediation but, in Warner and Siskin's construction, they *are* media.

“Neutering” Rhetoric

To examine the role that theory plays in relationship to language in general and oratory specifically, I use the term “neuter,” which obviously alludes to its most familiar lexical connotation associated with emasculation and castration. More specifically, the second definition in the *Oxford English Dictionary* encompasses my use of the term: “to

⁶⁵ Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, eds. *The Rhetorical Tradition* (Boston: Bedford St. Martins, 2001), 812.

⁶⁶ Clifford Siskin and William Warner, “This Is Enlightenment: An Invitation in the Form of an Argument,” in *This Is Enlightenment*, 5.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

render harmless or ineffectual, to neutralize.”⁶⁸ As my title indicates, and on the most basic level, I look to attempts to render orators harmless or ineffectual. These are the acts of containment and neutralization that I describe above, and will focus on throughout this project. However, I more specifically locate the neuter within ideas about language itself, the way it operates and how it *should* operate, which is a framework that draws upon a number of critical, rhetorical, philosophical, and literary legacies.

In his essay “The *Phaedrus* and the Nature of Rhetoric,” Richard Weaver uses “neuter” as an adjective to describe a linguistic program that can be extrapolated from Plato’s dialogue.⁶⁹ In the opening section of *Phaedrus*, Socrates describes three kinds of lovers: the idealistic love of the “noble lover,” the dehumanizing love of the “base lover,” and the disinterested love of the “non” or “neuter” lover. Since the dialogue is by nature rhetorical, and takes into account issues of organization and ethics, Weaver casts the lovers in terms of different kinds of speech. In comparison with these categories of “lovers,” Weaver describes a corresponding rhetorical imperative: “it can move us toward what is good; it can move us toward what is evil; or it can . . . fail to move us at all” (6). The last class describes what Socrates calls the “non-lover” – what Weaver associates with a “neuter” language. In Plato’s dialogue, the young and eager Phaedrus begins the dialogue by excitedly telling Socrates of the speech he has heard by Lysias, an encomium to this indifferent non-lover.⁷⁰ Lysias’ speech praises the failure to move as a virtue, a conscious philosophy for the non-lover who instead follows a policy of enlightened self-

⁶⁸ “neuter, v.” *OED Online*. December 2012. Oxford UP. <http://www.oed.com/> (accessed February 23, 2013).

⁶⁹ Richard Weaver, “The *Phaedrus* and the Nature of Rhetoric,” in *The Ethics of Rhetoric* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1953), 7. All subsequent references are to this text and will be noted parenthetically by page number.

⁷⁰ Plato, *Phaedrus*. In *The Rhetorical Tradition*, 138-168.

interest realized in an intellectual, psychological, and emotional objectivity. The non-lover avoids having his passion moved by the apparent sublimity of love, which Lysias claims is a deterrent for reaching a form of prudential reason. Socrates finds this love incompatible with transcendent notions of divine love and its representation through speech. Rather, Socrates symbolically delineates an ideal speech that persuades the soul to transcendent truth and virtue in an act of divine “remembering,” resulting in the momentary union of soul and body

As Weaver notes, Socrates’ gentle reproach of young Phaedrus’ enthusiasm for the “non-lover” offers a rhetorical model. Weaver connects the “non-lover” with a “neuter language” of prudent, scientific detachment which “is preferred by all men who wish to do well in the world and avoid tempestuous courses” (9). The suggestion of a neutered language implies the idealized quality of being “semantically purified,” or “a speech approaching pure notation in the respect that it communicates abstract intelligence without impulsion” (7). In the neuter, the non-lover fantasizes a perfect communicative transaction that Weaver calls an “unqualified medium of transmission of meanings from mind to mind, and by virtue of its minds can remain in an unprejudiced relationship to the world and also to other minds” (7). The ideal neuter communication is not an affective one, but a flawless transmission. The arhetorical impulse of the non-lover abounds throughout the eighteenth century, whether in the language projects of experimental philosophers or in the polemics of Anglican ideologues who instituted a less stylized preaching protocol. It is implicit in Thomas Sprat’s desire for a “close, naked, natural way of speaking,” or Jonathan Swift’s desire to refine “the *English Tongue*” through

“Ways found out to fix it for ever.”⁷¹ Again, language is a problem that must be solved, and orators who use language inappropriately create problems that require them to be neutered.

Expounding the virtuous duties of rhetoric, Weaver persuasively argues that Plato rejects the neuter and moves dialectically toward the noble speech that makes some effort to reconcile transcendental experience with its correlating incommunicability: “Rhetoric appears . . . as a means by which the impulse of the soul to be ever moving is redeemed” (25). Socrates rejects the suggestion that the “non-lover” is the only viable alternative to a “base rhetoric” that seeks compulsion over knowledge. For Weaver, the “neuter” becomes an appropriate term: by removing or “neutering” impulse from communication, one reaches the cultivated level of disinterest that the “non-lover” achieves. Since this is, in Platonic terms, psychologically impossible, Socrates spends the bulk of the dialogue outlining a redirection, rather than an elimination, of the impulse toward a Platonic divine madness that culminates in the discovery of truth and higher order.

As conceptualized by Weaver, the “neuter” offers an advantageous rational paradigm in its link to ideals of objectivity and linguistic purity. Within the discourse of rhetorical theory, the value of the “neuter” appears as a way of curbing the excesses of language through disciplinary refinement – as in Ulman, of solving linguistic problems. The typical account of the history of rhetoric accommodates this narrative of sophistication. If the origins of rhetoric are found in the undisciplined and self-promotional practices of the Sophists roaming the streets of fifth-century Athens, then rhetoricians pose an explicit threat to the culture that spawns them when they are not contained by institutions. Isocrates condemned the Sophists and their training as “stuff

⁷¹ Jonathan Swift, *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jonathan Swift*, 11: 9.

and nonsense, and not the true discipline of the soul”⁷² One who successfully employs a rhetoric that does not submit to the ethical rules of philosophy will, in the diagnosis of Gorgias in *Encomium of Helen*, “bewitch the soul with a kind of evil persuasion”⁷³

Historically, such abuse and impropriety anticipated the systematic project of refinement that Aristotle undertakes in *On Rhetoric*. As Paul Ricoeur argues, Aristotle “domesticates” the tropaic and potentially dangerous “undisciplined speech.”⁷⁴ He forces rhetoric to submit to a logical and ethical system of use, institutionalizing it through systematic definitions put to use in a vibrant educational program.⁷⁵ Ultimately, Aristotle sets the stage for a continuing discussion of ethics, praxis, and efficacy. By linking rhetoric so deeply with civic virtue and practical wisdom, as Ricoeur writes, Aristotle establishes an “embracing rhetoric.”⁷⁶ As anyone who has ever taught a first-year composition course knows, the systematization that Aristotle attempts is easily transferable to the classroom. Perhaps because of that systematic agenda, other critics have argued that Aristotle’s methodology is reductive. For instance, Carol Poster has argued that Aristotle crafted a “*Rhetoric* against rhetoric.” Even under the discipline of philosophy, Aristotle views rhetoric as an “unfortunate necessity” because, in an ideal society, “a proper political science would lay down such laws that rhetoric would become

⁷² Isocrates, “Against the Sophists,” in *The Rhetorical Tradition*, 73.

⁷³ Gorgias, “Encomium to Helen,” in *The Rhetorical Tradition*, 44–47.

⁷⁴ Paul Ricoeur, “Between Rhetoric and Poetics,” in *Essays on Aristotle’s Rhetoric*. Ed. Amelie Rorty (Berkeley: California UP, 1996), 325.

⁷⁵ Of Aristotle’s project, Ricoeur writes, “One possibility remained open: to delimit the legitimate uses of forceful speech, to draw the line between use and abuse, and to establish philosophically the connection between the sphere of validity of rhetoric and that of philosophy. Aristotle’s rhetoric constitutes the most brilliant of these attempts to institutionalize rhetoric from the point of view of philosophy” (“Between Rhetoric and Poetics” 326).

⁷⁶ Ricoeur, “Between Rhetoric and Poetics.” 325.

unnecessary.”⁷⁷ Though Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* is not overly prescriptive, later writers would narrow Aristotle’s focus to rules that make it easier to articulate and consume.

Rhetorical theory can facilitate the power of language, as in Aristotle, yet it can also be used to control language through limiting protocols or stringent ethical guidelines. By institutionalizing rhetoric, Aristotle paves the way to make the study and practice of rhetoric more reputable and appropriate. In his definition of rhetoric as the counterpart of dialectic, he moves rhetoric out of argumentation alone and expands its province to assisting inquiry through argumentative strategies. This has led Walter Ong to claim that the “deeply agonistic roots” of rhetoric were compromised over the “inevitable migrat[ion] from the oral to the chirographic world.”⁷⁸ For Ong, the shift from an oral to a written discipline is one of the many effects of the way that “writing restructures consciousness.”⁷⁹ If the oral moment offers the potential for the stimulation of inactive passions toward violent propulsion, the written word possesses what Jacques Derrida calls “the cadaverous rigidity of writing.”⁸⁰ Derrida’s phrasing recalls the docile counterpotential that the Restoration climate hoped to produce. The orator plays the foil to such endeavors with what Hobbes calls “great power to hurt ... little to save.”⁸¹ The spoken word, precisely because of its slipperiness, offers the prospect of misinterpretation or, worse, misuse. In its susceptibility to dialogic interaction, it lacks the “rigidity” that the written word can be supposed to have. Over the course of this project, I look to the ways that eighteenth-century theories of persuasive speech prompted these neutering

⁷⁷ Carol Poster, “Aristotle’s Rhetoric Against Rhetoric: Unitarian Reading and Esoteric Hermeneutics,” *The American Journal of Philology* 118, no. 2 (1997): 243.

⁷⁸ Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, 111, 116.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁸⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1981), 79.

⁸¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 125–26.

imperatives. The elusive nature of the oral, in particular, is what provokes so much anxiety in the settings I analyze.

The idealized neutrality that Weaver describes also shows up as a cultural imperative, as a method of surviving a potentially dangerous and debasing society through sophisticated reactions and a policy of non-participation. In 1711, Joseph Addison takes on the persona of Mr. Spectator to make the following assertion:

There are some Opinions in which a Man should stand Neuter, without engaging his Assent to one side or the other. Such a hovering Faith as this, which refuses to settle upon any Determination, is absolutely necessary to a Mind that is careful to avoid Errors and Prepossessions. When the Arguments press equally on both sides in Matters that are indifferent to us, the safest Method is to give up our selves to neither.⁸²

Mr. Spectator's advice is consistent with the persona he develops throughout his essays. He encourages "hover[ing]" over the scene of argument, rather than directly participating, just as he announces in a more famous passage that he will serve as "a Spectator of Mankind, [rather] than as one of the Species."⁸³ As Anthony Pollock argues, Addison and Richard Steele offer the superficial standard of "an urbane ethics of sociability" that encourages a "spectatorial mode of publicness."⁸⁴ Mr. Spectator both participates in and encourages what Pollock calls the "aesthetic redemption" of "social violence." Pollock writes that Mr. Spectator and Isaac Bickerstaff "embody the spectatorial ideal" because it essentially turns them into uncontaminated onlookers of an "irremediably antagonistic society."⁸⁵ The model response to the unalterable violence of society is not to look away, but to watch passively and react appropriately. This

⁸² Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 1:479.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 1:4–5.

⁸⁴ Pollock, *Gender and the Fictions of the Public Sphere, 1690-1755*, 55.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

detachment engenders authority. After explaining his intention to “stand neuter,” Mr. Spectator turns to the subject of witchcraft and concludes, “my Mind is divided between the two opposite Opinions; or rather (to speak my Thoughts freely) I believe in general that there is, and has been such a thing as Witch-craft; but at the same time can give no Credit to any particular Instance of it.”⁸⁶ Because he can rely on neither empirical evidence (he has never seen a witch) nor superstitious word of mouth (which he distrusts), Mr. Spectator is perfectly content to rely on the “safest method” and “give [himself] up to neither.” As an audience member to an argument, which can be described as a scene of violence, he both enjoys and advocates the sedate posture of impartiality. In this configuration, Addison presents a paradigm that serves for the rhetorical moment. In “standing neuter,” an audience member can effectively “neuter” the coercive intentions of the rhetor and what Weaver calls the “tempestuous” tendencies inherent in argumentation.

These two possibilities of the “neuter” suggest ways to cauterize the potentially deleterious effects of rhetoric. As Weaver notes, a philosophy of language and affect (like that presented by Lysias in *Phaedrus*) can neuter the orator by advocating a confining theory of rhetoric. This purity amounts to a system of rhetoric training that discourages overly stylistic prompts, for they might corrupt the (as Weaver notes, non-existent) sober fidelity between language and its user. Weaver challenges such an ideal and argues that qualifications and prejudices are written into language by its speaker even in the most objective attempt. Pollock’s reading of *The Spectator* offers another neutering proposition from the trained and polite audience who are able to aestheticize the

⁸⁶ Addison and Steele, *The Spectator*, 1:480.

persuasive moment. If these circumstances are enforced, the orator has a significantly reduced power.

The “neuter” grows out of a desire to make language submit to rules, or to do things that it is unwilling to do. However, the inherent flaws or problems implicit within language might also be celebrated through a less stringent approach. That recognition is at the heart of Mikhail Bakhtin’s analysis of the word as a site of conflict, in which an authoritative voice competes with an “internal persuasive discourse” that is “half-ours and half-someone else’s.”⁸⁷ As Bakhtin notes, the inherently centrifugal forces of language resist attempts at stratification. The spoken and written word is “dialogical” insofar as “it is entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents.”⁸⁸ Further, the “intentions permeating these languages become *things*, limited in their meaning and expression . . . making it difficult for the word to be utilized in a directly intentional way, without any qualifications.”⁸⁹ Bakhtin celebrates rather than corrects the open-ended and ambiguous nature of dialogism. As Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson note, “The dialogic truth manifests unfinalizability by existing on the ‘threshold’ of several interacting consciousnesses, a ‘plurality’ of ‘unmerged voices.’”⁹⁰ By contrast, Bakhtin discusses social forces that aim for a unitary or “monologic” language that can achieve authority through stable meanings that rise above argument. Bakhtin rejects this authoritative language because it is impossibly

⁸⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel.” In *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. (Austin: Texas UP, 1981), 345.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 276. In his discussion of the novel, Bakhtin discusses the related concept of heteroglossia, which can be seen as a dialogical category. Heteroglossia is “another’s speech in another’s language;” it “constitutes a special type of double-voiced discourse” (“Discourse in the Novel” 324). Bakhtin finds this linguistic energy most evident in cacophony of voices found in the novel, which celebrates a diversity of language and opinions.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 289

⁹⁰ Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, “Polyphony: Authoring a Hero,” in *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*, ed. Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990).

abstract and does not reflect the way meaning is formed through social exchange.⁹¹ Yet he notes that attempts to impose such linguistic unification are driven by “sociopolitical and cultural centralization.”⁹²

The effort to secure the relationship between political stability and linguistic purity can be seen as engaging in this effort toward centralization. As Bakhtin explains, “Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker’s intentions; it is populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others.”⁹³ Those who seek to neuter language often reject the possibility that persuasive speech can be the vehicle for positive change, replacing it with the impossible ideal of empirical accuracy and unprejudiced information. Following the Restoration, that anxiety specifically resulted from the threat rhetoric posed to the perceived empirical, spiritual, and political stability that many wished to give their new age. Even as writers demote the trivial art of the orator as outdated, they fear a speech that arouses passions best left dormant. The anxiety that provokes and desires the neutering proposition results in diverse representations – whether terrifying, trivial, or somewhere in-between – that nonetheless embody the same concern. These terrifying and ridiculous orators are among the most memorable in the period: Milton’s Satan, Richardson’s Lovelace, Sheridan’s Miss Malaprop, and even Fielding’s pontificating Partridge.

Disruptive orators are at once a remnant of an outdated culture and a potential threat to an apparently stable discourse. Often these threats are represented through depictions of rhetorical practices and practitioners corrupting the sober, corrective projects in which its participants engage. Therefore, orators must be neutered, sanctioned

⁹¹ Markley, *Fallen Languages*, 14.

⁹² Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” 271

⁹³ *Ibid*, 294.

by the initiation of centripetal protocols that attempt to reduce agonistic intention into a calming voice: a neutral language that aims to contain rather than diffuse. Building off the methodology Weaver and Bakhtin provide, I examine literary examples of speakers who must be “neutered” from dominant discourses that faced internal dissension. The troubling figure of the orator is an unwelcome resistance to a discourse that might otherwise contain him. As the masculine pronoun in that last sentence indicates, the primary actors in my study are mostly, though not exclusively, male. Although I also address the persuasive performances of female speakers and ensuing responses, both real and fictional, my focus on the decline of oratory reverberates with an emerging masculine ethos defined by its sober rationality, one that would be on display in forums such as *The Spectator* and the sentimental novel. Representations of orators are also representations of masculinity. Ineffective oratory can be linked to an ineffective, effeminized manhood as seen in vociferous dandies such as Cavendish’s Mimick or Thomas Shadwell’s Sir Formal, a key player in my first chapter. While the sentimental novel is beyond the scope of this project, Tobias Smollett’s narrative of reform for Humphry Clinker involves not his moral development, which is conceived as nearly preternatural, but his rhetorical character and the way he aims to affect audiences. Also, one of the most fevered anxieties that I explore, particularly in my respective chapters on the Methodists and Alexander Pope, are the effects of charismatic male orators on susceptible female audiences. Smollett is quick to note that the audience members of Humphry Clinker’s sermon are mostly female, and Humphry ends up marrying one of them. But the acts of neutering in my narrative are specifically connected to the perception of a masculine rhetoric and its

origin and legacy in patriarchal cultures such as Sophistic Athens, Ciceronian Rome, and Humanist England.

Chapter Outline

My chapters isolate specific discursive settings in which the orator presents a problem that must be settled through acts of containment and dismissal. My first chapter, “The Orator in the Laboratory,” shows the orator as a threat to the rising cultural capital of the Royal Society and their vaunted experimental philosophy in the wake of the Restoration. As experimentalists such as Thomas Sprat and Robert Boyle seek to banish “specious tropes and figures” from the laboratory, critics argue that the representative ideal of the orator is absolutely central to the production of supposedly objective findings. The incisive critical satires of Thomas Shadwell, Samuel Butler, and Margaret Cavendish invoke the orator to challenge the networks of correspondence, the modest witnesses, and the literary technologies that were pivotal to the authority of the Royal Society. This engagement is deeply connected to the post-Civil War political and linguistic anxieties that the Royal Society was deeply committed to eradicating.

These anxieties that haunted the laboratory could soon be heard coming from the church pulpit. As my second chapter, “Cannot You Trust God for a Sermon,” reveals, Restoration anxieties toward orators also deeply affected religious discourse in the following century. When John Wesley and the Methodists emerged in the 1730s, they posed a significant affront to the established clergy. The Methodists’ passionate homiletic practices confront the authority of an idealized Establishment union between the rational and the spiritual. In this chapter, I explore attacks on Methodists in plays, poems, and polemics that attempted to delegitimize the spiritual frenzy of the performances and the

auditors' intense reactions to them. Because of the success of Methodist orators, their critics were forced to respond with homiletic theories to account for new social and religious circumstances. The fate of religious oratory is deeply linked to the emergence of and response to the extemporizing Methodist preachers who confronted and changed embedded religious identities.

The devious power of rustic speakers that so troubled establishment clergy finds a beguiling representation in the poetry of Alexander Pope. In my third chapter, "He Spoke No More Than Just The Thing He Ought," I argue that Pope confronts and channels the rhetorical anxieties that I outline in my previous chapters. In his translation of *The Iliad* (1719), Pope not only tempers Homer's affective speakers but also offers extensive endnotes and commentaries about the ethics and efficacy of persuasive speech. In his mock-epic, *The Rape of the Lock*, Pope presents rhetoric's inefficacy to produce social change and moral instruction. Through these acts of translation and adaptation, Pope reformulates classical orators to temper their agonistic and violent impulses. This is part of a general project that he describes in his introduction to *The Iliad* as aiming to "cultivate and beautify . . . a wild paradise"⁹⁴ His later poems – *An Essay on Man* (1734), the *Moral Essays* (1731-35), and *The Dunciad* – show the effects of deceptive orators and artists, whose sole purpose is to misrepresent epistemological order for selfish purposes. Pope's fears about judgment are linked to his concern about the unmanageable reception of his own poetry. These representations constitute a vexed but thorough theory of rhetorical practice that illuminates the most compelling tensions of his poetry.

⁹⁴ Alexander Pope, "Preface to the *Iliad*," ed. Maynard Mack, vol. 7. *The Twickenham Edition of the Works of Alexander Pope* (Routledge, 1993), 1.

Rhetoric experienced a renewed interest after the 1750s through the work of Scottish Enlightenment rhetoricians. However, my last chapter, “We Forget The Orator,” shows that even these thinkers questioned the integrity of the orator in reshaping rhetoric for a new audience. While rhetoricians from Cicero to Thomas Wilson present the orator as a virtuous speaker who combines wisdom and eloquence, the rhetorical texts that emerge in the mid-eighteenth century are predicated on the concern that the orators’ excesses are responsible for the declining currency of rhetorical theory. In their revision of the rhetorical tradition, so-called new rhetoricians such as Hugh Blair, Adam Smith, and Joseph Priestley develop theories of communication and persuasion that limit the effects of the troublesome orators that populate the scientific, religious, and poetic landscapes earlier in the century. Theories of persuasion had to be “neutered” in order to contain orators and to prevent their persistence through the discourse of rhetorical education. In these influential works, the orator is so troubling that he must be qualified, corrected, and in some cases written out of rhetorical theory.

The story I tell is ultimately one about the emergence and disappearance of technologies of mediation, about social and religious change, and the stories an intellectual culture told itself in order to justify the phases of its so-called “enlightenment.” My protagonist is the orator, a figure who persists in speaking despite attempts to silence him. Whenever orators speak, they represent cultural responses to rhetoric: its tradition, practice, theory, and future, and its place in a polite society.

Chapter 1: The Orator in the Laboratory: The Rhetoric Of And Against The Royal Society

B.: But how came the people to be so corrupted? And what kind of people were they that did so seduce them?

A.: The seducers were of divers sorts . . .

- Thomas Hobbes, *Behemoth* (1679)⁹⁵

Implying Senses Aright

Robert Hooke's remarkable *Micrographia* (1665) might be the defining accomplishment of early Royal Society propaganda. Samuel Pepys called it, "the most ingenious book I've ever read," claiming he stayed up until two in the morning reading it.⁹⁶ With its captivating engravings, it offered a fascinated public access to the new technology of the microscope, an apparatus through which "the *roughness* and *smoothness* of the Body is made smooth."⁹⁷ Hooke's fantastical drawings of insects defamiliarized the mundane, making them mythical, and promoted the new science that made such achievements possible. Though readers most likely looked to *Micrographia* for spectacle more than science, Hooke is explicit about his goals. The microscope was not merely going to produce marvelous representations, but it was also going to be restorative in the grandest possible sense. In his preface, he writes that "*artificial Instruments*" can provide "in some manner, a reparation made for the mischiefs, and imperfection, mankind has brought upon itself."⁹⁸ As Steven Shapin and Simon Shaffer have explained, the power of instruments "resided in their capacity to enhance perception

⁹⁵ Thomas Hobbes, *Behemoth, or, An Epitome of the Civil Wars of England, from 1640 to 1660* (London, 1679), 2.

⁹⁶ Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. Robert Latham and William Matthews, 11 vols. (Berkeley: California Up, 1974), 6:18.

⁹⁷ Robert Hooke, *Micrographia: Or Some Physiological Descriptions of Minute Bodies Made by Magnifying Glasses: With Observations and Inquiries Thereupon*. By R. Hooke, Fellow of the Royal Society (London, 1665).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

and to constitute new perceptual objects” and to “impos[e] both a correction and discipline on the sense.”⁹⁹ Hooke will clarify this reparation as applying equally to the physical and the moral.

In particular, new technologies were going to allow experimental philosophers to move beyond argument and into certainty, taking experimental philosophy out of the realm of the “Brain and the Fancy” and into the serious spaces of “the plainness and soundness of Observations.” As Hooke explains in the preface,

And I beg my Reader, to let me take the boldness to assure him, that in this present condition of knowledge, a man so qualified, as I have indeavoured to be, only with resolution, and integrity, and plain intentions of imploying his *Senses* aright, may venture to compare the reality and the usefulness of his services, towards the true Philosophy, with those of other men, that are of much stronger, and more acute *speculations*, that shall not make use of the same method by the Senses.¹⁰⁰

Those who do not embrace the “true Philosophy” risk producing knowledge(s) gained outside of a method that “implys . . . Senses aright.” Rather than coming to conclusions dialectically, Hooke implies an objectivity, found through experimentation, that exists outside of debate. Thomas Sprat would add, “the *Microscope* alone is enough to silence all opposers.”¹⁰¹ *Micrographia* is not the beginning of a discussion, but the presentation of one of the many new technologies by which indisputable facts can be gathered. Further, Hooke privileges his plain intentions over rhetorical “speculations”: one of the central features of the “true” philosophy.

Though his prose is not particularly dogmatic, Hooke participates in the exclusion of rhetoric that was part of a broad seventeenth-century move to instrumentalize language

⁹⁹ Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life: Including a Translation of Thomas Hobbes, Dialogus Physicus De Natura Aeris* by Simon Schaffer (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985), 36–37.

¹⁰⁰ Hooke, *Micrographia*, 5.

¹⁰¹ Sprat, *The History of the Royal Society*, 384.

and reduce it of its affective (and misleading) capabilities. Robert Markley astutely recognizes this move as the Restoration urgency “to control the dialogical and subversive tendencies of language.”¹⁰² Regarding attempts at language reform, Markley notes,

After a divisive civil war characterized by a breakdown of censorship and a cacophony of voices struggling to articulate the rights of various factions, the ideological appeal of universal language schemes lies in the images of unity and structure they deploy . . . The totalizing rhetoric of language reformers and projectors in seventeenth-century England betrays the nervousness of an intellectual elite committed to achieving political, theological, and socioeconomic ends by stabilizing and regularizing forms of communication.¹⁰³

Illuminating the political stakes for language reformers, Markley shows the causal relationship between civic disorder and the allied heads of persuasive speech, linguistic ambiguity, and uncensored public discourse. To perpetuate such practices was to avoid learning the lesson history had taught a society proclaiming its restoration and the successful eradication of such divisive forces. In *Behemoth*, when Hobbes describes the “seducers . . . of divers sorts,” he reminds the now-stable culture of the tempestuous past and the orators who stimulated it. This caustic message will become a consistent theme in discussions about the fate of language in both the new science and the new political order of the Restoration.

These attempts are consistent with what Weaver calls the desire for “unvarying accuracy and regularity in . . . symbolic references” that characterizes moves toward putative neutral speech practices.¹⁰⁴ Weaver’s analysis applies to twentieth-century efforts at linguistic reform, but by the mid-seventeenth century, theories of philosophical and scientific language exhibit a similar suspicion toward heightened styles that indicate

¹⁰² Markley, *Fallen Languages*, 72.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric*, 8.

rhetorical intention. As Weaver notes, a “style” makes one a “marked man.”¹⁰⁵ Before and after the Restoration, the kind of “marking” Weaver describes was reserved for the rhetorical tradition that became associated with empty argumentative principles as in, for example, Thomas Sprat’s negative recasting of rhetoric’s cultural production to a destructive “volubility of *Tongue*, which makes so great a noise in the World.”¹⁰⁶ In *The History of the Royal Society*, Sprat’s paradigmatic exclusion of “specious tropes and figures”¹⁰⁷ from experimental practice is provocative, aimed not only at the seemingly benign ornaments, but also at what he sees as a bloated and dangerous tradition that instilled them as part of a robust stylistic program. In arguing that the Royal Society had successfully eradicated such excesses, Sprat marks his own discourse by both what it performs, a sanctioned style that can more succinctly relay neutral information, and what it lacks, “specious tropes and figures.” In this sense, Sprat’s imperative fits with Weaver’s category of “an unqualified medium of transmission of meanings from mind to mind, and by virtue of it minds can remain in an unprejudiced relationship to the world and also to other minds.”¹⁰⁸ By reminding us of the “other minds,” Weaver argues that linguistic operations are often shaped through collective, even institutional means. Prejudice may exist in “the noise of the world,”¹⁰⁹ as Sprat writes, but it is excluded from the proceedings – actual and virtual – of the Royal Society. For Sprat, rhetoric only corrupts, emphasizing presentation and “noise” over the substances that must be explored, experimented upon, and ultimately verified. Ideally, rhetoric should channel the amorphous varieties of intellectual activity through vibrant rhetorical forms; yet by

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 9

¹⁰⁶ Sprat, *The History of the Royal Society*., 112.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 112.

¹⁰⁸ Weaver, 7.

¹⁰⁹ Sprat, *The History of the Royal Society*, 112.

reducing the discipline to a dissonant “noise,” Sprat highlights the disruptive aspects of persuasive speech, and not in the terms of an enabling civic discourse, but of practiced deception inappropriate for experimental spaces.

Considering Markley’s analysis of the historical conditions, as well as Weaver’s discussion of the dynamics of a “neuter” rhetoric, in this chapter I turn to the culture of experimental philosophers and their critics as an especially vibrant arena for examining tensions about language in general and rhetoric in particular. At the heart of scientific practice are issues of linguistic instability that cannot be resolved despite assertions that, as in Sprat’s provocative eulogy, they have been isolated and removed. Experimental texts and treatises channel, in varying degrees, an anxiety toward rhetoric and its obscuring and agonistic effects into the often defensive pursuit of a “neuter” language free of affective potential. As a result, experimental philosophers tend to view the orator as the principal agitator of unsavory public passions and a corruptor of empirical truths through an improper style. Yet while experimental philosophers seemingly try to push rhetoric out of the laboratory, their critics push it back in. Both sides view rhetoric as a bombastic discipline pursued by specious, often ridiculous practitioners. Therefore, when these critics depict the orator as a participant in experimental conclusions, they strike at the heart of an indispensable institutional integrity. While experimental philosophers view rhetoric as the root of cultural disruption, its loosely allied critics target it as an overlooked flaw in the production of knowledge.

This chapter considers first the cultural and intellectual agendas that caused experimental philosophers such as Sprat, Robert Boyle, Joseph Glanvill, and Robert Hooke to frame rhetorical theory as an unworthy field in the matrix of progress and

stability. Then I move to the critics who use literary forms to critique the pronounced exclusion of rhetoric as a pivotal hypocrisy that can be utilized to expose the lack of objectivity and neutrality in experimental practice. The orator becomes symbolic for both flawed written and spoken practices, despite attempts to perfect them. Rhetoric, both its abuse and its undeniable presence, plays a central role in three literary critiques of experimental philosophy produced between 1661 and 1676: Samuel Butler's *The Elephant in the Moon* (1667), Thomas Shadwell's *The Virtuoso* (1676), and Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing-World* (1666). These literary examples are pivotal because they operate in the same responsive domain as the various publications that experimental philosophers produce, a public titillated by both the prospect and the spectacle of scientific activity. In a joint dedication to exposing hypocrisies and specious practices through the visualization of scientific practice, as well as evaluating a cultural phenomenon that proved an appropriate topic for fiction and satire, these literary responses offer a skeptical view of the glowing pronouncements that the Royal Society tended to lavish upon itself. In Butler, the essential experimental regulations toward spoken assent are corrupted by self-interested virtuosos desiring celebrity above knowledge, who pursue credibility through fantastical discoveries. While Butler's criticism addresses the corruption of experimental activity through speaking, Shadwell even more vividly captures the means by which the apparently objective vehicles of assent really act as a bloated rhetoric. Through the figure of the orator Sir Formal Trifle in *The Virtuoso*, Shadwell specifically satirizes a system of scientific mediation and publicizing by caricaturing it in the form of a florid rhetorician. Formal conceals purposeless trifling beneath elaborate tropes that rearticulate and ultimately corrupt

experimental reports into something more spectacular for public consumption. Finally, I turn to Margaret Cavendish's utopian vision in *The Blazing World*. The sovereign structure which Cavendish constructs and implicitly endorses avows that techniques of persuasive speech should not be removed, but must be regulated, corrected, and ultimately rehabilitated for inclusion in experimental settings.

In these examples, the orator becomes representative of a linguistic problem that must be resolved yet cannot be, though the idealistic setting of Cavendish's "Blazing World" offers the possibility of practical governance. If a discipline and tradition of rhetoric is specifically banished from scientific practice, Butler, Shadwell, and Cavendish find its remnants in bloated practices that are a "house rhetoric," a language dedicated to convincing its audience of a guiding integrity. Exposing that language both at the heart of experimental practice and its publications, then, challenges the integrity of experimental philosophers where they are most vulnerable.

"error" and Its Consequences: Rhetoric and Experimental Philosophy

One thing is clear from a survey of the inaugural texts of experimental philosophy: orators were not allowed in the laboratory. Orators disrupted the quiet and productive space that the laboratory and its philosophers sought to preserve. In Francis Bacon's *The New Atlantis* (1627), a text that came to be read as the spiritual foundation for the Royal Society, the "House of Salomon" allows the study of rhetoric only to nullify its effects. Natural discoveries presented as "adorned or swelling" will be subject to "pain of ignominy and fines."¹¹⁰ Rather, the presentation should be "only pure as it is, and without all affectation of strangeness."¹¹¹ In the "Houses of the Deceits of the Senses,"

¹¹⁰ Francis Bacon, *The Major Works*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2008), 486.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

rhetoric is only to be studied so that natural philosophers can recognize counterfeit “adorned” ideas and nullify their effects on the senses.¹¹² In *The New Atlantis*, Bacon keenly visualizes the more dense material his *Novum Organum* (1620) addresses in terms of “error” as he finds it invading analytical thinking. Perhaps most overtly in *Novum Organum*, his four “idols” target areas against which those who pursue natural philosophy must fortify themselves. While the most troublesome are the idols of the market-place, the indeterminate linguistic gesture that announces itself as objective truth, the idols of the cave also pose a threat in the substantiation of what becomes acceptable knowledge.¹¹³ For Bacon, the “cave” is an enclave where received ideas take on currency merely because of an association with an institution that authorizes itself; an endless repetition of errors goes uncorrected because of the exclusivity and self-endorsement that the “cave” represents. Opposing Plato’s cave, in which the myopic dwellers cannot distinguish shadows from a reality they have never seen, Bacon casts his own cave dweller as a victim of self-delusion rather than an unknowable reality. Though Bacon’s cave also “refracts and discolours the light of nature,” it is based on errors of personal knowledge and experience (“owing either to his proper and peculiar nature”) or “to his education and conversation with others.”¹¹⁴ For Bacon, the errors of cave are most evident when one believes his or her own personal authority as the most valid lens through which to view the external world.

Particularly in the tendentious wake of the civil wars, moral and political philosophy also challenged the orator. In moral and political philosophy texts, “error” was not only an empirical category, but also a broad term through which to isolate causes

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Francis Bacon, *The New Organon*. Trans. Fulton H. Anderson (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960), 49.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 48.

of theological and political disorder. Thomas Hobbes diagnoses and categorizes forms of error as a principal cause of civic unrest. For Hobbes, error has its basis in a misplaced causation that reduces the world to aphorismic wisdom. Throughout *Leviathan* (1651), Hobbes addresses error as it affects language, geometry, theology, politics, and the interpretation of natural phenomena. In a particularly relevant passage, he attributes “false miracles” to “the ignorance, and aptitude to error generally of all men, but especially of them that have not much knowledge of naturall causes, and of the nature, and interests of men; as by innumerable and easie tricks to be abused.”¹¹⁵ Hobbes’ solution was a series of political instruments that could stabilize an individual abject condition that only becomes amplified when combined in society – both the authoritative state and the ruler which could control and limit the effects of dangerous factions, and the citizen who ceded that authority. For Hobbes, error also has a rhetorical quality in the way invalid assumptions are taken to be either true or logically coherent through a culture of assent that allows them to disseminate.

The social nature of truth claims must be remedied or, at least, confined into a setting in which their disruptive effects cannot be realized. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes articulates the dangers posed by the presence of self-interested orators, lest:

any Subject, by the power of one man, for the enriching of a favourite or flatterer, may be deprived of all he possesseth; which I confesse is a great and inevitable inconvenience. But the same may as well happen, where the Sovereigne Power is in an Assembly: for their power is the same; and they are as subject to evill Counsell, and to be seduced by Orators, as a Monarch by Flatterers; and becoming one an others Flatterers, serve one anothers Covetousnesse and Ambition by turnes. And whereas the Favorites of an Assembly, are many; and the Kindred much more numerous, than of any Monarch. Besides, there is no Favourite of a Monarch, which cannot as well succour his friends, as hurt his enemies: But Orators, that is to say, Favourites of Sovereigne Assemblies, though they have great power to hurt, have little to save. For to accuse, requires lesse

¹¹⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 294–95.

Eloquence (such is mans Nature) than to excuse; and condemnation, than
absolution more resembles Justice.¹¹⁶

Keeping with his overarching state of nature, Hobbes sets up an arhetorical culture founded on binaries: monarchs and assemblies; friends and enemies; hurting and saving; accusing and excusing; political subject and the orator. Without limits, the orator thrives on a state of disruption that he animates through controversial arguments that rhetoric as a received discipline apparently encourages. In statements like this, Hobbes finds the best way to end political controversy is by removing a tradition that encouraged agonistic controversy. As Bryan Garsten argues, Hobbes seeks a new function for rhetoric to “eliminate the realm of controversy in which the old rhetoric has found its place.”¹¹⁷ In Hobbes’ commonwealth, Garsten notes, “an orator looking for an audience . . . would find the subjects’ ears already fastened to the lips of the sovereign and many of their opinions dictated by the sovereign.”¹¹⁸ *Leviathan* is a particularly vivid example of the envisioned means to which language must be regulated in order to achieve political stability. Later in the text, regarding “all Rhetorical figures,” Hobbes remarks, “in reckoning, and seeking of truth, such speeches are not to be admitted.”¹¹⁹

Hobbes’ distrust of political orators and Bacon’s expulsion of rhetoric from the laboratory are part of the backdrop for the formation and evolution of the Royal Society. Hobbes was no friend to experimental philosophers, yet his anti-rhetorical sentiment links him with a constellation of experimenters, theologians, language projectors, and even his

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 125–26.

¹¹⁷ Bryan Garsten, *Saving Persuasion: A Defense of Rhetoric and Judgment* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2006), 28.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 35.

¹¹⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 31.

occasional combatant, Robert Boyle.¹²⁰ Similarly, Sprat extends the “volubility of tongue” beyond the laboratory, and sees it as the troubling root of problems in the “world” as well. As Hobbes denounced rhetoric as a practice “not to be admitted,” experimental philosophers sought an appropriate language free of its traditional techniques. This language would emphasize fidelity to the object being described, as individual intention would be sacrificed to an integrity that reached, in Sprat’s terms, “mathematicall plainness.”¹²¹

In the perhaps inflated terms of Sprat’s *History*, linguistic reform was expressed not as an obstacle to be overcome, but as a bygone conclusion. A culture of critics rose to challenge the credibility that Sprat celebrated as quickly fulfilled destiny. For these critics, it was too soon for Royal Society member Abraham Cowley to announce in his preface to Sprat’s *History*, “To! Sound too the Trumpets here! / Already your victorious Lights appear.”¹²² Cowley continues by praising the achievement of Sprat’s text that many would call premature, “None e’re but *Hercules* and you could be / At five years Age worthy a History.” Sprat sees the progressive thinking of Bacon vindicated in the royal charter and rapid growth that the Royal Society enjoyed, yet he defends the inclusion of his work as a “History” in the prefatory “Advertisement to the Reader”: “though this Book does Treat of many Subjects that are not Historical, yet I have presum’d to name the whole a *History*, because that was the main end of my Design.”¹²³

For Sprat, six years after its foundation, the society warranted a history as well as poetic

¹²⁰ On the quarrel, see Shapin and Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump* in particular, Chapter IV: “The Trouble with Experiment: Hobbes versus Boyle”; Quentin Skinner, “Thomas Hobbes and the Nature of the Early Royal Society,” *The Historical Journal* 12, no. 2 (January 1, 1969): 217–239.

¹²¹ Sprat, *The History of the Royal Society*, 113.

¹²² Cowley’s poem appears as the preface to Sprat’s *History of the Royal Society*, sig. b3r.

¹²³ Sprat, *History of the Royal Society*.

celebrations using grand allusions such as those in Cowley's *Preface*. Statements like these can be read as decrees that accomplishment and inauguration had occurred at roughly the same moment.

Henry Stubbe, a surgeon whose controversial opinions spanned from spiritual orthodoxy to political heterodoxy, is particularly vehement in severing the link between institutional celebration and technological progress.¹²⁴ In his 1670 "Censure" on the latitudinarian Sprat, Stubbe scoffs, "It was not intended of the *Virtuosi*: Except ye become like one of these, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."¹²⁵ In particular, Stubbe challenges a group who made public exclamations that linked their exclusiveness and innovation with divine prerogative. While Stubbe found such evidence in Sprat, he could have looked elsewhere. Cowley invokes the Old Testament narrative of Gideon from Judges 7 to describe the process of separating the wheat from the chaff: "Methinks, like Gideon's little band, / God with design has pick'd out you, / To do these noble wonders by a few; . . ."¹²⁶ In the Biblical episode, God tells Gideon that the forces he leads to overtake Midian are "too many" and calls them to drink water from a lake. Those who drink with their hands are to remain, while those who leave are dismissed. Cowley's scriptural precedent connects divine providence, and with it predestination, with a justification for exclusion. Those who do not accept the experimental way of life are spiritually akin to those rejected from Gideon's army.

¹²⁴ See James R. Jacob, *Henry Stubbe, Radical Protestantism and the Early Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983). Jacob notes, "Stubbe's attacks . . . are especially important because they occur at the very moment when the new philosophy and the modern idea of science and its application were being formulated and institutionalized" (1).

¹²⁵ Henry Stubbe, *A Censure Upon Certain Passages Contained in the History of the Royal Society as Being Destructive to the Established Religion and Church of England* (London, 1670), 37.

¹²⁶ *History of the Royal Society*, sig. b31.

If “specious tropes and figures” had no place in experimental discourse, why was this same abandoned language being used to praise its sanctitude? This pretense drove its critics. Samuel Butler pithily points out the contradiction in his *Miscellaneous Observations*:¹²⁷ “The historian of Gresham College endeavours to cry down oratory and declamation while he uses nothing else.”¹²⁸ Butler criticizes an anti-rhetorical text not only for using rhetorical tactics, but also for participating in the very tradition from which it claims to have seceded. Rather, in eulogizing the Royal Society, Sprat develops a new rhetoric just as self-interested as a more transparent rhetorical program. Butler’s other barbs take on not only the texts but also the language that operates behind closed doors. Criticisms like Butler’s converge around the emerging issues of plainness and protocol, which intend to remove rhetoric from the laboratory but instead reconstitute it in a new, devious form. Yet most incisively, Butler identifies experimentalists’ failure to carry out in practice what they so thoroughly articulate in theory.

Other critiques and satires emphasize that Sprat’s “mathematical plainness”¹²⁹ is a rhetorical choice that cloaks its persuasion behind the strictures of a stylistic method. As historian Geoffrey Cantor notes, scientific discourse is a “discourse of power” because “far from being rhetoric-free, modern scientific prose has become the most potent instrument of persuasion in our culture.”¹³⁰ In other words, an anti-rhetorical agenda is still a rhetorical choice. Even the most neutral attempt at language is, to adopt a term that historians of science use to discuss scientific apparatuses, “theory-laden” in

¹²⁷ With the exception of *Hudibras*, none of Butler’s works were published during his lifetime. They were later collected and edited by Robert Thyer in *The Genuine Poetical Remains of Samuel Butler* (London, 1759). I discuss the circulation of these texts in a later section.

¹²⁸ Samuel Butler, “Miscellaneous Observations,” in *Hudibras Parts I and II and Selected Other Writings*, ed. John Wilders and Hugh de Quehen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 285.

¹²⁹ Sprat, *The History of the Royal Society*, 113.

¹³⁰ Geoffrey Cantor, “The Rhetoric of Experiment,” in *The Uses of Experiment: Studies in the Natural Sciences*, ed. David Gooding, Trevor Pinch, and Simon Schaffer (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), 161.

that, as Ian Hacking notes, “we have all sorts of expectations, prejudices, opinions, working hypotheses and habits when we say anything.”¹³¹

As Butler elucidates, Sprat attacks rhetoric in order to celebrate the achievement both of the Royal Society and the text he has written to celebrate it. Rhetoric is “specious” because it creates objectionable noise that disrupts the tranquil setting of both the laboratory and the various publications that explained the internal findings. In eulogizing the past and prophesying the future of the institution, Sprat consigns the Baconian idols to the “noise of the world,” outside the sterilized setting of experiment. Perhaps in his dedication to eulogizing the society of which he was a member, Sprat’s denouncement is more pronounced, less complex, and more overbearing than the active experimenters he aimed to commemorate. Yet the question of rhetoric as the means to improper forms of assent and authorization, both virtual and immediate, consumed those who wished to realize Bacon’s “House of Salomon.”

Regulating Assent: Neutering Witnesses

In *Leviathan and the Air Pump*, Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer describe the institutional conditions necessary for spoken assent to thrive as a network of authentication and correspondence that could support the neutral acts of “seeing and observing”:

This freedom to speak had to be protected by a special sort of discipline. Radical individualism – the state in which each individual set himself up as the ultimate judge of knowledge – would destroy the conventional basis of proper knowledge, while the disciplined collective social structure of the experimental form of life would create and sustain that factual basis . . . Legitimate knowledge was warranted as objective insofar as it was produced by the collective, and agreed to voluntarily by those who comprise the collective. The objectification of knowledge proceeded through displays of the communal basis of its generation

¹³¹ Ian Hacking, *Representing and Intervening: Introductory Topics in the Philosophy of Natural Science* (Cambridge UP, 1983), 175.

and evaluation. Human coercion was to have no visible place in the experimental form of life.¹³²

In a later article, Shapin further explores the space of the laboratory and the status of its occupants and concludes, “What underwrote assent to knowledge claims was the word of a gentleman, the conventions regulating access to a gentleman’s house, and the social relations within it.”¹³³ In *Leviathan and the Air-Pump*, Shapin and Schaffer add that the experimental model of assent is basically a “technology of trust”¹³⁴ that “functioned as an objectifying resource.”¹³⁵ Approval or disapproval in the laboratory had to be elaborated in terms that could take such judgments for granted, or as self-evident. Sanctioning the experiment merely by noting the group who conducted it was what led to the clamors of criticism that I describe above. Though the society stressed their status as experimenters, they were still broadly gentlemen, and had to ensure that the integrity of their experiments was based on the factual status of the object, rather than the social status of the observing subjects. Assent had to be an invisible process, one in which social standing and what Sprat calls “self-love” are ignored in place of a neutral response to experiment. Experimenters pursue their work in the quiet confines of the laboratory, which had to be represented and accounted for in the publications that reported that work.

In addition to pursuing material technology, experimental philosophers also were dedicated to producing what Shapin and Schaffer call a “literary technology”¹³⁶ that could textually reproduce the events of the laboratory. Addressing the reader of his *New Experiments Physico-Mechanical* (1669), Robert Boyle sees experimental publications as

¹³² Shapin and Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump*, 78.

¹³³ Steven Shapin, “The House of Experiment in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Isis* 79, no. 3 (1988): 404.

¹³⁴ Shapin and Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump*, 61.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

“standing records,” reports that could ideally replicate experimental productions, and thus “need not reiterate themselves an experiment to have as distinct an idea of it.”¹³⁷ Shapin and Schaffer explain how the methodology established an authenticating community:

If one wrote experimental reports in the correct way, the reader could take on trust that these things happened. Further it would be as if that reader had been present at the proceedings. He would be recruited as a witness and be put in a position where he could validate experimental phenomena as matters of fact. Therefore, attention to the writing of experimental reports was of equal importance to doing the experiments themselves.¹³⁸

Boyle explores the difficulty of achieving this trust in his 1661 “Proemial Essay,” where he prizes transparency and clarity above all else. He does not reserve the same rancor for Sprat’s “specious tropes and figures,” but still argues for their exclusion from experimental discourse. Using rhetoric in an experimental report is the equivalent of “paint[ing] the eyeglasses of a telescope.”¹³⁹ Boyle translates the scientific virtue of transparency that the telescope offers into a literary ideal. Unlike Sprat several years later, Boyle does not herald this transparent writing style as the prized experimental conclusion of Royal Society inquiry, but contemplates carefully the direction published reports must take. As Markley notes, for Boyle stylistic concerns are reinforced by theological, social, and epistemological matters. Markley argues that throughout *Certain Physiological Essays*, the collection in which the “Proemial” is included, Boyle “can place his faith neither in a real character nor in a reformed language because he perceives representation – the metaphoricity of language – as ultimately mysterious.”¹⁴⁰

The “Proemial Essay” reveals both the desire and accompanying skepticism that any stylistic method can approach objectivity, while recognizing that experimental results

¹³⁷ Robert Boyle, *Certain Physiological Essays* (London, 1669), 1.

¹³⁸ Shapin and Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump*, 62–63.

¹³⁹ Boyle, *Certain Physiological Essays*, 12.

¹⁴⁰ Markley, *Fallen Languages*, 114.

must take on a written form for public validation. Yet Boyle still advances a program that approaches linguistic reform: “for though a Philosopher need not be solicitous that his style should delight its Reader with his Floridnesse, yet I think he may very well be allow'd to take a Care that it disgust not his Reader by its Flatness.”¹⁴¹ Though Sprat will later appropriate this balance as the opposition between rhetorical and scientific language, Boyle recognizes that a strictly programmatic approach to scientific writing might “disgust.” Boyle’s interest in crafting the public ethos of the Royal Society is markedly more humble than Sprat’s and Joseph Glanvill’s. When Glanvill claims that Royal Society experimental results “may be received as undoubted Records of certain events, and as securely depended on, as the Propositions of Euclid,”¹⁴² critics such as Stubbe and Hobbes saw such epistemological certainty as testifying to a naïve and self-interested institutional faith that had yet to be earned. Stubbe also lashed out at Sprat’s *History* as “impious and pernicious.”¹⁴³ Boyle is less committed to promoting the institution than he is in testing and perfecting the vehicles that can ensure its integrity. While Boyle’s interests are myriad, in the wake of the Restoration his writings reveal a desire to bridge gaps between public curiosity and institutional rigidity, and in finding an appropriate protocol in which experimental results could be communicated.

Though Royal Society members celebrated and aspired to a purer language outside of the confines of the rhetorical tradition to promote matters of facts, historians of science emphasize the institutional structures and protocols that reveal such knowledge as a social construction, and bring to light social practices that organize experimental

¹⁴¹ Boyle, *Certain Physiological Essays*, 13.

¹⁴² Joseph Glanvill, *Scepsis Scientifica: Or, Confest Ignorance, the Way to Science ; in an Essay of the Vanity of Dogmatizing and Confident Opinion* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1885).

¹⁴³ Stubbe, *A Censure upon Certain Passages*, 1.

practice and contribute to knowledge production. Shapin and Schaffer locate the “modest witness” at the center of experimental practices that determined how an experiment could be confirmed as fact. In written report, for instance, the modest witness could be realized in the literary technology of the plain style. The social aspect required an experimental community extended through a “network of correspondence” (69) institutionalized through the vehicle of integrity that the Royal Society provided. The authorizing body of the Royal Society could mark the authenticity of the systematic process through which assent is gathered and ultimately publicized. As I will show, to sever this connection was to delegitimize an entire experimental culture by removing its grounds for objectivity and authorization.

Boyle continues, “though it were foolish to colour or enamel upon the glasses of Telescopes, yet to gild or otherwise embellish the Tubes of them, may render them more acceptable to the Users, without at all lessening the Clearness of the Object to be look’d at through them.”¹⁴⁴ The separation of “tube” and “glass” further emphasizes Boyle’s faith in the observational validity of the telescope. While the corruption of the “glass” reflects an unacceptable variable in the observation, the “tube” does not intervene between observer and observed, and therefore might be adjusted for aesthetic purpose. The tube can be shaped or changed simply because its external surface is inessential to providing a reliable report. The magnifying technology of the glass, however, offers a symbolic ideal for the language that should be used in experimental report. In his

Experiments and Considerations Touching Colours (1664), Boyle comments,

as we see, that in the Moon we can with Excellent *Telescopes* discern many Hills and Vallies, and as it were Pits and other Parts, whereof some are more, and some

¹⁴⁴ Boyle, *Certain Physiological Essays and Other Tracts Written at Distant Times, and on Several Occasions by the Honourable Robert Boyle*, 13.

less Vividly illustrated, and others have a fainter, others a deeper Shade, though the naked Eye can discern no such matter in that Planet. And with an Excellent *Microscope*, where the *Naked Eye* did see but a Green powder, the *Assisted Eye* as we noted above, could discern particular Granules, some of them of a Blew, and some of them of a Yellow colour, which Corpuscles we had beforehand caus'd to be exquisitly mix'd to compound the Green.¹⁴⁵

Just as the telescope offers the increased vision in the semblance of an “*Assisted Eye*,” revealing the phenomenon of greenness to be merely an “exquisitely mix’d” series of compounds, the language programs of the Royal Society clarify the vagaries of experience and sensual impression, which are often corrupted by rhetorical conceits.

What Boyle describes are difficult, if not impossible, balancing acts. However, Boyle and Hooke’s texts contend that a technology such as the telescope makes this level of empirical precision possible. In terms of writing, even Boyle expresses skepticism that such fidelity is possible through the internal ambiguities that language contains. Yet such equilibrium was necessary in order for the Royal Society to perpetuate the institutional rigidity that their texts profess. Experimental publications had to be readable while still providing absolute fidelity to the experiments they chronicled. Royal Society members had to be an institutional elite that still recognized a public responsibility. In the first issue of *Philosophical Transactions* in 1665, when the introduction promises productions that will be “clearly and truly communicated,”¹⁴⁶ it is part of an on-going articulation of Sprat’s “mathematical plainness.”¹⁴⁷ As the qualifying adjective “mathematical” suggests, plainness can be refined to a point where it services, rather than misinforms and alters, scientific observations. To be “clear” and “true” is not a simple matter; thus equating them with the “plainness” and “soundness” of microscopic inquiry shows

¹⁴⁵ Boyle, *Experiments and Considerations Touching Colours* (London, 1664) , 41.

¹⁴⁶ “The Introduction,” *Philosophical Transactions (1665-1678)* 1 (January 1, 1665): 2.

¹⁴⁷ Sprat, *The History of the Royal Society*, 113.

exactly how high thinkers like Boyle aim, and what was at stake for his contemporaries in the pursuit, presentation, and ultimate publication of experimental knowledge.

Boyle does not offer the common literary virtue of the plain style; rather, he emphasizes the technology to underscore the importance of the difficult perspicuity that best reflects the objective ideal of scientific inquiry. In comparing the use of “needless rhetorical ornament” to “paint[ing] the eyeglasses of the telescope,” Boyle argues that a scientific approach to language should at least have the same implicit goal as telescopic and microscopic observation, in which the transparency and neutrality of the apparatus secures spatial separation between subject and object, writer and text. Boyle combines stylistic method with Robert Hooke’s pronouncement that the apparatus of the microscope allows “a supplying of (the senses’) infirmities with Instruments” and “the plainness and soundness of Observations.”¹⁴⁸ Like the transparency the technical apparatus provides, scientific style should clarify rather than obscure, inform rather than explain. As Hooke’s “glass” corrects infirmities, so could a language that had as its guiding principle the operative neutrality of this new mode of knowledge.

In forwarding the veracity of an experiment, public presentation must bring about the assent of an audience, where the public approval virtually legitimates the private. Since the laboratory had to be reimagined for public consumption, contemporary critics rose to attack the various representations. Hobbes, for instance, consistently criticizes the Royal Society, particularly after Boyle’s experiments with the air pump, for the way that knowledge was gathered and the society of exclusive gentleman of questionable

¹⁴⁸ Hooke, *Micrographia*, 6.

credentials who gathered it.¹⁴⁹ Hobbes emphasizes the need for evidence and observation in the collection of knowledge and pronouncing of truth. In his rigid terminology, the results of many experiments qualify as an “experience,” yet even this “concludeth nothing universally.”¹⁵⁰ Hobbes notes the finitude and fallibility inherent in the senses that fetters observations even when aided by the systematized process or fantastic technology. Even in consensus, such knowledge is flawed because of the rhetorical process by which it was gained. What was primarily at stake for critics of experimental philosophy was knowledge – not only who was producing it, but who was approving and ultimately disseminating it. Among their many targets is exposing the mediation which experimental polemicists claimed to have perfected.

Yet in many ways, the laboratory, and its institutional form, the Royal Society, served figuratively as the calming apparatus that would separate the “noise” and vigorous passions of the world from the sober tranquility of experimental spaces. In particular, Sprat opposes this regimen of tranquility with the dissolute voices that lead to social and spiritual unrest. Different kinds of “noise” appear throughout the *History*, both positively and negatively. The noise that Sprat celebrates is “the noise of Mechanick Instruments . . . heard in Whitehall itself.”¹⁵¹ While the tinny clamor of instruments acts as a kind of music, Sprat reserves anxiety for the noise of diverse voices, and sees the need for an insulated setting:

There are indeed some operations of the mind, which may be best perform'd by the simple strength of mens own particular thoughts; such are invention, and judgement, and disposition: For in them *a security from noise*, leaves the Soul at

¹⁴⁹ Thomas Hobbes, “Dialogus Physicus De Natura Aeris,” in *Leviathan and the Air Pump*, trans. Simon Schaffer, 350.

¹⁵⁰ Thomas Hobbes, *Human Nature and De Corpore Politico* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), 32.

¹⁵¹ Sprat, *The History of the Royal Society*, 151.

more liberty, to bring forth, order, and fashion the heap of matter, which had been before supply'd to its use.¹⁵²

If what Sprat describes is an isolation chamber, in which the soul can be at liberty, he suggests an external world in which a disturbed peace is the result of “the volubility of tongue” that persuasive language apparently aims toward. Discussing the limitations of the apparatus, Karen Barad discusses this severing move in scientific settings in its relationship to (or “intra-action” with) a pervasive subjectivity and finitude.¹⁵³ In such enclosures, where objectivity can occur because of the conditions of the setting, the scientific ideal of the apparatus/instrument is “hermetically sealed off from any and all ‘outside influences,’” which reduces “the role of the experimenter to a mere recorder of the objective marks displayed by the instrumentation.”¹⁵⁴ Sprat’s vision for the laboratory, buttressed by the protocols that ensure “security from noise” can “leave the soul at more liberty,” offers a societal model that may inform and perhaps be replicated to remedy external conflicts. Joseph Glanvill sees the guiding ethos of the Royal Society extending beyond the setting of experiment, seeing the new philosophy as “tend[ing] to the ending of disputes,”¹⁵⁵ as their generated knowledge might also remedy political and theological controversy. In *Micrographia*, Hooke projects the regenerative powers of science as redemptive in the grandest possible sense: “As at first mankind fell by tasting of the forbidden Tree of Knowledge, so we, their Posterity, may be in part restor’d by the same way, not only by beholding and contemplating but by tasting those fruits of Natural

¹⁵² Ibid., 20. Emphasis added.

¹⁵³ See chapter four, “Agential Realism: How Material-Discursive Practices Matter” in Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke UP, 2007), 133–185.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 144.

¹⁵⁵ Joseph Glanvill, *Philosophia Pia, or, a Discourse* (London, 1671), 93.

knowledge that were never yet forbidden.”¹⁵⁶ Such statements reveal the ambitions of the Royal Society to sanitize human behavior both inside and outside the laboratory, offering the paradigm of a spiritual and material space that provided for an emergent neutrality that obsessed seventeenth-century thinkers. While perhaps inflated for polemical intention, the institutional faith shown here reflects the adoption of Boyle’s growing belief that theology and experimental philosophy “interpenetrate, inform, and elucidate each other.”¹⁵⁷ The extension of the community that undergirds Royal Society publications testifies to the institutional belief that what happened behind closed doors could be communicated to a wider population in hopes of cultural and spiritual edification.

In these idealistic spaces, the subject of many an experimental philosophy treatise, the experiment and experimenter could be validated by a group of disinterested peers. To rectify the obvious finitude and occasional disruption of human conduct in experimental settings, Hooke repeats the need for “method or engine, which shall be as a guide to regulate its action,” lest the intellect “act amiss.”¹⁵⁸ For Hooke, experiments must be viewed as separate from social occasion, and must be enhanced by elaborate protocols that became the “engine” to secure objective knowledge. In response to the social concern of authenticating knowledge this presents, Sprat argues the need for “many sincere witnesses standing by, whom self-love will not persuade to report falsly.”¹⁵⁹ Sprat shows a confidence that sincere witnesses will be easily found in the gentlemanly culture he occupies, and that their privileged and institutionally sanctioned status will ensure

¹⁵⁶ Hooke, *Micrographia*.

¹⁵⁷ Markley, *Fallen Languages*, 40.

¹⁵⁸ Robert Hooke, “The Present State of Natural Philosophy,” in *Literature and Science, 1660-1834*, ed. Judith Hawley. 2 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003-04), 24.

¹⁵⁹ Sprat, *The History of the Royal Society*, 73.

their objectivity. Since the conditions for experiment had to be protected from the corruption of self-interested participants, it necessitated a language that functioned on principles of transparency and certainty. However, as I will show, deflating the sincerity of these “witnesses,” revealing them as impassioned rather than impassionate, could be used as a move to demean the society as a whole.

For critics of Hooke and his cohort, exposing persuasion at the heart of supposedly neutral practices, then, reveals experimental culture as a gentlemanly club more concerned with protecting its own integrity than producing anything of value. It is like going through sanitized, protected, and polemicized space and finding an orator. Just as Butler finds rhetoric in the anti-rhetorical pronouncements of Sprat, these critics join him in finding rhetoric at the heart of the Royal Society, despite its pronounced absence. As Butler hints, the character of the orator is publicly denied a presence, but subsists in the exclusive and self-congratulatory culture of gentlemen that authorizes itself. As the gentleman Bruce will remark in Shadwell’s *The Virtuoso* in a comment that caricatures the figures of audience and experimenter, they are “the chorus to [a] puppet show” (I.i.283).

“Several faiths of seeing”: Samuel Butler’s Satires on Science

Thomas Babington Macaulay notes that Samuel Butler was the “only man of real genius who, between the Restoration and the Revolution, showed a bitter enmity to the new philosophy.”¹⁶⁰ The specifics of that enmity, however, have been lost to history. In his own time, Butler’s popularity began and ended with *Hudibras* (1663-78). Royalists, in particular, celebrated his acidic couplets depicting a vain Presbyterian justice whose

¹⁶⁰Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James II.*, ed. Charles Harding Firth, vol. 1 (New York: AMS Press, 1968), 400n4.

zeal outweighs his common sense. *Hudibras* was so popular that, fittingly, the poem consumed the author: he was known by all as “Hudibras” Butler.¹⁶¹ This fate could only be expected of an author who published a single significant work. Yet when Butler’s writings were published anonymously after his death in 1680, and then in 1759 in a two-volume edition published and edited by Robert Thyer, the collected works of “Hudibras” Butler included pithy invectives framed as “Miscellaneous Observations,” “Satyrs” consistent with the genre of similarly-titled works, over two hundred character sketches, and the longest poem other than *Hudibras*, *The Elephant in the Moon*. Scattered among these works, and focalized in *The Elephant in the Moon*, is a consistent disdain for experimental philosophy for the way its cultural enterprise corrupts its methodology.

In his sympathetic entry on Butler in *The Lives of the Poets* (1779-81), Samuel Johnson expresses his own curiosity about Butler’s animosity:

Some verses . . . show him to have been among those who ridiculed the institution of the Royal Society, of which the enemies were, for some time, very numerous and very acrimonious; for what reason it is hard to conceive, since the philosophers professed not to advance doctrines, but to produce facts: and the most zealous enemy of innovation must admit the gradual progress of experience, however he may oppose hypothetical temerity.¹⁶²

Johnson adds, “In the mist of obscurity passed the life of Butler.” In that “mist,” Butler continually targeted the Royal Society with sharp satires that positioned him as an “enemy of innovation” because of what he saw as the troubling means by which “innovation” was conducted and publicized. Perhaps the animosity came as a result of his relationship with Sprat, with whom he served in the court of the Duke of Buckingham.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ See Ricardo Quintana, “Samuel Butler: A Restoration Figure in a Modern Light,” *ELH* 18, no. 1 (March 1, 1951): 7-31.

¹⁶² Samuel Johnson, *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*. ed. John H. Middendorf. 24 vols. (New Haven: Yale UP, 2010), 23:1219.

¹⁶³ George Wasserman, *Samuel “Hudibras” Butler* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989), 14.

Whatever the case, the public behavior and proclamations of the Royal Society troubled Butler enough that he inveighed, at least privately, against them.

Marjorie Hope Nicholson notes that *The Elephant in the Moon* more than likely “circulated in manuscript among the Wits at tavern and coffeehouse.”¹⁶⁴ Since, as Nicholson explains, Butler wrote a poem to Thomas Shadwell, Shadwell had likely read *The Elephant in the Moon*.¹⁶⁵ At one point, when Shadwell’s virtuoso, Sir Nicholas, announces his plans for a geography of the moon, he explains, “I can see all the Mountainous parts, and Vallies, and Seas, and Lakes in it; nay, the larger sort of Animals, as Elephants and Camels; but publick Buildings and Ships very easily” (V.ii.81-87). He adds, “At Land they fight with Elephants and Castles,” echoing the conceit of Butler’s poem that depicts a lunar war involving Elephants.

The Elephant in the Moon was Butler’s first foray into targeting the society, but not his last. Since the poem was never published, dating it proves difficult. Yet because the poem invokes both the *Philosophical Transactions* – begun in 1665 – and Royal Society antagonist Henry Stubbe, we can assume that the poem was written after the 1671 publication of Stubbe’s censures. In 1674, Butler amended *Hudibras* to include a new “part” dedicated to Hudibras’ argument with Sidrophel, a “Rosicrucian” who farcically elaborates talking points of experimentalists, and whom scholars see as a satirical caricature of prominent Royal Society member Paul Neile.¹⁶⁶ Sidrophel is “as full of tricks / As Rota men of politics” (191), and is easily deflated even by the ridiculous knight-errant Hudibras. Butler also drafted, but did not finish, a *Satire upon the*

¹⁶⁴ Marjorie Hope Nicholson, *Pepys’ Diary and the New Science* (Charlottesville, Virginia UP, 1965), 131.

¹⁶⁵ Nicholson, *Pepys’ Diary and the New Science*, 170-71 .

¹⁶⁶ See Joseph Toy Curtiss, “Butler’s Sidrophel,” *PMLA* 44, no. 4 (December 1, 1929): 1066–1078.; Nicholson, *Pepys’ Diary and the New Science*, 141; Wasserman, *Samuel “Hudibras” Butler*, 53..

Royal Society, and frequently targets so-called men of science in his *Characters* and his *Miscellaneous Observations*. In these works, Butler rises against a group wishing to depict themselves as devoid of “self-love,” casting the virtuosi as men of passion, not reason, who have merely figured out a way to legitimate their quest for obscure knowledge. This is consistent with Butler’s other writings which expose the archetypal Restoration gentleman as driven by a need for public vindication. In his *Satire upon the Imperfection and Abuse of Human Learning*, Butler writes, “Man has a natural desire to know, / But th’one half is for int’reast, th’other show . . .”¹⁶⁷ That Rochesterian sentiment reappears throughout his writings. In this particularly grim view of “human learning,” the knowledge-seeker is guided by a combination of selfish curiosity and vain showmanship. Of experimental settings, Ken Robinson notes, “Butler thought of error, self-interest, and imposture as close companions.”¹⁶⁸ Though microscopes and telescopes, as well as the rigid protocols of the scientific inquiry, are the apparati that separate finite observers from their observations, they cannot resolve the dilemma that those humans can do whatever they want with those observations to bolster their own status. These tools are merely an avenue toward the same implicit flaw Butler saw in all Restoration “characters,” a desire for fame, wealth, and social and sexual fulfillment through whatever means were available to them. The man of science, even in his pronouncements of objectivity and his vision for a shared natural order outside of individual achievement, was not be excluded from this appraisal.

¹⁶⁷ Samuel Butler, “Satire Upon the Imperfection and Abuse of Human Learning,” in *The Poetical Works of Samuel Butler* (Boston: Houghton, Osgood, 1880), 247–254.

¹⁶⁸ Ken Robinson, “The Skepticism of Butler’s Satire on Science: Optimistic or Pessimistic,” *Restoration* 7, no. 1 (1983): 3.

One of Butler's most biting criticisms to this effect comes in his *Characters*, which he wrote between 1667 and 1669, and presumably circulated in manuscript.¹⁶⁹ These Theophrastan sketches, which flourished during the seventeenth century,¹⁷⁰ present a variety of farcical types specific to Restoration culture, for instance "Clap'd Man," "A Tennis-Player," and "An Hypocritical Nonconformist." When he turned to "A Virtuoso," Butler cleverly conflates the two common connotations that were familiar to experimental culture. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, from 1650 to 1700, a virtuoso can either be "one who has a general interest in arts and sciences" or "a student or collector of antiquities, natural curiosities or rarities," to which is added "one who carries on such pursuits in a dilettante or trifling matter."¹⁷¹ On the former, John Evelyn refers to "one of the greatest vertuosas in France for his Collection of Pictures, Achates, Medaills, & Flowers."¹⁷² Walter Houghton notes the connection of "virtuoso" to scientific endeavor by showing that the term was employed to reflect either a positive or negative valence: "there were virtuosi and virtuosi - the amateurs or dilettantes, and the 'sincere' inquirers into nature, with or without the Baconian purpose of ultimate use."¹⁷³ Using the term to reflect "sincere" inquiry, Joseph Glanvill refers flatteringly to forefathers such as Copernicus and Kepler as "the virtuosi of the awakened world."¹⁷⁴

Butler's character sketch takes on the experimental "dilettante" and synthesizes it with the antiquarian connotation of "virtuoso" to belittle the kind of useless knowledge

¹⁶⁹ See the introduction to Samuel Butler, *Characters*, ed. Charles W. Daves (Cleveland: Case Western UP, 1970), 1–27.

¹⁷⁰ See J.W. Smeed, *The Theophrastan Character: The History of a Literary Genre*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985)

¹⁷¹ "virtuoso, n." *OED Online*. December 2012. Oxford UP.

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/223848?redirectedFrom=virtuoso> (accessed February 16, 2013)

¹⁷² *ibid*

¹⁷³ Walter E. Houghton, "The English Virtuoso in the Seventeenth Century: Part I," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 3, no. 1 (January, 1942): 54.

¹⁷⁴ Joseph Glanvill, *Scepsis Scientifica* (London, 1665), 66.

that the experimental philosopher collects. Just as the antiquarian pursues obscure items rather than any productive undertaking, Butler caricatures the “virtuoso” as one perversely delighted by the mundane:

He is a Haberdasher of small arts and sciences, and deals in as many several operations as a baby artificer does in engines. He will serve well enough for an index to tell what is handled in the world, but no further. He is wonderfully delighted with rarities, and they continue still so to him though he has shown them a thousand times, for every new admirer that gapes upon them sets him a-gaping too. Next these [sic] he loves strange natural histories; and as those that read romances, though they know them to be fictions, are as much affected as if they were true, so is he, and will make hard shift to tempt himself to believe them first to be possible, and then he's sure to believe them to be true, forgetting that belief upon belief is false heraldry. He keeps a catalogue of the names of all famous men in any profession, whom he often takes occasion to mention as his very good friends and old acquaintances. Nothing is more pedantic than to seem too much concerned about wit or knowledge, to talk much of it, and appear too critical in it. All he can possibly arrive to is but like the monkeys dancing on the rope, to make men wonder how 'tis possible for art to put nature so much out of her play.¹⁷⁵

In this passage, the artistic does not only invade nature, but supplants it. Natural histories are the equivalent of “romances,” because they arouse – perhaps even sexually – the attention of the reader. In establishing the virtuoso as a pedantic lover of useless knowledge driven by a need to impress on others his inflated sense of self-worth, desiring to be included amongst the “famous men in any profession,” Butler emphasizes the corruption of inquiry by those who have a need for a calculated status as a celebrity. Butler’s virtuoso is titillated by “strange natural histories” and forgets that “belief upon belief is false heraldry.” Though such reports are more than likely written and authorized by Sprat’s “mathematicall plainness,” they still arouse the virtuoso’s passions toward empty spectacle and insignificant curiosity. Concluding the sketch, Butler notes, “His learning is like those Letters on a Coach, where many being writ together no one appears

¹⁷⁵ Butler, *Characters*.

plain,” as the virtuoso amounts to little more than “a great man among the ignorant, a Figure in Arithmetic, is so much the more, as it stands before Ciphers that are nothing of themselves.”¹⁷⁶

In the character sketch of the virtuoso, Butler emphasizes the actual content of experimental reports, as well as the twisted fantasies of those who read them. Virtuosos are creatures of passion, even if they announce themselves as ruled by rational faculties that sublimate their desires to the neutral quest of progress and inquiry. In this sketch, strange passions are aroused both inside and outside of the laboratory, and are only legitimized through a mix of royal prerogative and sanctimonious reporting. The virtuoso deceives his audiences through presentations that are practically theatrical by nature, and trumpets even the most worthless achievements as grand scientific accomplishment. By emphasizing the desire for experimentalists to create (perhaps above all else) a sense of celebrity, he challenges its solemnity and apparently disinterested aims. Butler connects the premium of knowledge with external factors that its most “noble” pursuers refuse to acknowledge are operative in their practices.

The *Characters* provide a specific line of attack against experimental culture, and not just the technologies and innovations themselves, that helps clarify his purpose in *The Elephant in the Moon*. Where the virtuoso mainly aspires to celebrity and is titillated by both that prospect and the literature and language that surround it, the moon-watchers Butler depicts are bound by an institutional faith that corrupts their practices. Not merely an individual problem, as the character sketch suggests, the larger threat lies in societies of virtuosi who confirm each other and are deemed genuine by an audience who takes their obscurity as truth merely because of how it is uttered. In *The Elephant in the Moon*,

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 123.

the desire for institutional accomplishment and telescopic inquiry is bound with a need for public validation and vindication from their critics, which leads the virtuosi to obtain and confirm spectacular findings that can be publicized.

In the poem, a society of virtuosi set out one evening to observe the moon, hoping that the new knowledge they might find will legitimate them in the eyes of a (in the fiction of the poem) skeptical public. At first, the moon-watchers claim to see “Privolvans” and “Subvolvans” warring on the lunar surface, as described in Johannes Kepler’s fictional creation *Somnium* (1634) and John Wilkins’ *The Discovery of a World in the Moone* (1638). However, their most remarkable discovery occurs when they see an “elephant from one of those / Two mighty armies is broke loose.”¹⁷⁷ When the virtuosi discuss their finding, they recognize that such spectacular knowledge will validate them “for the general satisfaction” (243). Even though the finding goes against everything they understand about astronomy, they are convinced the telescope does not lie:

And every man, amazed anew
How it could possibly be true
That any beast should run a race
So monstrous in so short a space,
Resolved, howe’er, to make it good –
At least, as possible as he could –
And rather his own eyes condemn
Than question what he’d seen with them. (254-260)

Just as Kepler’s dream-vision presents a war between lunar races, Butler’s poem casts the specialists at war with a general audience before whom they must be approved. Lunar observation, especially that which produces fantastic results, will (in theory, at least) delight their fancy. Throughout the poem, Butler emphasizes this desire for authentication as a “learn’d society” – while they are deeply respected within the

¹⁷⁷ Samuel Butler, “The Elephant in the Moon,” in *Hudibras Parts I and II and Selected Other Writings*, 125–126. All subsequent quotations will be cited parenthetically within the text by line number.

confines of their own communal borders, their conversation condemns the distrustful public. After some discussion, they formulate a plan to present the information. As they write, their observations are found to be erroneous by a group of “footboys” who realize that a mouse has become trapped in the telescope. At first, the society members refuse to believe the footboys’ reports, and instead argue that their trained sights would not deceive them to such a grand degree. As a point of contrast, the footboys function on a “monkeys’ ingenuity,” unbound by any intellectual or social affiliation, which leads them to challenge the finding. Finally, the virtuosi unscrew the glass of the telescope to find the invading mouse. Only when they submit to the common sense and reasonable skepticism of their unschooled technical assistants do they realize how deeply and preposterously they have erred.

Butler includes terms that connect these virtuosi to current practitioners of the Royal Society. After discovering the “elephant,” they decide “to print it in the next *Transaction*” (244). The “sly surveyors” of Ireland refers to William Petty, who mapped Ireland nearly a decade earlier. The virtuosi also lament their critics, among them “Stubbs,” or Henry Stubbe, and “all the academic clubs.” Butler would further attack the Royal Society in his “Satire upon the Royal Society,” where he mocks their “constant occupations / To measure wind, and weigh the air.”¹⁷⁸ These allusions emphasize Butler’s target specifically of the contemporary setting of institutionalized science – they are, after all, a “learn’d society” – and not merely a group of amateur triflers. In what becomes a parable, the institutional faith of the virtuosi overpowers the kind of rational skepticism that would otherwise lead them to an accurate conclusion.

¹⁷⁸ Samuel Butler, “Satire Upon the Royal Society,” in *Hudibras Parts I and II and Selected Other Writings*, 86–87.

Butler's structure allows him to expose more completely the sharp contrast between objective protocols and finite subjectivity that figures into every observation. In the opening lines, "a learn'd society" (1) gathers to "search the moon by her own light." Butler opens by presenting the objective reserve with which experimental philosophers wish to characterize themselves, emphasizing the language of neutral inquiry with terms such as "inventory" (5), "accurate" (7), and "properest observations" (13) that all mark an integrity uncorrupted by a desire for personal fame. Though they join to search by "her own light," rather than their own, they gradually begin to turn away from what they can learn from the moon to what they can gain from spectacular lunar discoveries. Indeed, the first two stanzas suggest the communal quickening and sharpening of inquiry that Sprat anticipates when he writes that the nature of assembly allows circumstances where "the Wits of most men are sharper, their Apprehensions readier, their Thoughts fuller, than in their Closets."¹⁷⁹ In this cooperation, inquiry is freed from what Hooke calls "all the difficulties of prejudice, with which mens minds are usually beset."¹⁸⁰ In Sprat's idealization, built on Baconian principles, the group sublimates the unfruitful directions that unfounded individual hypotheses might bring about. Yet Butler reveals the manner in which persuasive individuals deceive the group through speculations that lead only to further, more convoluted speculations. The group gathers around the "lofty tube, the scale / With which they heaven itself assail, / Was mounted full against the moon" (21-23). Until this point, the observers are cast as free from prejudice, yet the adverb "against" is the first hint that something other than dispassionate examination will occur, suggesting an opposition between observer and observed.

¹⁷⁹ Sprat, *The History of the Royal Society*, 98.

¹⁸⁰ Hooke, "The Present State of Natural Philosophy," 25.

Following this, the poem becomes a narrative of the corruptive emergence of “self-love” in such gatherings; the society members are each “impatient who should have the honour / to plant an ensign first upon her” (25-26). In the stanza that follows, when Butler introduces the “virtuoso then in chief,” the satirical voice takes over the poem following the decreasingly solemn beginning. This tactic allows Butler to frame the event around the accomplishment and cultural status of the Royal Society, which reveals how such surveys are informed by the inflated self-worth of the members of the institution. In each subsequent stanza, the “learn’d society” are revealed to be merely a group of triflers. In their speeches, Butler’s moon-watchers offer polemics that contain the language we have seen the members of the Royal Society use to describe themselves and the necessity of their advancements. Since the characters are meant to represent prominent experimental philosophers, their activity satirizes the self-serving discourses that happen inside and outside the laboratory.

As the virtuosi discuss their findings, they become more confident in their conclusions. Eager to present their finding to the public, their conversations shows that exhibitionism trumps scientific curiosity. George Wasserman sees Butler’s primary target as general concern, not specific to the scientific moment or the Royal society, toward the “use of reason to cultivate falsehood and subvert truth in the interest of self-esteem.”¹⁸¹ Equally significant is the way that self-esteem is tied to institutional authority more than individual confidence. The observers display a degree of egalitarianism amongst their own circle; in dialogue, they join together in the project of institutional validation and use the sort of dialectical protocols reminiscent of the Royal Society as the vehicle to do so. Yet reason is sublimated to a conversation in which each society member celebrates the

¹⁸¹ Wasserman, *Samuel “Hudibras” Butler*, 31.

achievement of the last. Their assent builds to a point where, the narrator notes, there are “several faiths of seeing” (462). In other words, they can believe in their supposedly unified initial perception simply because they are the ones doing the perceiving. Their faith in their supposedly faultless faculty of their “seeing” leads them to conform nature to their own “learn’d” ideas of how it should be.

In addition to their own puffed-up confidence, Butler opposes a skeptical public and the institution convinced of its own merit. Before being exposed by their footboys, one of the virtuosi excitedly notes that their latest discovery will allow them “henceforth to be believed, / And have no more our best designs, / Because they’re ours, believed ill signs” (200-203). This virtuoso¹⁸² acts as a scribe of sorts, and is celebrated among the group “for his excellence / in heightening words and shadowing sense” (166-167). At his behest, they decide to pen an “exact narrative” before subjecting their observations to scrutiny. Instead, because “it is uncertain when / Such wonders will occur again” (233), they rush to publicize what they have just seen because it will challenge public prejudice and skepticism. As Ken Robinson notes, “the poem’s quack-scientists fail to check on the conformity between their speculations and the phenomena that they purport to explain” and thus believe Kepler’s claims about moon-men, which are “claims treated as signifying dogmatic hubris and wrong scientific method.”¹⁸³

Butler reveals the tricky balancing act between science as a phenomenon that must be explored privately yet still presented publicly, which oscillates most often toward

¹⁸² Marjorie Hope Nicolson identifies this speaker as Robert Boyle. (*Pepys’ Diary and the New Science* 388). See also Sv. Bruun, “The Date of Samuel Butler’s Elephant in the Moon,” *English Studies* 55, no. 2 (1974): 133–139. Bruun argues that the speaker is John Wilkins. These evaluations are made by comparing two versions of the poem: an earlier octasyllabic version and a later version published in his typical “Hudibrastic couplets.”

¹⁸³ Robinson, “The Skepticism of Butler’s Satire on Science: Optimistic or Pessimistic,” 1.

sacrificing the integrity of the experiment for the suitability of its presentation. In addition to their plans to persuade the outside world of their own merit, these virtuosi also persuade each other that their initial impressions, even after they are disproven by a footboy, might somehow be accurate. They do this by further expressing their animosity toward the public. An expert on “vermin” steps forward, ruefully determining:

It is no wonder we’re cried down
And made the talk of all the town
That rants and swears for all our great
Attempts we have done nothing yet. (393-96)

The retaliation, of course, to claims that “we have done nothing yet” is to fabricate something that the public can understand and that will capture their imagination. Their debate comes to the conclusion that above all else, the public must be persuaded with results regardless of their validity. The form of the presentation outweighs its content. It doesn’t have to be true, it just has to *persuasive*. As the vermin expert proclaims, “For partners have been always known / To cheat their public interest prone” (443-444).

For the virtuosi, their presentation ultimately acts as a defensive retort for that skeptical public who “rant and swea[r]” (395). But even if the sighting is not in any way an accurate one, the legitimation gained by such spectacular knowledge will allow them the opportunity to pursue valid conclusions. However, these conclusions should not necessarily be shared with the public. The purpose of scientific audiences, like those in court or in the houses of great men who might be benefactors, is to endow and affirm, not to question. As conceived by Butler, the “network of correspondence” is mere lip-service, a way of publicly crediting non-specialist audiences in hope that the good faith will ensure a confidence toward the institution that recognizes them. Internally, however,

the “learn’d society” sneers at everyone outside of it. The words of the vermin expert close the dialogue:

For truth is too reserved and nice
T’appear in mixed societies,
Delights in solitary abodes,
And never shows herself in crowds . . .
The world, that never sets esteem
On what things are, but what they seem,
And if they be not strange and new,
They’re ne’er the better for being true. (405-408; 415-418)

The public fancy for experiments is marked by a desire for “strange and new” spectacles, so the virtuosi might as well appease them with elaborately concocted “things.” The real truth will not appease public fancy; it is “too reserved and nice,” and is only suitable for the confines of the “learn’d society” where it will be properly nurtured and understood. Of course, the dramatic irony evident in the “vermin” expert’s response is obvious because he and his fellow society members have just accepted the most absurd of observations. As Butler shows, the desire for spectacular visions animates both the virtuosi and their audience, if only in the case of this “learn’d society” for more shallow reasons. Upon finding the reality of gnats and a mouse instead of men and elephants, the virtuosi are “amazed, confounded, and afflicted / To be so openly convicted” (504-505). Butler finds the source in the need for public validation, and turns the tale into a satirical parable that locates error in this indulgence. His closing imperative is a reproach of a culture grown self-congratulatory, targeting

. . . those who greedily pursue
Things wonderful instead of true,
That in their speculations choose
To make discoveries strange news,
And natural history a gazette. (509-514)

Scientific investigation animates, rather than suppresses, odd passions and the desire for wonder rather than for truth. Returning to the lover of strange histories in the *Characters*, experimental publications err by becoming a “gazette,” emphasizing spectacle rather than the mundane goings-on both inside and outside of the laboratory. Like Sprat’s *History*, which “cr[ies] down oratory and declamation while us[ing] nothing else,” the moon-watchers of Butler’s poem exemplify the wide gulf between theory and practice.

“I see Sir Formal’s oratory cannot prevail”: Assent and Rhetoric in *The Virtuoso*

Butler emphasizes that, even in attempts to exclude it, rhetoric is evident in the process of reshaping scientific findings into public literature, as well as the clear persuasive tactics that occur in the scientific inquiry itself. In *The Virtuoso*, Thomas Shadwell offers a similar line of attack but more explicitly visualizes this process in the composite of Sir Formal. For Shadwell, the laboratory is not the apparatus in which “self-love” is sifted out as though through a crucible, but actually encourages its participants to engage in practices of self-interested persuasion because of the domineering presence of the virtuoso. Shadwell’s Nicholas Gimcrack only allows the kinds of authorization and authentication that affirm his ridiculous efforts, even though such support comes exclusively from those who have the most to gain from it.

The plot of *The Virtuoso* mainly concerns the attempts of two lovers, Bruce and Longvil, to win the hands of Clarinda and Miranda, nieces of the virtuoso, Gimcrack. Gimcrack and his wife, the cuckolding Lady Gimcrack, wish to have the dowry of their nieces for their own, and have already rejected many marriage proposals. Bruce and Longvil realize that amorous attempts on the nieces, who are already attracted to them, will be blocked by their selfish and absent-minded uncle. As Bruce laments, “His

jealousy is helped by the vigilancy and malice of that impertinent strumpet his wife, keeps 'em from all manner of address. Letters they have receiv'd from us, and we can have no answer."¹⁸⁴ However, Longvil has found a way to have a meeting with Gimcrack by ingratiating himself to Gimcrack's sycophantic house orator, Sir Formal. Sir Formal will ignorantly act as mediator between the two potential suitors and the closed-minded Gimcrack by presenting Bruce and Longvil as "the greatest philosophers and the greatest admirers of the Virtuoso and his works that can be" (I.i.120-22).

At first denied a chance to woo the nieces, the suitors immediately recognize that the easiest way is through the laboratory, which Gimcrack keeps in his home. Immediately, the laboratory merges uneasily with a domestic setting, which figures into the marriage plot of the comedy as well. As Stephen Shapin notes, such settings were common in the sense that "by far the most significant venues were the private residences of gentlemen or, at any rate, sites where places of scientific work were coextensive with places of residence, whether owned or rented."¹⁸⁵ Shadwell satirically shows that while these "places" are architecturally "coextensive," they work to corrupt the activity that happens in each. As Miranda claims, her will is controlled by the "government of a virtuoso" who "never cares for understanding mankind" (I.ii.5). Gimcrack fails in his dual role as domestic head – both as husband and controlling uncle – and dedicates his time only to ridiculous experiments such as the bottling of air and teaching a frog to swim. The narrative of the play shows Gimcrack losing control of his household as the absurdity of his experiments becomes more apparent. For Bruce and Longvil, endorsing

¹⁸⁴ Thomas Shadwell, *The Virtuoso*, ed. Marjorie Hope Nicolson and David Stuart Rodes (Lincoln: Nebraska UP, 1966). All subsequent quotations will be noted parenthetically within the text by act, scene, and line number.

¹⁸⁵ Shapin, "The House of Experiment in Seventeenth-Century England," 378.

Gimcrack's scientific enterprise will allow them audience and access, a space in which they are closer to the two nieces. The plan works precisely because Gimcrack surrounds himself with the sycophantic Sir Formal and the coxcomb Sir Samuel, who has "forty several disguises to make love in" (I.i.140). Both are authorized presences in the laboratory, and Sir Formal in particular not only observes the production of Gimcrack's prized "knowledge," but also participates in it.

Shadwell's critique of experimental philosophy comes through his exposure of the Royal Society's paradigmatic sanctified setting of the laboratory. As I will show, Shadwell has his characters even repeat the solemn language of experimentalists as a way of proving how ridiculous it sounds when one actually speaks it out loud. As John Shanahan argues, "Against a rising tide of polemic and apologies casting laboratories as sacred spaces different from their worldly surroundings, Shadwell casts them as perfectly continuous with fallen spaces of (common) man."¹⁸⁶ Tita Chico emphasizes Shadwell's implication that "the popularization of experimental philosophy emphasizes such buffoonish and self-interested behavior,"¹⁸⁷ and thus highlights the culture that belies the ideals of its solemn rhetoric. Michael McKeon adds that theatrical satirists such as Shadwell use dramatic representation to show how "the entire technology of experimental instrumentation became a mirror of theatrical technology and its arts of illusion."¹⁸⁸ Such assessments reveal Shadwell's approach in savaging experimental culture and the language dedicated to its perpetuation. Yet in considering *The Virtuoso* as

¹⁸⁶ John Shanahan, "Theatrical Space and Scientific Space in Thomas Shadwell's *Virtuoso*," *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 49, no. 3 (2009): 565.

¹⁸⁷ Tita Chico, "Gimcrack's Legacy: Sex, Wealth, and the Theater of Experimental Philosophy," *Comparative Drama* 42, no. 1 (2008): 38.

¹⁸⁸ Michael McKeon, "Mediation as Primal Word: The Arts, the Sciences, and the Origins of the Aesthetics" in *This is Enlightenment*, 390.

an “equal-opportunity critic,”¹⁸⁹ we should reflect on another explicit aspect of Shadwell’s satire: the audience who watches and ultimately verifies the experiment. Far from the tranquil space that Boyle and Sprat polemicize, in which “self-love” can be separated from the observer through the implementation of protocol, Shadwell visualizes the shallow motives that enter into the authentication of knowledge production, ultimately corrupting it. Throughout the play, Gimcrack surrounds himself with a self-absorbed culture of yes-men who do not care what the experiment is, but only what they can gain from their approval of it.

Critics have been attentive to the various plots for which Gimcrack’s laboratory plays conduit, whether the romantic entanglements of Bruce and Longvil, the endeavors of Gimcrack’s scoundrel “uncle” Snarl, or a bizarre cross-dressing plot involving Sir Samuel and Lady Gimcrack’s lover, Hazard. In this section, I focus on Shadwell’s portrayal of a corrupt culture of assent that operates around the moments of experimental pursuit. Critics have debated whether Shadwell attacks specifically the Royal Society or merely those experimental triflers who pursue elaborately unnecessary and unsanctioned experiments outside of it (like Sir Nicholas).¹⁹⁰ Shadwell’s views toward experimental philosophy are neither completely derogatory nor are they built to preserve a culture of proper experimental decorum. Like Butler, he suggests that the pretensions of experimental practice invade the integrity of experimental works. Yet Shadwell saves his largest target for the network of correspondence that serves to corrupt experiments of any integrity, and chooses the orator Sir Formal as the expression of this hypocrisy.

¹⁸⁹ Tita Chico, “Gimcrack’s Legacy,” 34.

¹⁹⁰ See Joseph M. Gilde, “Shadwell and the Royal Society: Satire in *The Virtuoso*,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 10, no. 3 (July 1, 1970): 469–490.

Gimcrack's ridiculous experiments are not meant for public consumption, yet they enter that realm through the pronouncements of Sir Formal. When we first meet Gimcrack, venturing with Bruce and Longvil behind the formerly closed doors of his laboratory, he is "learning to swim upon a table" (II.ii), imitating a frog in a nearby bowl, his limbs attached to the frog's by a string. As the obsequious audience offers their praises, each desiring favor from the Virtuoso, Gimcrack announces his experiments with the utmost gravitas: "I seldom bring any thing to use; tis not my way. Knowledge is my ultimate end" (II.ii.85-86). Sir Formal immediately endorses him, which leads to an exchange between Gimcrack and his audience that will serve as a prototype for the rest of the authenticating claims that happen throughout the play. This dialogue embodies Shadwell's perception of the networks of correspondence that follow the experimental moment:

Bruce: You have reason, Sir; Knowledge is like Virtue, its own reward.

Formal: To study for use is base and mercenary, below the serene and quiet temper of a sedate Philosopher.

Gimcrack: You have hit it right, Sir. I never studi'd any thing for use but Physick, which I administer to poor people: you shall see my method.

Longvil: Sir, I beseech you, what new curiosities have you found out in Physick?

Gimcrack: Why I have found out the use of Respiration, or Breathing, which is a motion of the Thorax and the Lungs, whereby the Air is impell'd by the Nose, Mouth, and Windpipe into the Lungs, and thence expell'd farther to elaborate the Bloud, by refrigerating it, and separating its fuliginous steams.

Bruce [aside]: What a Secret the Rogue has found out! (II.ii.87-101)

Bruce's final aside reveals his obvious skepticism at Gimcrack's method after his earlier public consent. Bruce assents, connecting the silly spectacle of Gimcrack's swimming with "virtue" because he realizes the quickest way to Clarinda is by proving himself as a "philosopher." Yet Bruce's authentication comes easily – by confirming Gimcrack's "discoveries," Bruce is validated. When Bruce and Longvil are introduced in the play's

opening scene, they show the aptitude to be good critics and impartial observers. They are described as “Gentlemen of wit and sense” in the “Dramatis Personae.” Yet once they enter the laboratory, they sacrifice the cultural and intellectual acumen earlier displayed so they can manipulate Gimcrack into validating them. Gimcrack’s laboratory is not a crucible that refines its participants into the neutral way of experimental life, divorcing them of the “self-love” that Sprat rejects. As Bruce’s aside reveals, spoken assent masks skepticism because of social factors unrelated to the experiment at hand. In this scene, the experimental ideal of collective witness only joins together self-interested social aspirants who offer empty praise.

Gimcrack partly authorizes Bruce and Longvil for their gentlemanly social status, and partly because they acquiesce to his presentation. When they are around Gimcrack, their approvals are often qualified by asides that reveal their contempt for him, and prove that they perform for two audiences. Their private words reveal what a fraud they think he is, as their vocal sanctioning of his experiments is as exaggerated as their asides are biting. For instance, when Bruce declares that a failed blood transfusion between a spaniel and a bulldog is an “experiment you’ll deserve a statue for” (I.iii.133), he could be talking about *anything*. Gimcrack resists anyone who might be a critic, in particular the virulent Snarl, who corrects and mocks him at every point, and only welcomes a group who responds with flattery and approval to his every word. Shadwell specifically positions Bruce, Longvil, and Sir Formal as audience members only to show their obvious fallibility even in their authenticating announcements. They have no desire for observing truth and presenting an objective judgment, but only appeasing and gaining the favor of the virtuoso for the non-scientific privileges he controls. Rather than provide the

knowledge Gimcrack desires – useless even in the accuracy of its empirically-noted minutia – they merely offer flatteries disguised as judgments, which gain them even further access to first the laboratory and later the amorous nieces.

To Shadwell, the absurdity of an experiment such as the bottling of air is, literally, no matter. It takes on a kind of public currency through the authentication of its observer, in each case a faux-modest witness whose apparent disinterestedness is a performance calculated to be a successful tool for persuasion. Yet Sir Nicholas does not care about, nor does he even recognize, the partiality or foolish nature of his audience. After Bruce makes a fawning remark about an experiment in his laboratory, Gimcrack calls him “a most admirable observer” (IV.iii.212). Gimcrack wants only to surround himself with those who validate him, or offer the useless evaluations that he does. The virtuoso can continue to remain in the theatrical space of the laboratory so long as he has the consent of his audience. When faced with a hostile audience, as we will see, Gimcrack shows his inability to defend his science. Shadwell’s depiction refutes the ideal of the modest witness in every scientific setting, whether in dealing with its validation or its public reception.

Sir Formal’s responses are more initially ridiculous even than Gimcrack, yet they offer a compelling example of modes of assent that shape scientific knowledge in the form of rhetorical pronouncement. Formal acts as both a house orator and an external publicist. He performs the latter duty in the play’s opening scene, when upon meeting Bruce and Longvil he describes Gimcrack as the “finest speculative gentleman in the whole world” (I.i.267-68). By ingratiating themselves to Sir Formal, Bruce and Longvil are given introduction through him. Formal admits this, saying, “I am proud not a little

proud of the Honour of being the grateful and happy Instrument of the Necessitude and familiar Communication, which is to intervene between such excellent Virtuoso's" (II.ii.52-55). Through this corrupted "instrument," Bruce and Longvil accomplish their genial confirmation with flattery. The scientist and his rhetorician, the tool of his public mediation, are both easy for the taking. They both subscribe to a self-interested rhetoric easy to reproduce, dedicated to transforming dull scientific findings into rhetoric that confirms its worth. As the play rises to a climax, he even acts as intermediary between Gimcrack and the public, arguing that his rhetorical skill will pacify an incendiary crowd. Formal is not only a mediator, but an institutionally sanctioned one, and his flowery rhetoric is the accepted instrument through which Shadwell presents knowledge being conveyed and authenticated.

Easily flattered, Formal responds to any gesture with a volley of tropes that mask his lack of substance. When faced with the rejection of Clarinda, whose hand he seeks to win with poetic oratory, he exhorts her to "ignore not that those venturous blossom whose overhasty obedience to the early spring does anticipate the proper season do often suffer from the injuries of severer weather unless protected by the happy patronage of some benign shelter" (I.ii.185-190). Not convinced that Formal will provide the "benign shelter" she apparently needs, Clarinda leaves, and Formal responds, fittingly, "Her departure favors somewhat of abruptness" (I.ii.192).

Though limited to lavish ornamentation, Rhetoric is the only instrument Formal knows. Formal even admits as much, describing himself as one who "speak[s] alike on all subjects" (III.iv.92). Yet Formal also allows Gimcrack a kind of significance that the virtuoso does not even allow himself. Though Gimcrack's mantra is "knowledge is my

ultimate end,” Formal restates the purposely useless experimental findings in such a way to endow them with an extrinsic value. Formal’s “gift” lies in taking Gimcrack’s bland language and rearticulating it through rhetorical concoctions. For instance, after Sir Nicholas makes a brief observation about a tumbler spider, that “The Fabric or Structure of this Insect, with its Texture is most admirable,” Sir Formal responds,

Nor is its Sagacity, or Address, less to be wonder'd
at, as I have had the honour to observe under my noble
Friend; as soon as it has spi'd its Prey, as suppose upon a Table,
it will crawl under-neath till it arrive to the Antipodes
of the Fly, which it discovers by sometimes peeping up; and
if the capricious Fly happens not to remove it self by crural
motion, or the vibration of its wings, it makes a fatal leap
upon the heedless Prey, of which, when it has satisfied
its appetite, it carries the remainder to its Cell, or Hermitage.

(III.iii.
53-61)

Formal thoughtlessly embraces bland, scientific facts and weaves them into a grand rhetorical narrative. He embellishes the story with adjectives (“capricious,” “fatal,” “heedless”) that make it at once more fantastical and less accurate. He also emphasizes the “honour” of his noble “friend,” Gimcrack, who makes such an occasion possible. Though Gimcrack’s description avoids the metaphorical, Formal’s ignores the factual. Though not always to this extreme, such sacrifices are necessary for the publicizers who convert private observation into material for public discourse. As an audience to Gimcrack, Formal’s ignorant approval and subsequent rhetorical revision invalidates him as an observer. Yet both in the laboratory and outside of it, Formal acts as a rhetorical mediator for the conclusions that Gimcrack reaches. Formal’s rewording privileges presentation over substance; he is, as Bruce claims, “very much abounding in words and very much defective in sense” (I.i.115-116).

Formal acts as a farcical synecdoche for all the instruments of publicizing experimental facts that the Royal Society employed – whether its vocal proponents or the anonymous reports. Within the confines of the laboratory, he is successful insofar as he, like the suitors, floridly celebrates Gimcrack’s findings. Formal might be seen as evidence that Gimcrack is not meant to represent the sanctioned and proper culture of the Royal Society. After all, Lady Gimcrack notes that “[Gresham] Colledge indeed refus’d him” (II.ii.304). This remark has led one critic to assume that the scientific figures are “aberrations of their respective professions” because the “Royal Society provides a standard of reason and decorum against which the follies and excesses of fools may be measured.”¹⁹¹ Though Gimcrack operates outside the institution, his laboratory is clearly meant to resemble Royal Society practices. For instance, when Formal notes that knowledge of the moon “wou’d be of infinite advantage to us, in the improvement of our Politicks” (II.ii.40-42), Shadwell critiques the tendency for experimental philosophers to view themselves as Sprat and Glanvill did, holding the answers to all of England’s problems by perfecting a civil setting that leads to the production of worthwhile knowledge. Also, as Marjorie Hope Nicolson notes, Gimcrack’s foolish resolution of selling trips to the moon copies an almost identical passage in Glanvill’s *The Vanity of Dogmatizing* (1661).¹⁹² Further, the experiments Gimcrack describes originated in the pages of *Philosophical Transactions*.¹⁹³

When Formal finally must face the public, Shadwell shifts our attention from internal practice to external networks that publicize scientific findings. Later in the play,

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 470.

¹⁹² Nicolson, *Pepys’ Diary and the New Science*, 171.

¹⁹³ For these parallels, see the introduction to the Regents Edition of *The Virtuoso* by Marjorie Hope Nicolson.

local weavers are led (falsely) to believe that Gimcrack has invented an engine loom that will put them out of business. When a mob forms and threatens to burn down his house, Gimcrack cowers away and mutters, “I never invented anything of use in my life” (V.iii.115). Sir Formal offers to settle the dispute using his most powerful weapon, “Eloquence” (V.iii.126). The result is predictably comical; despite his pronouncement of both his own rhetorical mastery and the power of “eloquence” to bring order to chaos, Sir Formal utters a few pompous paragraphs before the weavers “beat him, kick him, and fling oranges at him” (V.iii.61 s.d.).

In the earlier scene, in which he eulogizes a spider, Formal both intervenes and reinterprets scientific results, replacing any scientific result (deeds) with his florid rhetoric (words). The most vocal member of Gimcrack’s specious authentication community, Formal’s bombastic praise serves as authentication enough to bypass any rigid test. In the later scene, the scientist is protected by the mediation of the language he sanctions. Formal’s report proves more important than the experiment itself, yet ultimately it is hollow and unproductive. As experimental philosophers strived to find an appropriate language for public mediation, Shadwell depicts them failing because of an overwhelming regard for their perception.

In this desire for public authentication, it is pivotal to Shadwell’s satire that when Gimcrack cowers for fear from the rioting weavers, neither Gimcrack’s innovation nor Sir Formal’s rhetorical stylings are effective in putting the mob to rest. Sir Formal’s rhetoric inadequately explains the advantage of the loom and fails to prevent what he calls the “rapid force of the too dangerous hurricane of passion” (V.iii.44-45). When Sir Nicholas realizes, “I see Sir Formal’s oratory cannot prevail,” we see Shadwell’s

devastating attack on the presentation of experimental philosophy to the public. With all its excesses and transformed, yet corrupted, visions of private activity, the practiced rhetoric fails to do anything that it purports to do. It is far from the sober language that members of the Royal Society envisage as necessary for the publication of scientific facts. Inside the laboratory, the orator merely authenticates; outside, his rhetoric is exposed by a skeptical and angry group of workers. The weavers are better auditors of the kind of internal and institutionalized lingo that Gimcrack allows.

Regulating Bear-men: Putting Argument in its Place in The Blazing World

Shadwell and Butler concern themselves with a rhetoric that pervades experimental culture despite the improved social and literary technologies that supposedly rendered such impulses unnecessary and undesirable. More specifically, they attack and expose flawed practices of sociability that utilize a self-interested rhetoric – Butler in terms of a communal agenda, Shadwell through the more explicit form of an orator whose vocal assent and eventual rearticulation corrupts the accuracy of experimental findings in both private and public spaces. These critiques challenge the privileged and apparently perfected sociability of the Royal Society by showing it in action: the moon watchers in Butler’s poems are hardly “modest witnesses,” and no one in Shadwell’s laboratory is free of the “self-love” that Sprat claims can be instrumentally severed from experimental participants.

In her diverse writings about a number of scientific matters, Margaret Cavendish also comments on the role social authority plays in assessing empirical accuracy, yet her imperative throughout is that it does not have to be this way. Her social writings, particularly on the nature of dialogue and rhetoric, inform her philosophical writings, a

vantage that allows her a unique viewpoint on the mediation of experimental conclusions. They have to be expressed to curious audiences fascinated by new technologies, fantastical ideas, and the men who produced them – audiences, in other words, like Cavendish. Cavendish does not share the bemused perspective of wits like Butler and Shadwell. In her skepticism, she attempts to be informative and ameliorative, aiming to correct a reliance on apparati and empirical models that overruled rational inquiry while expressing a desire to join more closely in the pursuit of experimentation. As opposed to the more caustic attacks of Butler and Shadwell, Cavendish offers the promise of an appropriate program of social demeanor that can engage and correct empirical methods built on the denial of finite involvement. Throughout her writings, Cavendish addresses both the problem and potential of eloquence, particularly in her *Sociable Letters* (1664) in which she both praises eloquence and fears its deleterious effects. Even in dialogue, the orator can provoke agonistic unrest that can be damaging in both social and intellectual settings. In her utopian vision of *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World*, Cavendish visualizes the regulation of internal dialogues through a sovereign argumentative structure, similar to that articulated by Hobbes, which will keep discussions from turning into endless disputes.¹⁹⁴

Cavendish famously oscillated between critic of, and rapt audience for, Royal Society presentations. Samuel Pepys, not an admirer of the Duchess of Newcastle, describes Cavendish attending planned experiments at Arundel House “full of

¹⁹⁴ For the influence of Hobbes on Cavendish, to varying degrees, see Anna Battigelli, *Margaret Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind* (Lexington: Kentucky UP, 1998). Neil Ankers, “Paradigms and Politics: Hobbes and Cavendish Contrasted,” in *A Princely Brave Woman: Essays on Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle*, ed. Stephen Clucas (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 242–254.

admiration, all admiration.”¹⁹⁵ In his diary entry for May 30, 1667, Pepys notes his disdain for Cavendish as she turns the serious business of scientific inquiry into a frivolous social occasion. As Samuel Mintz notes in a synthesis of all the reports of this visit, she did not live down her reputation as “the laughing stock of London.”¹⁹⁶ According to Pepys, Cavendish arrived fashionably late with her “women attending her.” Pepys was particularly entranced and annoyed by the antics of “a very black boy that ran up and down the room.”¹⁹⁷ Though Mintz notes she took “unashamed pleasure in what she saw,”¹⁹⁸ such pleasure seemed, to Pepys, antithetical to the serious purposes of the occasion of scientific inquiry. In that same diary entry, Pepys laments, “we do believe the town will be full of ballets of it.”¹⁹⁹ Cavendish is represented as treating technology as a trifle, and its serious business as an event to which one brings an ill-behaved child.

While Cavendish was excited by the prospect of natural philosophy and made many ventures to scenes of experiment such as Pepys describes, she was also skeptical about those who privileged empirical observation over rational contemplation. She clearly and vividly articulates her disenchantment with such innovations. For instance, in the wake of celebrations of the certainty to which Hooke’s microscope could aspire, Cavendish challenges the apparatus for producing “copies from copies.”²⁰⁰ In *Observations on Experimental Philosophy* (1666), she argues that the value of Hooke’s

¹⁹⁵ Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. Robert Latham and William Matthews, vol. 8 (Berkeley: California UP, 1974), 243.

¹⁹⁶ Samuel I. Mintz, “The Duchess of Newcastle’s Visit to the Royal Society,” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 51, no. 2 (April, 1952): 176.

¹⁹⁷ Of “black,” Nicolson notes that “the word indicated only that they were brunette rather than blonde.” Nicolson, *Pepys’ Diary and the New Science*, 108.

¹⁹⁸ Mintz, “The Duchess of Newcastle’s Visit to the Royal Society,” 176.

¹⁹⁹ Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, 1974, 8:243.

²⁰⁰ Margaret Cavendish, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, ed. Eileen O’Neill (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), 50.

Micrographia is as much aesthetic as scientific; they are “superficial wonders.”²⁰¹ The preferable observation comes through “a perfect natural eye” combined with “rational contemplation joined with the observations of regular sense.”²⁰² Rather than seeing the apparatus as providing what Hooke called “reparation made for the mischiefs,”²⁰³ Cavendish argues that such “aids” distort natural perception by combining it with the flawed, ornamental qualities of art:

for Art is not onely gross in comparison to Nature, but, for the most part, deformed and defective, and at best produces mixt or hermaphroditical figures, that is, a third figure between Nature and Art: which proves, that natural Reason is above artificial Sense, as I may call it: wherefore those Arts are the best and surest Informers, that alter Nature least, and they the greatest deluders that alter Nature most, I mean, the particular Nature of each particular Creature.²⁰⁴

Cavendish’s explicit skepticism toward “artificial sense” arises out of the milieu which draws both her fascination and critique. The *Observations* can be read as an endorsement of the general project of experimental philosophy and a challenge to its contemporary methodology. The invasion of aesthetic into natural realms should be avoided at all costs, lest it produce “hermaphroditical figures” taken to be accurate. Challenging the claim that the microscope can reveal an empirically sound matter of fact, Cavendish sees it as mere hypothesis – and not a very strong one – to be subjected to further scrutiny. She writes, “exterior inspection through an Optick glass, is so deceiving, that it cannot be relied upon: Wherefore Regular Reason is the best guide to all Arts.”²⁰⁵ This perspective echoes Hobbes’ criticism that experimental practice does not constitute a philosophy

²⁰¹ Ibid., 51.

²⁰² Ibid., 53.

²⁰³ Hooke, *Micrographia*, 4.

²⁰⁴ Cavendish, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, 52.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 9.

because it foregoes rational inquiry.²⁰⁶ The empirical precision that the optical aid provides is perceptually flawed and is ideological rather than empirical, as in Butler's poem, because of the institutional faith that supports it.

Though enraptured by the public show at Arundel House, her skepticism about the magnificent display of Hooke's text is telling.²⁰⁷ In her utopian science fiction spectacle, *The Blazing World*, Cavendish has the empress express this skepticism as an authoritative judgment on the nature of such devices and the images they produce. The empress denounces "the insufficiency of those Magnifying-glasses,"²⁰⁸ and rejects any findings from them as reliable observations. This insufficiency is further delineated in the *Observations*, where she condemns "those who invented microscope" as doing "more injury than benefit." She adds, "this art has intoxicated so many men's brains" even though it merely produces "superficial wonders."²⁰⁹ While such technology might work as a kind of courtly entertainment, similar to Cavendish's treatment of the occasion at Arundel House, it operates primarily as a kind of speculative knowledge that should be subjected to the more careful scrutiny of rational inquiry. Despite Pepys' complaints, Cavendish offers firm distinctions between superficial and productive forms of inquiry. She sees the occasion Pepys reports as spectatorial in a theatrical, rather than scientific sense. She is, like him, an actor entering a stage, and her judgments, unlike his, are not to be taken as authoritative. The *Observations* belie Virginia Woolf's stinging influential

²⁰⁶ Shapin and Shaffer write, "In Hobbes's view Boyle's procedures could never yield the degree of certainty requisite in any enterprise worthy of being called philosophical" (*Leviathan and the Air-Pump* 22).

²⁰⁷ On Cavendish's critique of Hooke, see Battigelli, *Margaret Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind*, 91–95.

²⁰⁸ Margaret Cavendish, "The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World.," in *Paper Bodies: A Margaret Cavendish Reader*, ed. Sylvia Bowerbank and Sara Mendelson (Toronto: Broadview, 1999), 174. All subsequent quotations will be noted parenthetically within the text by page number.

²⁰⁹ Cavendish, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, 51.

remark that Cavendish and her writings “ha[ve] the irresponsibility of a child and the arrogance of a Duchess. The wildest fancies come to her, and she canters away on their backs.”²¹⁰ Woolf targets the prose of Cavendish as undisciplined, overrun with conceits and condescending imagination. Rather, as critics such as Richard Nate, Ryan J. Stark, Steven Clucas, and Jane Donawerth have recognized, Cavendish rejected a homogenizing stylistic program that she saw as reductive and the ideological components that imply its epistemological and social privilege.²¹¹ Cavendish’s concern lies at a discursive level: she challenges the prevalence of a too-confident institutional language and its affiliation with and authentication of unproven technologies.

As revealed in the episode in *The Blazing World*, which I will touch on in more detail, what bothered Cavendish about the microscope was not so much its presence as the confidence it inspired. That confidence could lead to unwavering belief in and promotion of knowledge that was at best provisional. Hooke’s text, then, acquires its public value through its rhetorical presentation; his images are “superficial wonders” legitimated merely by the authority of the apparatus, its creator, and the audience who endows them both. Much like contemporary critics of science, Eve Keller notes, Cavendish “rejected the validity of the subject-object boundary and the self-construction

²¹⁰ Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader. First Series* (London: Hogarth Press, 1962), 103. My reading of Cavendish also contributes to the body of criticism (consulted here) to disprove Woolf’s provocative claim that “It was from the plain of complete ignorance, the untilled field of her own consciousness, that she proposed to erect a philosophical system that was to oust all others” (105).

²¹¹ Stephen Clucas, “Variation, Irregularity, and Probabilism: Margaret Cavendish and Natural Philosophy as Rhetoric.” *A Princely Brave Woman*, 199-210; Jane Donawerth, “Conversation and the Boundaries of Public Discourse in Rhetorical Theory by Renaissance Women,” *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 16, no. 2 (May, 1998): 181–199; Richard Nate, “‘Plain and Vulgarly Express’d’: Margaret Cavendish and the Discourse of the New Science,” *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 19, no. 4 (November, 2001): 403–417; Ryan John Stark, “Margaret Cavendish and Composition Style,” *Rhetoric Review* 17, no. 2 (April, 1999): 264–281.

it implies.”²¹² Rather than being satisfied by the neutral products of the boundaries and conditions that the Royal Society emphasizes, Cavendish’s *Observations* seeks to include human agency as a component to the production of knowledge. Unsatisfied by claims of neutrality and certainty, Cavendish critiques both social boundaries and epistemological assumptions in her view that, as Keller writes, “claims of methodological rigor, value-neutrality, and objectivity” should not be seen “as monolithic conduits for achieving certainty, but as social constructions that are endorsed as much because they advance the needs of their adherents as because they are deemed to be scientifically effective or true.”²¹³ By recognizing human interference as a fallible yet indispensable aspect of natural philosophy endeavors, as well as the impulses and aspirations of its practitioners, the Royal Society can best address the error of subjecting nature to human limitations, by recognizing that, as Cavendish’s editors put it, “Human design can capitalize, but not improve, upon nature.”²¹⁴

Throughout her writings, Cavendish characterizes the culture of experimental philosophy as one plagued by an agonistic tendency. As she characterizes it in the *Observations*, “disputes are endless, and the more answers you receive, the more objections you will find; and the more objections you make, the more answers you will receive.”²¹⁵ In the specific context of the *Observations*, these disputes arise from debates about materialism.²¹⁶ Her own attempt to understand the situation is framed in the

²¹² Eve Keller, “Producing Petty Gods: Margaret Cavendish’s Critique of Experimental Science,” *ELH* 64, no. 2 (1997): 452.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 451.

²¹⁴ Sylvia Bowerbank and Sara Mendelson, “Introduction.” *Paper Bodies: A Margaret Cavendish Reader*, 34.

²¹⁵ Cavendish, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, 26.

²¹⁶ For more on Cavendish’s adherence to a “vitalistic materialism,” which refuted Descartes and derived from the work of J.B. Van Helmont, see the introduction to Cavendish, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*. See also Keller, “Producing Petty Gods.” 455-459; Battigelli, *Margaret Cavendish and the*

Observations as a prefatory “Argumental Discourse” between her “former thoughts” and her “latter thoughts.”²¹⁷ Yet the titular “argumental” belies what the discourse sets out to do: the tone is not argumentative, but didactic. The latter thoughts are satisfied by the former through a presentation of rational inquiry rather than empirical results. By setting up an inquiry into causes through this kind of discussion, Cavendish opens the possibility for resolution to come through communication instead of observation. As the thoughts exist within the confines of the “rational parts of my mind,”²¹⁸ she presents her own process of understanding in terms of a dialogue that can be ordered through social equity and agreed-upon grounds of argument. As the discourse opens, Cavendish admits that the “chief points and principles in natural philosophy” have caused a “war in my mind, which in time grew to that height, that they were hardly able to compose the differences between themselves.”²¹⁹ Curiously, she offers these thoughts to the “arbitration of the impartial reader” whose judgment might “reconcile their controversies, and, if possible, to reduce them to a settled peace and agreement.”²²⁰ Natural philosophy inspires this “war” because the concepts are so elusive, lost in dense language and conceptions through which the only way out seems to be the exclusion of rational debate. Yet the outcome between the former and latter thoughts is clearly harmonious. If rational dialogue can lead to productive conclusions, Cavendish offers that possibility of resolution even in the realm where the immaterial and material cannot be definitively

Exiles of the Mind, 99–102. Battigeli writes, “In Cavendish’s vitalist universe . . . all of nature was infused with reason” (100).

²¹⁷ Cavendish, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, 23.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

ascertained. A clear understanding of terms for nebulous concepts and immaterial substances must first be agreed upon, and with this Cavendish precedes the “discourse.”

In the opening to her *Observations*, Cavendish presents an extended address “To the Reader,” in which she complains about the dense and ambiguous language of “Philosophical Works of other Authors” to explain the impulse that led her to be specific, even tedious, in defining her own terms. She writes, “I was so troubled with their hard words and expressions at first, that had they not been explained to me, and had I not found out some of them by the context and connexion of the sense, I should have been far enough to seek; for their hard words did more obstruct, then instruct me.”²²¹ Cavendish anticipates a possible rejoinder – that she is only a woman, and therefore incapable of interpreting a specialized language – and notes that despite a lack of proper education, “many of our Sex may have as much wit, and be capable of Learning as well as Men.”²²² In this opening advertisement, Cavendish centralizes a theme that her scientific writings both model and exemplify. In combining all the multivalent and vague practices of institutionalized learning, the language has become obscure to the point that it “obstruct[s]” instead of “instructs.” The *Observations* that follow, then, can be read as Cavendish’s proof that a woman can not only play a man’s game, but also can harness the natural wit necessary – and, in her view, overlooked by her contemporaries – in such a project.

The eclectic and open-ended nature of Cavendish’s philosophical writings is an intentional choice, and can be used as a paradigm for discussing evolving technologies and empirical observations. Stephen Clucas notes that the “unmethodical design” of

²²¹ Ibid., 11.

²²² Ibid.

Cavendish's writings often confuses critics who tend to mark them as idiosyncratic and inherently formless.²²³ Instead, Clucas argues, the provisional nature and lack of dogma of Cavendish's texts situate them within a larger discourse of scientific writing that emphasized the priority of empirical claims over any formal properties.²²⁴ He adds, "Thus for Cavendish every theory . . . must necessarily be contingent." Yet if Cavendish views contingency as necessary for the formation of a rational program, she also recognizes the need for proper language to reflect its meaning particularly in experimental writings. Since the eyes and ears are so easily deluded, even the apparati that are supposed to remedy them cannot be trusted to correct false findings and imprecise linguistic turns. The inefficacy of language and the imperfectability of finite human faculties are themes that run throughout Cavendish's work. Nicole Pohl argues that Cavendish "wrote unconnected, singular scientific treatises, but also aimed at creating an overall scientific and philosophical methodology and, ultimately, epistemology."²²⁵ The apparent incongruity of her own writing, its attempt to reflect the open-ended nature of an inquiry in denouncing dogma, can be seen as an appropriate style for provisional ideas and speculations. Otherwise, she fears that she might fall into a category of philosophers with a tendency to "endeavour to prove intricate and confused opinions, by sophistical and irrational arguments" and to have "rendered philosophy perplexed and confused."²²⁶

In her literary and sociable works, Cavendish explores themes of collective integrity and morality, as well as the guidelines for eloquence, that at once inform and interpenetrate her philosophical works. In her *Sociable Letters*, Cavendish addresses an

²²³ Clucas, 199

²²⁴ Ibid, 205.

²²⁵ Nicole Pohl, "'Of Mixt Natures': Questions of Genre in Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World*" in *A Princely Brave Woman*, 56.

²²⁶ Cavendish, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, 22.

imaginary woman with observations on philosophy, science, and politics. As Diana Barnes notes, these letters “describe different social scenarios and are works of imagination or fancy” in which “the social scenario represented by the friends’ conversation comes first, and philosophy is distilled from it in act of authorial judgement and decorum.”²²⁷ For instance, in Letter 51, she describes the visit of “Mrs. P.I.” who has “become an alter’d woman.”²²⁸ Cavendish wryly comments that, though Mrs. P.I. now moralistically denounces the fashionable clothing and cosmetics that once characterized her, she has merely adopted “self-conceited babling” about scripture as a new posture. Cavendish explains that “she is not onely transform’d in her dress, but her garb and speech, and all her Discourse . . . She speaks of nothing but heaven and purification.”²²⁹ In this letter Cavendish makes the connection between the more obvious commodities of contrived fashion and professions of spirituality, each of which operates as a social recourse. Yet the connection between this ostentatious spirituality and persuasive language comes in the epistolary coda, when Cavendish notes Mrs. P.I.’s unnatural progression to “preaching sister”:

I know not what Oratory the Spirit will inspire her with, otherwise I believe she will make no Eloquent Sermons, but I think those of her calling do defie Eloquence, for the more Nonsense they Deliver, the more they are Admired by their Godly Fraternity.²³⁰

The pretense of this letter is to associate a fashioned spiritual manner as a means to social acceleration to the “Godly Fraternity” that praises nonsense only because it matches familiar and privileged language – thus Mrs. P.I. “defie[s] eloquence.” In order for the

²²⁷ Diana Barnes, “Familiar Epistolary Philosophy: Margaret Cavendish’s Philosophical Letters (1664),” *Parergon* 26, no. 2 (2009): 44–45.

²²⁸ Margaret Cavendish, *Sociable Letters*, ed. James Fitzmaurice (Ontario: Broadview, 2004), 102.

²²⁹ Cavendish, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, 102.

²³⁰ Cavendish, *Sociable Letters*, 103.

kind of progress that Cavendish desires both in social and philosophical circles, this language must reflect a genuine purpose, rather than a desire for status.

The *Letters* also address rhetoric more specifically in terms of reception and composition, as well as the figure of the orator, and these thoughts connect with an overarching view of the necessity that any linguistic program must have a guiding integrity at its foundation. Cavendish demarcates a “natural orator” to be desired over the “premeditated orations” of formal rhetors.²³¹ While the formal orator follows prescribed structures and uses arbitrary tropes, the natural orators “can speak on a Sudden and Extempore upon any Subject, are Nature’s Musicians, moving the Passions to Harmony, making Concords out of Discords, Playing on the Soul with Delight.”²³² Rather than express her disdain toward the formal orator, she instead eulogizes the power of words articulated through a gifted speaker. Though “Eloquent speech” can “bind the judgment,” it can also “refine the drossy humours” and “polis[h] the rough passions.”²³³ She adds, “since Eloquence hath such Power over Arms . . . those men that are indued with such Eloquence, and overflowing Wit, are both to be Fear’d and Lov’d, to be highly Advanced or utterly Banished.”²³⁴ Rhetorical activity may have many positive outcomes, but its power is such that it might result in banishment. Cavendish implies here that language must be marshaled and contained, as orators can “Compose or Dissolve Commonwealths, to Dispose of Souls and Bodies of Mankind.”²³⁵ The *Sociable Letters* can be read as a standard for acceptable discourse that is similar to the linguistic order that Cavendish’s philosophical writings implore. Words have “a power beyond nature, custom, and

²³¹ Ibid., 75.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid., 75–76.

²³⁴ Cavendish, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, 76.

²³⁵ Cavendish, *Sociable Letters*, 76.

force,²³⁶ and therefore should be formalized not through strict rhetorical programs, but through clear definitions that arbitrate the misunderstandings that result from the natural dialogism of language. In these letters, Cavendish celebrates the capability for social discourse to attain what Bakhtin calls an “internal logic and internal necessity” that “reveals not only the reality of a given language but also, as it were, its potential, its ideal limits and its total meaning conceived as a whole, its truth together with its limitations.”²³⁷ Bakhtin recognizes that unforced social discourse celebrates linguistic ambiguity in terms of what it enables, rather than what seems surface inconsequentiality, just as Cavendish sees the possibility of the musical qualities of language to operate even within conversational settings normally considered empty.

Though dialogue leads to harmony through the basic decencies of human nature, the power of rhetoric can be used to more devious effects. As she writes in the letters, the force of oratory is such that it has “Power over Arms” and should be “highly advanced or utterly Banished.” At the end of Letter 28, Cavendish acknowledges the power of oratory but states she will “leav[e] Words and Wit . . . [and] rely upon Love and Friendship, and rest.”²³⁸ In other words, though the power of persuasive speech is an incontestable influence on social relationships, an ideal of “Love and Friendship” can be found outside the reigning pressures of a domineering and centripetal rhetoric that might dictate social order. So while oratory might be celebrated for its virtues as an aesthetic form, its potential to disrupt and distort should be placed under control, as these innate factors must be taken into account when considering the ethical ramifications of rhetoric as a discipline and a possibly destabilizing social force. In her *Observations*, this kind of

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ M.M. Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” 356.

²³⁸ Cavendish, *Sociable Letters*, 76.

verbal manipulation must be consigned so that agonistic debate and selfish intention will not overwhelm an objective repose. Throughout, Cavendish recognizes the need to reign in language for purposes of stricter observation and clearer reports.

In *Blazing World*, Cavendish envisages a society in which the dialogical constraints of her *Observations* become guiding scientific principles. In the narrative which describes “a World of my own” (154), Cavendish depicts an English woman who travels “through” the North Pole to world lit by the light of multiple suns and occupied by a variety of talking animals. Upon being brought to the emperor, she is declared a goddess and made empress. Mimicking Cavendish’s scientific curiosity, the empress immediately sets about organizing the various anthropomorphic inhabitants into disciplinary pursuits:

The Bear-men were to be her Experimental Philosophers, the Bird-men her Astronomers, the Fly- Worm- and Fish-men her Natural Philosophers, the Ape-men her Chymists, the Satyrs her Galenick Physicians, the Fox-men her Politicians, the Spider- and Lice-men her Mathematicians, the Jackdaw- Magpie- and Parrot-men her Orators and Logicians, the Gyants her Architects, &c. (163)

In putting natural inquiry under her dominion, the empress primarily seeks to end disputes and orders each group of “Vertuoso’s” to investigate their domain (165). Predictably, the empress shares Cavendish’s distrust of microscopes. She is more interested in the first-hand observations of the flying bird-men than the bear-men who merely see it through their telescopes.

The “Blazing World” is a paradoxical combination of both the natural world of which Cavendish was captivated amateur “philosopher,” and a landscape in which her scientific fancies lead to fantastic fictional creations that do not conform to nature or contemporaneous technology: fire-stones, submarines, and “immaterial spirits” that use

bodies as vehicles to go from one world to the next. The empress not only is given a position of hierarchical power from which to rule, but also is allowed to operate from the omniscient perspective that allows her accurate empirical insight that her subjects lack. In England, the narrator points out, the empress was suspicious of such pseudo-sciences as alchemy, so her skeptical epistemology in her utopian fiction similarly challenges such assessments. In these moments, the empress becomes Cavendish's skeptical surrogate, and her declarations, validations, and refutations resemble her earlier criticisms in the *Observations*. Her subjects are wrong, and she gently corrects them, and the empress is always right. As Deborah Taylor Bazely notes,

. . . it is the Empress who controls the direction of conversation, avidly pursuing her own form of natural inquiry within the framework of the question-and-answer flow of communications. The Empress formulates the questions to which her scientists respond . . . the Empress then arbitrates, asks more questions, initiates experiments, ventures opinions and judgments upon the information presented to her, and sometimes reformulates her opinions after considering new data.²³⁹

The Empress forces the sciences to submit to this dialogue primarily because there is so much tendency to dispute. As she notices, the disagreements usually arise out of empirical observation. For instance, when the Bear-men are sent to observe the sky, the telescopes lead to "differences and divisions among them" (169). The empress silences the disagreement and, reflecting Cavendish's skepticism toward the "Optick Glass" in her *Observations*, commands that they destroy the telescopes because they "delude your sense." The telescopes do not "rectifie" their sight, but only further misinform them. The Bear-men, however, see some civic potential in the apparatus, because the "Artificial

²³⁹ Deborah Taylor Bazely, "An Early Challenge to the Precepts and Practice of Modern Science: The Fusion of Fact, Fiction, and Feminism in the Works of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle (1623-1673)," *DAI* 51 (1991).

delusions” give them “subjects for arguments” (171). The narrator summarizes their argument:

Besides, we shall want Employments for our Senses, and Subjects for Arguments; for, were there nothing but truth, and no falshood, there would be no occasion to dispute, and by this means we should want the aim and pleasure of our endeavors in confuting and contradicting each other; neither would one man be thought wiser then another, but all would either be alike knowing and wise, or all would be fools; wherefore we most humbly beseech your Imperial Majesty to spare our Glasses, which are our onely delight, and as dear to us as our lives. (171)

The empress accepts the provisions for “employments for our senses” as the rationale for disputes and thus contains and limits their effects. She consents to inaccurate technology and even the spirited debates they might produce, but only so long as the “quarrels should remain within their Schools, and cause no factions, or disturbances in State, or Government” (171). Disputes may be useful within the confines of academic discussion, but they cannot plague scientific discussion or spill over into other areas that threaten sovereign order and political stability. Because the empress has the luxury of the bird-men, who offer a privileged form of sight, she has no need for the delusion and dissension that the telescope provokes.

Microscopy and oratory lead to potentially dangerous clashes. When the visions of optical instruments lead to conflicting results, the viewers have to engage what Butler calls “several faiths of seeing.” As a contraption that might be used to produce “hermaphroditical figures,” the kind that might encourage debate confined to an academic or courtly setting, the microscope should not be relied to produce authoritative knowledge. Similarly, to the Empress, oratory is full of stratagems and syllogisms that rely on form rather than fact and, therefore, as in the *Observations*, “disputes are endless” (26). When she meets with her orators and logicians, the “Magpie – Parrot – and

Jackdaw- -men,” she allows them to present a series of orations and syllogisms that result in an animated disagreement (188). The empress mocks the “chopt Logick” of syllogistic argumentation because it “disorders my reason.” Again, she confines such modes of disputation to academic discussion so that they do not “disturb also Divinity and Policy, Religion and Laws, and by that means draw an utter ruine upon a state and government” (191). The orators, on the other hand, at first seem merely unnecessary. Their florid language is full of verbal excesses as they “followed too much the Rules of Art, and confounded themselves with too nice formalities and distinction” (188). Yet since the parrot-men study both logic and rhetoric, the empress sees them as mutually destructive by emphasizing art over reason; art “disorders mens understandings more then it rectifies them, and leads them into a Labyrinth whence they’ll never get out” (191). The empress rejects these persuasive techniques because she prizes a system of intellectual order above all else, and rejects any interest that threatens it.

Cavendish’s scientific writings are guided by an impulse for restored cultural order shared by the experimental philosophers her fantasy romance explicitly critiques. The empress organizes and stabilizes by sublimating disputes and allowing arguments to take place only in confines where they can cause no damage. In the curious ending, the empress meets Margaret Cavendish and is enlightened by the author’s ideas. Cavendish exhorts the empress “to dissolve all their societies; for 'tis better to be without their intelligences, then to have an unquiet and disorderly Government” (229). Yet Royal Society writers, particularly Sprat, turn their critiques externally, seeing culture and an intellectual tradition as the greater problem to which the laboratory must provide alternatives. Cavendish highlights the flaws inherent within this intellectual culture, even

if its members claim to have removed those problems through rigorous methods. She presents a world of men that the good sense of a woman can moderate beyond their sometimes questionable ambition. Indeed, the empress gives women a more substantial role in the “Blazing World” than they had in England because she recognizes their “quick wits, subtle conceptions, and solid judgments” (229). Such traits are ideal for regulating the agonistic setting of experimental philosophy. Cavendish shows that apparently conflicting social attitudes about which she addressed in the *Sociable Letters* might be implanted with good effect into the sterile setting of the laboratory.

Conclusion

As language was a source of tension for both experimental philosophy and its varied critics, reform faster became an imperative. In *An Essay Toward a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language* (1668), John Wilkins affirms and elaborates the Royal Society motto that “*things* are better than *words*, as *real knowledge* is beyond elegance of speech” and echoes Bacon in noting that “wild errors . . . shelter themselves under the disguise of affected phrase.”²⁴⁰ Wilkins adds,

I shall assert with greater confidence, That the reducing of all things and notions, to such kind of Tables, as are here proposed (were it as compleatly done as it might be) would prove the shortest and plainest way for the attainment of real Knowledge, that hath been yet offered to the World. And I shall add further, that these very Tables (as now they are) do seem to me a much better and readier course, for the entring and training up of men in the knowledge of things, then any other way of Institution that I know of . . .²⁴¹

Here Wilkins yokes institutional faith with a vision for linguistic perfection. Language can be reformed; things can replace words; real knowledge can replace that which is attained rhetorically or speculatively, and this can be done by refining language and

²⁴⁰ John Wilkins, *An Essay Towards a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language* (London, 1668).

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

diminishing it of the excesses that plague contemporary discourse. John Locke would later complain that philosophical inquiry was beset by ambiguity and mixed meanings. In such debates, he argues, “the precise signification of the names of substances will be found not only *not* to be well established, but also very hard to be so.”²⁴² While his solution is nowhere near as radical or all-encompassing as Wilkins’ fantastically elaborate system, Locke joins Bacon in seeing a need to diminish reliance on old concepts of rhetoric and linguistics that are “not capable . . . of conveying the sense and intention of the speaker, without any manner of doubt and uncertainty to the hearer.”²⁴³ The inefficacy of language is troubling because of the volatility that miscommunications might provoke. As Robert Markley notes, Wilkins produces “a call to action that is ideologically useful precisely because it preserves what is valuable in civilization.”²⁴⁴ The “Doubt and uncertainty” in the “hearer” poses a threat to the cultural order that Wilkins and his likeminded Royal Society colleagues idealize and see as the logical and spiritual extension of their project.

The quixotic extremes to which language projectors like Wilkins went can be seen in Jonathan Swift’s famous parody of them in Book III of *Gulliver’s Travels* (1735). In the progressive academy of Lagado, the project for “abolishing all words whatsoever” takes on both an epistemological and physical dimension.²⁴⁵ Those projectors who worry that speaking is dangerous to the physical body could be viewed as metaphorical, or as a hopeless attempt to contain the Babel-like effects of speech. Yet in combining physical and intellectual motives, Swift links oral practice with cultural anxiety. Orality is at once

²⁴² Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 484.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 489.

²⁴⁴ Markley, *Fallen Languages*, 85.

²⁴⁵ Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*, 172.

outwardly contagious and internally corrosive. Words are dangerous not only for their inherent instability, but also because of the disharmony they provoke. Within the sterile conditions that Lagado aspires to perpetuate, the projectors, committed to “abolishing all words,” work to eliminate the negative effects of vehement speech that comprise destructive speech. In addition to the internal threat posed to “our lungs,”²⁴⁶ the danger that the project seeks to extenuate extends to the corruption of the world. Swift reveals the vexed relationship between experimental practitioners, who desired certainty and transparency to the point of anxiety, and the spoken word. In their quest for linguistic determinism, these projectors exemplify what Markley calls the Restoration urgency “to control the dialogical and subversive tendencies of language.”²⁴⁷ In Swift’s fantastical Lagado, the projectors contrive schemes, even an elaborate “engine” that can “improv[e] speculative knowledge, by practical and mechanical operations.”²⁴⁸ Speculations lead to disorder, and might be resolved through the mechanical practices that the Lagadans employ. In casting the extremity to which experimentalists go to produce order and eliminate uncertainty, his satire shows that the grand faith in technology and instrumental mediation inspires an impossible vision of cultural order.

In the next chapter, I examine the specter of disorder caused by the rising phenomenon of Methodism. Just as experimental culture sought to regulate the act of speaking to remove it of its troubling insufficiencies, Establishment religious figures targeted unlicensed preachers whose efficacy was as undoubtable as their violation was unsettling. As with the tensions toward rhetoric in experimental philosophy, I also argue that the emergence of vehement Methodist preachers converges with a tendentious

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Markley, *Fallen Languages*, 72.

²⁴⁸ Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*, 171.

moment in the history of rhetoric. Attacks on Methodism reveal an anxiety toward oral performances and the physical “enthusiasm” provoked in audiences’ responses that unsettled a religious culture that sought to demote such fervor in synthesizing the rational and the spiritual, enlightenment reason with religious passion.

Chapter 2: “Cannot you trust God for a sermon?”: The Rhetoric of Extemporary Preaching

Thirdly, before their sermons, their prayer was or seemed to be extempore, which they pretended to be dictated by the spirit of God within them, and many of the people believed or seemed to believe it. For any man might see, that had judgment, that they did not take care beforehand what they should say in their prayers. And from hence came a dislike of the common-prayer-book, which is a set form, premeditated, that men might see to what they were to say amen.²⁴⁹

- Thomas Hobbes, *Behemoth*

"Cannot you trust God for a sermon?"

According to a perhaps apocryphal anecdote that was repeated in many nineteenth-century Methodist texts, first reported by Thomas Marriott in an 1825 issue of *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, John Wesley was forced to preach extempore for the first time in 1735 when he forgot his sermon.²⁵⁰ In Marriott's account, Wesley recalls the event to an attendant who was standing by:

I came without a sermon: and going up the pulpit stairs, I hesitated, and returned into the vestry, under much mental confusion and agitation. A woman who stood by, noticed my concern and said, "Pray sir, what is the matter?" I replied, "I have not brought a sermon with me." Putting her hand on my shoulder, she said, "Is that all? Cannot you trust God for a sermon?" This question had such an effect upon me, that I ascended the pulpit, preached extempore with great freedom to myself, and acceptance to the people; and have never since taken a written sermon into the pulpit.²⁵¹

Regardless of its veracity, the anecdote nonetheless stages a central cultural response to Wesley and his movement in the form of an originary moment. The woman's provocation

²⁴⁹ Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 24.

²⁵⁰ Marriot, Thomas. "Anecdote of Mr. Wesley," *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, 4 (1825), 105. It is repeated verbatim, without any reference, in works including but not limited to Joseph Beaumont Wakely, *Anecdotes of the Wesleys* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1869), 109; Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of John Wesley* (Harper & brothers, 1871), 563; *Friends Review*, vol. 24 (1870-71), 590. See also Richard Green, *John Wesley, Evangelist* (London, The Religious Tract Society, 1905), 111. Green acknowledges *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* as the source for the story, along with a journal entry in which Wesley notes that he first preached off-book in 1735, but does not tell the story that is recounted here. This account does not appear in Wesley's writings.

²⁵¹ Marriot, "Anecdote of Mr. Wesley," 105.

can be read as paradigmatic, as a question that Methodists would ask themselves throughout the eighteenth century, and that their continued presence would provoke from the religious order they ostensibly challenged: “Cannot you trust God for a sermon?” In this chapter, I argue that the various answers to that question constitute a striking moment in the history of rhetorical theory, when critical discussions of homiletics became consumed by the phenomenon of extemporaneous preaching. By answering “no” to this question, as the eighteenth-century establishment church clearly did, one would be standing firm on a methodology and practice of a ritualistic pulpit styling that the Methodists clearly challenged. Emphasizing the word “sermon,” we can interrogate the often conflicting aesthetical and spiritual bases that underwrote the various texts articulating ecclesiastical preaching protocols. Wesley might very well be able to probe his most inward feelings for a passionate oral performance, some would argue, but the ensuing performance was not a sermon in the terms of establishment writers who codified its internal structure and external presentation.

Faced with such critiques, Methodists did not want to be called orators; their allure was based on their sincerity as they preached the revealed word of God and did it in such a way that resisted an ornate rhetorical program. As Methodists such as Wesley and Whitefield would consistently argue, the extemporaneous facilitates the spiritual fervor and inspiration that lead to genuine conversion. After all, the sincere moment of the gospel message should come outside of rhetorical conceits or intricate preparation. Seizing on this pretense for inspiration, anti-Methodists cast extemporaneous preachers as orators in order to emphasize the rhetorical nature of the seemingly spontaneous. This

effort to discredit the movement grew along with the Methodists' popularity and influence.

To clarify the tensions that the woman's question provokes, as well as the way it symbolically prompts a heated discussion of the rhetoric of the pulpit, I read the overlooked but prolific texts that constitute anti-Methodist discourse. The emergence and rapid growth of Methodism sparked an immense cultural anxiety that can be seen through the 934 anti-Methodist publications between 1738 and 1800.²⁵² Both scholars of Methodist history and eighteenth-century religious rhetoric have been attentive to the features that made the Methodists so compelling to the unusual audiences they attracted. Yet with the exception of Albert M. Lyles' 1960 survey *Methodism Mocked*, little focus has been given to the voluminous attacks that depicted the Methodists as dangerous hypocrites upsetting not only the contemporaneous politics and protocols of the church, but also the polite decorum that had come to rule the pulpit.²⁵³ In general, scholars approaching anti-Methodist discourse characterize it as a collection of fraudulent, insignificant, poorly written tirades. In his valuable 1902 bibliography of attacks on Methodists, the Methodist historian Richard Green predictably characterizes the collected works as "ribald, profane, and filthy publications, which were a disgrace to the press and foul offence to public morality, revealing a deplorable corruption in the taste and moral sentiments of the age."²⁵⁴ Green's statement echoes late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Methodist historiography, practiced also by prominent Wesley and Whitfield

²⁵² For catalogs of these attacks, see Richard Green, *Anti-Methodist Publications Issued During the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1902); Clive D. Field, *Anti-Methodist Publications of the Eighteenth Century: A Revised Bibliography* (Manchester: John Rylands Library, 1991)

²⁵³ Albert M. Lyles, *Methodism Mocked: The Satiric Reaction to Methodism in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Epworth Press, 1960).

²⁵⁴ Richard Green, *Anti-Methodist Publications Issued During the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1902), 8.

biographer Luke Tyerman. Tyerman characterizes the Methodists as the true purge to spiritual apathy and cultural depravity, virtually critic-proof. In introducing the first recorded attack on Wesley, a 1732 caricature of the “Oxford Methodists,” Tyerman refuses to quote certain passages because they are “so loathsomely impure, that it would be a sin against both God and man to reproduce it.”²⁵⁵ In the first significant study of Methodism and literature, T.B. Shepherd shares Tyerman’s opinion in characterizing “direct criticism of the movement” as lacking “any claims to literary value.”²⁵⁶ Reviewing Lyles’ effort to write sympathetically about anti-Methodist satire as a genre, John M. Aden complains that “Abstract a few strokes by Churchill, Fielding, Foote, Goldsmith, Smollett, and Sterne, and the rest is oblivion.”²⁵⁷

Yet amongst that “oblivion” rests a dynamic debate over dissident speaking practices and their place amongst both a cultural and intellectual elite looking to disseminate and instill polite values in middling sorts. The canon of anti-Methodist literature is a curious, intriguing addition to the literature of the eighteenth century, one that is often left unexplored merely because of its reputation. Many of the critiques of these the Anti-Methodists could apply to other religious dissenters. Often, as we will see, Methodists were described as Papists under a different name. However, the attacks on Methodism are unique because the writers focus primarily on oratory. While some of these texts are indeed marked by a narrow-minded and elitist frenzy, and others might be seen as mere doggerel or ragged, even hysterical prose, these texts nonetheless reveal the unease that the members of the established church expressed toward the new movement

²⁵⁵ Tyerman, *The Life and Times of John Wesley*, 86.

²⁵⁶ T. B. Shepherd, *Methodism and the Literature of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Epworth Press, 1940), 207.

²⁵⁷ John M. Aden, “Review: Methodist Abuse,” *South Atlantic Bulletin* 27, no. 2 (1961): 12.

in terms of its ability to generate intense audience reactions and fervent followings in rural areas. Discussions of extemporaneous preaching are a particularly vibrant setting for representations of orators.

This chapter begins by exploring the same civil war anxieties and exigencies that I outlined in my last chapter, only with more attention to the attempts to attribute, as Hobbes does, the recent turmoil to a style of preaching that had to be eradicated. Moving to the emergence and ensuing valorization of a rational religion, I show how homiletics writers emphasize a rigid textual authority to serve as the basis for a sermon. In the wake of the civil war, these writers are also keenly invested in a stability that conceivably could be realized through linguistic practice. Seventy years later, the Methodists' confrontation with what had become the authority of this idealized rational system was a threat to both polite oral practices and the culture that encouraged them. The success of Methodist preaching sparked a series of attacks that attempted to delegitimize the spiritual frenzy of the performances and the auditors' responses to them. This passion had to be seen as resulting from calculated manipulators who aimed at conversion for financial or social motives. However, an equally involved attempt to code Methodist spirituality as artificial, more presentational than inspirational, comes through elaborate representations of preaching techniques as observed in various settings. This imperative rests on a dissociation that the rhetorical theorists Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca call "branding discourse as a device," a strategy of preserving the outward expression as a calculated production that can be more easily internally critiqued because of that contextual separation.²⁵⁸ Reducing the internal content as secondary to operative

²⁵⁸ Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (South Bend: Notre Dame UP, 1969).

rhetorical features, this “branding” operates as a method of dissociation that replaces the realistic appearance of an argumentative presentation with the “mechanical, farfetched, abstract, codified, and formal aspects of a speech.”²⁵⁹ To its followers, Methodism offered a model of spiritual sincerity and moral piety through internal revelations that could be externalized in the rhetoric of the public movement. To its critics, the phenomenon of Methodist growth could be deflated by pointing out the rehearsed features of pulpit performances, as a “device” styled to appear spontaneous and targeted toward those unable to recognize this artificiality.

On these competing criteria, both Methodists and their critics participate in, respectively, modifying and affirming a previous century’s worth of homiletic discourse. Again, as with experimental philosophy, attempts to analyze, stabilize, or reinvigorate rhetorical practice give way to critical response. And again, rhetorical theory happens when its creators do not even set out to produce it. Reading the constellation of diverse, sometimes disreputable figures who are “first responders” to the emergence of a new religious identity allows for an understanding of the rhetorical tensions of a period that was often silent about the status of rhetoric as a discipline. To address the issue of mass persuasion was to engage the factors of its production, the problems of its results, and the future of its practice, even when those dynamics are seemingly uninvolved with the formation of rhetorical theory. For stakeholders of a polite culture who did not want to have their passions roused, these Methodist preachers presented the problem of a mass persuasion that threatened to undo the bonds of civil culture, bonds trumpeted as secure even as their most vulnerable elements were being rendered visible.

²⁵⁹ Ibid

“No Preaching’s Real That’s Extempore” : Toward a Rhetoric of Rational Religion

Attacks on extemporaneous preaching occupy a significant portion of anti-Methodist literature through a corpus of sermons, pamphlets, polemics, poems, and fictional accounts ranging from sympathetic to acidic to vindictive. The Methodists would become more and more successful at attracting new followers and nurturing converts in places that the establishment church had either ignored or overlooked. As a result, Methodist tactics came under the watchful and disapproving eye of establishment writers. Throughout their texts, anti-Methodists assert the primacy and spiritual integrity of a more rational preaching program since the civil wars. As Hobbes illustrates in the epigraph that opens this chapter, the connection between fiery preachers and civic disruption was a widely-held assumption, inspiring a rational religion which would inspire sedate contemplation rather than the disorder that could arise from highly passionate encounters with opposing religious or political ideologies. The Methodists continued to attract new followers and nurture new converts in places the establishment church had either ignored or overlooked. The shadow of this religious and political conflict impelled an urgency to stabilize and contain diffusive forces that threatened to revive the conflict of the past thirty years. Through the end of the seventeenth century, clergymen and homiletics writers celebrate the collective achievement of a pulpit style encouraging sedate contemplation instead of the slippery immediacy of passionate response. First articulated after the Restoration, this style would be valorized in the early eighteenth century in terms of a “rational religion” more appropriate for the emerging discourse of politeness.

The tensions that Methodist rhetors provoked are manifest in the homiletic context to which they reacted. After the civil war, the phenomenon of preaching and praying “off-book” sparked a significant discursive reconsideration related to phenomena of inspiration and protocols of public worship. As Michael Warner notes, establishment preachers came to rely on the “literary sermon” or “an essayistic form.”²⁶⁰ For these preachers, the offense of Methodism prompted a reevaluation of homiletic techniques that had gone unchallenged in the years before Wesley and Whitefield’s emergence. Plainness was not merely a suggested protocol, but a cultural ideal that pervaded religious discourse in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. This plainness could take many different forms, and could still exist in the form of a passionate sermon, but homiletic texts exhort a degree of propriety that later critics would argue the Methodists’ lacked.

There is a tendency to see all of the most populated denominations on the eve of Methodism as Elie Halévy has described the establishment church – “apathetic, skeptical, lifeless; sects weakened by rationalism, unorganized, their missionary spirit extinct.”²⁶¹ The church was unable to reach the majority of its members, and bishops found themselves embroiled in political conflict rather than attending to the needs of the rising population of their parishioners or crafting a message that took such criteria into account. As Henry Rack explains, even the dissenting churches legitimated by the 1690 Act of Toleration faced similar challenges in terms of an endemic “dullness” because of “sermons as dry and moralistic as those of the Church of England without the redeeming

²⁶⁰ Michael Warner, “The Preacher’s Footing,” in *This is Enlightenment*, 376.

²⁶¹ Elie Halévy, *A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. E.I. Watkin, 6 vols. (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1961), 1:410.

glories of the Prayer Book.”²⁶² Michael Watts claims that dissenters such as the Presbyterians lacked an evangelical agenda because they were constrained by “a rational Arminianism which was inclined to treat Christianity as a philosophy to be debated rather than as a faith to be served” and thus “no early eighteenth-century Dissenter regarded the world as his parish.”²⁶³ While the apparently insular nature of various denominations might be disputed, the preaching techniques and evangelical fervor of the Methodists strike a sharp contrast to the establishment practices.

The Methodists upset ecclesiastical hierarchy by preaching in outdoor settings without the official sanction of the establishment. Of course, this violation was coupled with the radical form and function of the messages they presented, as their sermons seemed to renew a mode of preaching that had apparently been eliminated. The radical sentiments of preachers before the civil war and interregnum emphasized an intense, incendiary personal reaction often realized through prophecies and visions. For some of the sects that thrived off this spiritual energy, theological purity could only be attained through political revolt – a tantalizing message to those who felt displaced by the escalating latitudinarian deluge. In *The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England* (1672), Lord Clarendon connects the constantly reviving flame of revolutionary desires before and during the conflict with the self-mobilizing, largely independent spirit of the clergy that acted on its own sense of urgency. Parliament, Clarendon claims, could “leav[e] it to their clergy to keep the fire burning in the hearts of the people by their pulpit inflammations,” fomenting revolt even from diverse sectarian collectives that at

²⁶² Henry D Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, 3rd ed. (London: Epworth Press, 2002), 37.

²⁶³ Michael R Watts, *The Dissenters*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 438.

least shared the passion of the anti-royalist message.²⁶⁴ That shared sermon took on many different forms, but later political thinkers such as Hobbes argue that the form was just as important as the content, recalling that the sensation of what “was or seemed to be extempore” found receptive audiences looking to internalize the intense spiritual conviction that was being modeled for them. On the eve of the civil war, Royalists found themselves alarmed by the titular suggestion of the cobbler turned separatist preacher Samuel How’s sermon, “The Sufficiency of the Spirits Teaching, without Human Learning.”²⁶⁵ Leaning heavily on the spirit, and growing fiercely antagonistic toward a humanistic religion, the separatist cause was driven by sectors of the occasionally divided, sometimes tenuously allied forces against what these contenders perceived as the Royalist ecclesiastical supremacy. Presbyterians, Jacobites, Brownists, Levelers, Congregationalists, Fifth Monarchists could disagree wildly on the specific resentments against the established church, yet still be unified in their stirring proclamations of its overall offense. After the Restoration, the established response to dissent was first one of persecution and then an uneasy and controversial toleration that paved the way for the Methodists to operate without strict penalty. When the Act of Toleration enabled the fringe to worship without penalty, it offered the irenic possibility toward what John Locke called “the controversies that will be always arising between those that have, or at least pretend to have, on the one side, a concernment for the interest of men's souls, and, on the other side, a care of the commonwealth.”²⁶⁶ Yet the protocols instilled by

²⁶⁴ Edward Hyde (Earl of) Clarendon, *The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England*, 12 vols. (London: Clarendon Press, 1807), 5:481.

²⁶⁵ Quoted in Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1:69.

²⁶⁶ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government: and a Letter Concerning Toleration* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2003), 218.

authorized churches, meant to inspire rational precision in both speakers and hearers, dominated approaches to homiletics.

The extemporary, whether found in the public devices of the sermon and corporate prayer or in the private setting of individual devotion, offered the at once exhilarating and troubling potential of stimulating subversive conclusions. To secure the stability of appropriate forms of religious practice, such powerful reactions had to both moderate from, and be characterized by, its excesses. The stability of religious practice in the early eighteenth century was built on its encouragements and exhortations to a sedate spirituality performed through repose rather than response. Obviously, those staid methods worked to protect the hierarchy that encouraged them.

Nonetheless, the place of spiritual immediacy was not dismissed, but intensely theorized. Considerations of spontaneity played a significant role in the development of spiritual practice during the early modern period. In *Rituals of Spontaneity*, Lori Branch traces an ideology of spontaneity contained within and disseminated from such diverse discourses as Puritan free-prayer texts and Romantic poetry. As Branch notes, early modern critiques of ritual led to its alienation from liturgical practices, only to be reinstilled through disseminated church publications that inspired routines to make the soul “an echoing warehouse whose interior is furnished only with language and ready-made phrases collected with an eye toward coaching devotion.”²⁶⁷ As Branch puts it, free prayer becomes a “recurring site of tension” in which what is at stake is a sense of the spiritual response as a performative act, one that should not be read as a mark of sincerity or authenticity, or certainly not true inspiration, but could be deconstructed by noting its

²⁶⁷ Lori Branch, *Rituals of Spontaneity: Sentiment and Secularism from Free Prayer to Wordsworth* (Waco: Baylor UP, 2006), 58.

production and conventions.²⁶⁸ Throughout the seventeenth century, diverse denominational figures produced a substantial body of texts, from the Parliament-issued *Directory for the Publique Worship of God* (1645) to John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666), designed to teach prompts from which a spiritually edifying spontaneous prayer might be achieved, including words and phrases that were essentially a way of "coach[ing] devotion."²⁶⁹ Branch finds a growing attitude that the emotionally resonant promise of extemporary responses is countered by "anxieties attendant on requiring spontaneity, and the way its evidentiary, economizing logic seems to be at odds with the very notion of personal relation with god or others, perhaps with the very religiousness of religion."²⁷⁰ Seventeenth-century reconsiderations of heuristics such as "sincerity" and "spontaneity" led to "a profound skepticism that dismissed all prayer and worship as what it can only be, in some manner constructed, volitional, and performative."²⁷¹ As spontaneity became alternately contested and endorsed, the provocative devotional literature of the dissenters came to be seen by their opponents, as a practical methodology more than a genuine spiritual experience.

A survey of texts produced in the eighty years between the interregnum and Wesley's perhaps apocryphal moment when he "trust[ed] God for a sermon" reveals the degree to which post-Restoration Anglican writers distrusted spontaneity in the pulpit, instead favoring a plainness and simplicity that could be found by strictly adhering to a textual referent. These writers must sacrifice the exhilarating possibility of inspirational reaction for the stability its elimination might ensure. Concurrent with the attempts to

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 14.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 58.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 50, 59.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 61.

stabilize language through the methodologies provided by the innovations of science that I outlined in my last chapter, the message of the pulpit had to be reshaped and rearticulated, even sanitized to avoid the tendentious period that had just passed.

When Joseph Glanvill turned to the achievements of experimental philosophy, he expressed that its results could “tend to ending of disputes,”²⁷² and predicted that the agonistic inclination of the early seventeenth century would give way to a tranquility in which the metaphor of certainty through experimentation would offer a reproducible societal model. Predictably, as an establishment clergyman, Glanvill carries over this degree of empirical certainty to his consideration of new and old strategies of pulpit practice. In the same vein that he believed linguistic correctness could be achieved by mirroring the procedures of scientific inquiry, Glanvill advocates a form of purity and simplicity in homiletics that could remedy obscurity and dissolve theological controversy through the salve of propriety. Like Robert Boyle, Glanvill confronts the crisis with “attempts to impose ideal concepts of order, ostensibly derived from the Bible, on a politicized and argumentative nation.”²⁷³ In this, the anxiety of a revival of sectarian tendencies is countered by a latitudinarian imperative for biblical messages that encouraged a serene political climate. In *An Essay on Preaching* (1667), Glanvill encourages a preaching “method” that could not be overly calculated, and must be free of ornate and obscure language that could confuse or mislead audiences. In particular, Glanvill opposes a method in which affective principles are privileged over substantive matters, yet does so in such a way that assumes a malleable, uninformed audience who should not be allowed to go too far into interpretative confusion. The message must be

²⁷² Joseph Glanvill, *Philosophia Pia, or, a Discourse* (London, 1671), 93.

²⁷³ Markley, *Fallen Languages*, 35.

shaped with this consideration in mind, as Glanvill argues throughout that the audience must internalize transparent spiritual and social imperatives. Given over to too much thought, the cryptic message can be distorted and disseminated through untrustworthy auditors. Glanvill writes,

If the method be dark and hidden, it loseth its end, and neither helps the understanding, nor the memory. What some say here, that it should be Cryptick to surprise the Auditors, seems to me very vain, and weak; for our business is not to surprise, but to instruct; not to take the phancy with the unexpectedness, and strangeness of what we say; but to inlighth the mind, and encourage the practice.²⁷⁴

In exhorting transparency, Glanvill views the divide between speaker and audience as one that must be bridged through a tightly-controlled simplicity. Auditors are to be given neither theological conundrums nor overly crafted rhetorical turns, as such preaching techniques will elude the memory and obscure the truth that the speaker should elucidate. He notes that this proper method ensures that “the hearers know where we are, and their thoughts can go along with us.”²⁷⁵ Though obscurity, bolstered perhaps through animated language, might “surprise” and challenge an audience, the ultimate goal is enlightenment and moral education.

Throughout the text, Glanvill views the process of preparing a sermon as an act of simplification and reduction, as well as an on-going evaluation of the parishioners and what they can or cannot process. He provides few examples of what might qualify as cryptic. The key problem is an audience who cannot interpret higher spiritual truths without the help of a pastor. Obviously, this gives the preacher a great degree of control not only over the content of the sermon but also the way it is interpreted. Glanvill’s concern, consistent with the rhetorical-scientific agenda he shared with his Royal Society

²⁷⁴ Joseph Glanvill, *An Essay Concerning Preaching*, (London, 1678), 39.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

colleagues, is that the rhetorician can dominate and delude uninformed audiences with a torrent of tropes and figures. In an *Essay Concerning Preaching*, Glanvill finds himself faced with an obvious oratorical setting and divests it of traditional oratorical methods. For instance, in the opening section he explains the end of preaching as “the *Instruction* of the hearers in *Faith* and *Good Life*, in order to the Glory of God, and their present and future happiness.”²⁷⁶ Shortly after, he rejects a rhetorical emphasis in crafting the sermon, noting “When it is not so aim’d, though the Discourse be never so elaborate, witty, or Learned, it is not preaching. It may have its proper commendation as a Speech, but ought not to be reckon’d as a good Sermon.”²⁷⁷ Glanvill’s opposition between “speech” and “sermon” best articulates the theory of preaching that the contemporary Church of England would espouse. It also sets a model for the early eighteenth century, when sermons, periodicals and religious publications nostalgically recall such plainness as part of a golden age of preaching. While Glanvill marks a “speech” as reflecting the affectation and calculation of a performance, the sermon itself should be a solemn, sedate occasion in which overt rhetorical tactics have little place. In every case, Glanvill advocates plainness over such methods as “inversions of sentences and playing with words, and the like, [which] is vile and contemptible fooling.”²⁷⁸ These precepts anticipate the rational religion that would dominate the decades leading up to the startling appearance of the Methodists.

Glanvill focuses the composition of sermons on the matter of audience consumption. The pastor controls the scripture and by removing its “strangeness” in place of a pulpit-authorized explanation, he also controls the way it should be internalized and

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 10.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 10–11.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 72.

performed. However, Glanvill makes many general assumptions about the nature of audiences: they will not understand dense theology, for instance, and they will be confused by Greek and Latin phrases. Deceiving an audience could lead to the unpredictable anarchy that Glanvill and his fellow members of the Royal Society aimed to end. This anxiety animates the desire for a comparable rationalistic religious discourse in light of the objectifying technologies of the new science. The danger of obscurity requires an endemic plainness that will stabilize and sanctify the pulpit. The scriptures themselves even offer the threat of a disturbing confusion, as the preacher should “avoid the ordinary choice of abstruse, difficult, and mysterious scriptures, which some affect on purpose to ostentate their skill and learning.”²⁷⁹ The crucible of stylistic precision, enhanced through an organized sermon that Glanvill delineates throughout the *Essay*, results in hearers placated rather than confused, understanding their own place in the reigning cultural and spiritual hierarchy as a result of this firm, unambiguous liturgical model.

Following Glanvill, Gilbert Burnet’s 1692 treatise, *Of the Pastoral Care*, can be read as a celebration of the cultural success that such plainness enjoyed even in the wake of the Act of Toleration. Though the newly enjoyed license allowed for dissenting sects, these denominations seemed to be adhering to the principles of propriety that Glanvill outlines. Burnet claims, “Our language is much refined, and we have returned to the plain Notions of simple and genuine rhetoric.”²⁸⁰ Burnet operates on the conviction that the earlier moves toward purification have finally purged language of its immoderate excesses. To what the “simple and genuine” period in the history of rhetoric refers is

²⁷⁹ Ibid, 42.

²⁸⁰ Gilbert Burnet, *A Discourse of the Pastoral Care* (London, 1692), 216.

unclear, especially since figures such as Sprat and Glanvill seem to disparage the entire rhetorical tradition. Unlike Glanvill, Burnet offers precedents from the rhetorical tradition as models for exemplary speech, even as he comes to a similar conclusion. For instance, he describes the preacher as orator in the sense of Quintilian's definition of a good man speaking well, stating that "An orator, if we hearken to them, must be an honest man."²⁸¹ However, Burnet rigidly stresses the need for a coherent text as a basis for the sermon. He even exhorts preachers to make a habit of opening the text (the Bible, a prayer book) in such a way that the audience sees it happening. At his most explicit, he is polemical:

A sermon should be made for a *Text*, and not a *Text* for a *Sermon*; for to give our Discourses weight, it should appear that we led to them by our *Texts*; such Sermons will probably have much more Efficacy than a general Discourse, before which a *Text* seems only to be read as a decent Introduction, but to which no regard is had in the Progress of it.²⁸²

At no point does Burnet bring up the practice of extemporary preaching. Yet the oppositions and repetitions in this passage reveal his resolute belief that unvarying adherence to the text has an even greater affective potential than a "general discourse" has, even if this "general discourse" might allow for departure and improvisation. Whether intended or merely a decision made by the printer, the italicization of "text" throughout further emphasizes the need for a textual referent. While he encourages a degree of pathos that Glanvill does not, the move toward extemporary speech remains a deviation from appropriate pulpit demeanor.

In 1707, the prolific bookseller John Dunton indirectly extolled the virtues of the propriety celebrated by Burnet and Glanvill by attacking those who deviate from it. His poem "The Pulpit Fool: a Satyr" attacks "pulpit fools," who preach exclusion rather than

²⁸¹ Ibid., 228.

²⁸² Ibid., 218.

toleration, and does so in a form of raillery that often takes on extemporary preaching.²⁸³ An Anglican supportive of toleration, Dunton is sympathetic to all dissenting sects and emerging denominations, so long as they act as “ambassadors of peace” and do not use rhetorical tricks, such as an affected style or calculated performance to incite seditious desires.²⁸⁴ The title of “fool” transcends all categories and is not specific to any particular religion, though the previous half-century provides many examples of those movements that Dunton believes came about through illicit means. Since “all serious preaching must come from the heart . . . they are Fools that think not, yet exhort.”²⁸⁵ Echoing Glanvill, Dunton contends that plainness reflects both sincerity of feeling and a connection between sanctioned modes of pulpit performance and internal stability. Dunton writes, “That we do not Extempore Whims detect, Where we do *pure Christianity* expect.”²⁸⁶ Purity here is a form of transparency that only gets distracted by the “whims” of an ostensibly unplanned sermon. Later, he extends this concept by claiming “No Preaching’s Real that’s Extempore,”²⁸⁷ establishing the epistemological basis that a “real” form of preaching can be easily identified both by what it contains and what it lacks. The “Extempore” is equally (and oppositionally) illusory and calculated. For Dunton, these tactics confirm the inauthenticity of the preacher: an extemporary sermon cannot be “real” because it is calculated to appear spontaneous, and thus demystifies the apparent artlessness that poses as inspiration. In one sense, *The Pulpit Fool* shows the degree to which the mistrust of the spontaneous precedes the Methodists. Yet Dunton also affirms a

²⁸³ For the most interesting and concise account of Dunton’s poem, see Melvyn New, “Laurence Sterne’s Sermons and The Pulpit-Fool,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 35, no. 2 (2011): 1-17.

²⁸⁴ John Dunton, *The Pulpit-Fool. a Satyr* (London, 1707), A2.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 6. Dunton does not use line numbers in the poem.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

growing anxiety that religious factions are successfully stirred by those with pretensions to inspiration.

If Dunton attempts to expose a sincerity that is altogether rhetorical in its production and its effects, then Richard Steele attempts to contain the divisive forces of religious enthusiasm by demarcating that sincerity as part of the decorum that he and Joseph Addison advocate in the larger project of *The Spectator*. In *Spectator* no. 103, Steele exhorts proper linguistic protocol through a polemical eulogy of John Tillotson, the venerated divine about whom George Whitefield would claim “knew no more of religion than Mahomet.”²⁸⁸ In the essay, which gives way to an extensive passage from the recently published posthumous edition of Tillotson’s sermons, Steele uses an on-going discussion of general discourse to situate the appropriateness of Tillotson as a pulpit model. The paper opens with a harangue by the unnamed divine about the spurious nature of “compliments,” a “prostitution of speech” that should be avoided because they corrupt the spectrum of discourse that *The Spectator* instills. This is a common theme in the Spectator Club, in which discussions of acceptable speaking practices build off examples of negative or overwrought rhetoric.²⁸⁹ In no. 155, for instance, Mr. Spectator reproves dialogues in the marketplace for operating on a similar lack of sincerity: “instead of the plain downright lying, and asking and bidding so unequally to what they will really give and take, we may hope to have from these fine Folks an Exchange of

²⁸⁸ Quoted in Jerome Dean Mahaffey, *Preaching Politics: the Religious Rhetoric of George Whitefield and the Founding of a New Nation* (Waco: Baylor UP, 2007), 131.

²⁸⁹ See Erin Mackie, ed., *The Commerce of Everyday Life: Selections from The Spectator and The Tatler* (Boston: Bedford St. Martins, 1998). In the introduction to these selections, Mackie writes, “The task the papers set themselves is to reform the sensibilities” (2). Further, “Addison and Steele want to change social standards so that what is sober, sensible, and modest is also fashionable. They want fashionable society to be more responsive to standards of ethical decency” (12). In order to achieve this goal, they often offer examples of what is not “sober, sensible, and modest” for reproach and mockery.

Compliments.”²⁹⁰ Convinced that frivolous exchanges fuel and corrupt the marketplace, Mr. Spectator pushes for social exchange to operate not as mere diversion, but as an opportunity to reveal uncontaminated sentiment that can lead to rational discourse even if rooted in moments of immediate and apparently fleeting interaction. As Anthony Pollock argues, Mr. Spectator dedicates himself in large part to nurturing a public sphere in which there is a “strict separation between an irremediably antagonistic social realm and a compensatory private sphere of ethically legitimated spectatorship.”²⁹¹ Those who model themselves after this identity “will not be particularly decisive or agential but will replicate (or become) new programming at the level of habit.”²⁹² In that specifically-oriented space of polite behavior and practice, individual motives will be sacrificed for the sake of a political and social neutrality that perpetuates itself as a guiding virtue, and that is expressed in a carefully selected impartial language.

The discussion of compliments acts an appropriate entry for a brief but pointed foray into the language of the pulpit, as the rhetoric of compliments is similar to the embellished conceits that Mr. Spectator worries are plaguing contemporary preaching. To counter this, he valorizes Tillotson as a recent model for pulpit simplicity who “abhors any Pomp of Rhetorick on this occasion.”²⁹³ In the arrangement of the essay, Mr. Spectator announces this fact before announcing that Tillotson’s “heart was better disposed” to preach gospel forms. Steele fittingly quotes Tillotson’s “Of Sincerity towards God and Man,” a sermon that venerates “the old *English* Plainness and

²⁹⁰ Addison and Steele, *The Spectator*, 2:109.

²⁹¹ Anthony Pollock, *Gender and the Fictions of the Public Sphere, 1690-1755* (New York: Routledge UP, 2009), 57.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 59.

²⁹³ Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *The Spectator*, 1.430.

Sincerity.”²⁹⁴ Tillotson’s homiletic example mirrors the kind of impartial and frank discourse Steele and Addison advocate. In her analysis of *Spectator* no. 103, Christina Lupton writes that Mr. Spectator operates on and exhorts a “linguistic sincerity . . . characterized by an internal dynamic of form and content rather than from a stable relationship of truths and objects.”²⁹⁵ This sincerity, achieved through an idealistic rhetorical position that Mr. Spectator continually elucidates, often takes on the form of an accomplished neutrality divorced from agonistic intention or selfish motives. Looking back over the period when Burnet, Tillotson, and Glanvill advocated clarity over arousal, Mr. Spectator venerates a tradition in which logical proofs should be shared in simple language. Through this lineage, preaching from the heart becomes a process of homogenizing pulpit protocols into a more sedate and socially acceptable manner. Mr. Spectator, looking to instill discursive codes of conduct more generally, fittingly turns to the example of a preaching style that had been so carefully theorized over the past and its realization in the sermons of Tillotson. In 1711, when Steele examined this particular eulogy, the official church had protocols that, by their own evaluation, had successfully manifested the ideals of a rational religion. These texts limit the degree to which improvisation and creativity play into the moment of the preached sermon. By 1740, despite some disruptions, these techniques had endured to the point where they seemed rooted in religious practice, uncontested even by those who dissented from other establishment doctrines.

“What then will your reason do here? ”: The Power of Methodist Performance

²⁹⁴ Ibid

²⁹⁵ Christina. Lupton, “Sincere Performances: Franklin, Tillotson, and Steele on the Plain Style,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 40, no. 2 (2007): 87.

In two 1759 articles written for *Weekly Magazine* and *Lady's Magazine*, Oliver Goldsmith considers the tenuous situation that preachers faced in light of the success of Methodism. By this point, the Methodists were no longer a fringe movement located primarily in scattered settings, but rather occupied a prominent if controversial place in religious culture. Despite some internal clashes between Calvinists (headed by Whitefield) and Arminians (following Wesley), the number of Methodist converts approached 20,000.²⁹⁶ Goldsmith addresses this phenomenon with what Paul Goring astutely describes as a seemingly firm endorsement that is nonetheless “qualified with a careful distancing of his sympathy from any Methodist deviation from ‘common sense.’”²⁹⁷ Like many commentators, Goldsmith recognizes the deficiencies in contemporary preaching, while still denouncing the tactics of enthusiasm.²⁹⁸ In *The Weekly Magazine*, he acknowledges, “the enthusiast ever makes disciples, the calm unpassioned speaker seldom if ever.”²⁹⁹ Goldsmith defends established preachers as having to face the arduous task of walking a tightrope between reason and passion, as well as content and form. He offers a scenario that sympathizes with the challenges of established preachers in light of the energy of new movements:

We are told of an eminent preacher still alive, that addressing his audience with all the eloquence in his power, and he master of much, he found them quite insensible; either employed in whispers, or sunk in sleep; he increased the pathetic, raised his voice, and felt what he could wish to have others feel, but all

²⁹⁶ There are no membership figures before 1760, but by 1767 there were 25,911 members. By Wesley's death in 1791, that number would rise to 72,476 (Rack *Reasonable Enthusiast* 437-38).

²⁹⁷ Paul Goring, *The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), 79–80.

²⁹⁸ I will delineate more clearly the specific usages of the term “enthusiasm” when I touch on the attacks that employ it. However, Henry Rack is helpful in noting that enthusiasm “implied not only religious excess but social subversion” (275). Also, “its basic theological meaning in the eighteenth century was a claim to extraordinary revelations or powers from the Holy Spirit; and, more vaguely and abusively, any kind of religious excitement.” See also Ronald A. Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion* (South Bend: Notre Dame UP, 1994).

²⁹⁹ Oliver Goldsmith, *Collected Works*, 1:49.

in vain; finding his efforts to no purpose, he threw himself back upon his seat and burst into tears.³⁰⁰

Goldsmith's passage can be read as allegorical. The "eminent preacher" could easily stand for the Established Church writ large, caught between a plain and reasoned homiletics and "encreas[ing] the pathetic." The sleeping audiences needed stimulation from one who could properly employ the "pathetic," no matter what the guiding theological principle. As figured by Goldsmith, Establishment figures tended to view their audiences much as this preacher: not wanting to rouse them beyond an appropriate level, yet concerned by their lack of response, as well as the increasing conversions to the different sects categorized as enthusiasts. This tension derives, Goldsmith writes in *The Lady's Magazine*, from the necessity of establishment thinkers privileging a "prudent mediocrity to a precarious popularity."³⁰¹ In these articles, Goldsmith expresses the conundrum that polite preachers have to engage, albeit reluctantly: the vehemence of what one satirist calls "Fanatic Saints" was as highly effective as it was repellent to the establishment who watched with horror disguised as disdain.

Throughout Goldsmith's writings on the negative state of preaching in the middle of the century, he also notes that while the Methodist theology is unacceptable, their homiletics might have something to offer a stagnant church. As Goring writes, Goldsmith acts as a "topographer of politeness" in his attempt to inculcate a "contagious enthusiasm" within more acceptable theological parameters because "reserved delivery . . . is not effective civil practice and hence it should be transformed into something more emotively and effectively eloquent."³⁰² Goldsmith's joint status as critic and admirer

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 1:50.

³⁰¹ Oliver Goldsmith, *Collected Works*, 3:151.

³⁰² Goring, *The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 78, 81.

links him with Richard Graves, whose *The Spiritual Quixote* (1773) conceives an appropriate level of eloquence “between the poles of manic enthusiasm and soporific reserve.”³⁰³ As Goldsmith’s example of the Anglican preacher who works himself into a frenzy in a vain attempt to provoke his parishioners reflects, the practice could not be embodied because of polite doctrinal and homiletic limitations that served as a foundation for contemporaneous pulpit practice. By ignoring those restraints, Methodists were able to pursue converts in the most unlikely of places by offering the physical presence of a preacher who spoke to the passions of his observers. In his adherence to a program of rational religion, Goldsmith understands the need for those more reserved standards of affective engagement. Seeing the “conventicles of Methodism so crowded as they are,” Goldsmith attributes the phenomenal surge to an “earnest exhortation which gives an air of masculine eloquence,” and thus recognizes the need for a more vibrant program.³⁰⁴ Yet he also contends that “reason is but a weak antagonist when headlong passion dictates” and that a “prudent mediocrity” stifles the emotional response that is necessary for conversion and conviction.³⁰⁵

Goldsmith expresses a sharp reaction to the Methodists’ zealotry and to many of their methods while noting that establishment pastors need an injection of passion to stir their congregations. Rather than only further instill a method of reductive plainness, similar to several of the establishment figures I quote above, Goldsmith sees the needed change to be a synthesis instead of an opposition between appeals to reason and passion. The excesses of enthusiasm might have no place inside the somber confines of the Church of England, but Goldsmith prompts the necessary development of a stronger

³⁰³ Goring, 89

³⁰⁴ Goldsmith, *Collected Works*, 3:51.

³⁰⁵ Goldsmith, *Collected Works*, 3:151.

“antagonist” to the apathy it faces. In this characterization of a national church unequipped to confront the needs of its parishioners, Goldsmith diagnoses a flawed response to groups like the Methodists: instead of adapting to a religious population desiring a richer spiritual experience, the church turned more inward and more sedate, and pursued more rational approaches that must have seemed a jarring contrast to those who had seen the fiery itinerants in their back-yards.

The undeniable success of Methodism is often seen as resulting from its unique and innovative evangelical tactics. Headed loosely by Wesley, itinerant preachers visited rural outposts, often preaching outdoors to those overlooked by organized religion. Methodists energized settings in which the stronghold of the Church of England had not been reinvigorated. As David Hempton notes, “Methodism often took strongest root in marginal areas, scattered settlements, and new industrial and mining environments where the traditional social cement was weakest.”³⁰⁶ The Methodists embraced every aspect of the oral performances both of pastors and parishioners. Charles Wesley’s hymns replicated the passion of the Methodist sermon in a popular and memorable form. In 1780, Wesley prefaces the *Collection of Hymns* by noting that these hymns contain “all the important truths of our most holy religion” and act as “a little body of experimental and practical divinity.”³⁰⁷ Hempton notes that Methodists “absorbed their faith through the words of their hymns and sacred verse.”³⁰⁸ The Methodist sermon follows a similar tactic, preached in plain language vocally modulated to great effect. Rather than forcing audiences to find them, Methodists adapted to the field, targeting the geographically disparate poor and uniting them under a similar cause.

³⁰⁶ David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (Yale UP, 2006), 87.

³⁰⁷ John Wesley, *A Collection of Hymns, for the Use of the People called Methodists* (London, 1816), 4.

³⁰⁸ Hempton, *Methodism*, 71.

Early in the Methodists' evolution into a denomination, their leaders saw themselves as the antidote to the complacency of contemporary religious practice. In *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* (1743), Wesley opens, "We see, on every side, either men of no religion at all, or men of a lifeless, formal religion. We are grieved at the sight; and should greatly rejoice, if by any means we might convince some that there is a better religion to be attained, — a religion worthy of God that gave it."³⁰⁹ Adding life to that formal religion is an apt description for what Wesley was aiming to do with the religion of his father, a rigid if passionless rector. Indeed, the early Methodists leveled forms both ecclesiastic and homiletic in their interference in establishment parishes and rejection of the boundaries placed on the setting of the pulpit.³¹⁰ As Wesley explains in this passage, his task of invigorating English religion had to take on unorthodox means and challenge the old methods that had fashioned such a docile climate in the first place. Responding to his critics who asked of his religion, "what is it good for," Wesley claims "I do preach to as many as desire to hear, every night and morning. You ask, what I would do with them: I would make them virtuous and happy, easy in themselves, and useful to others."³¹¹ This mission reflects Wesley's own conversion narrative that he and his disciples repeated regularly in an attempt to recreate the experience in the hearts of their hearers: five years before, he wandered into a society on Aldersgate street and heard a preacher reading the words of Martin Luther's "Epistle to the Romans" and felt his "heart strangely warmed."³¹² In his journals, he marks the

³⁰⁹ John Wesley, *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, 10 vols. (London: J. & J. Harper, 1827), 8: 187.

³¹⁰ See particular Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit*.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 8:191.

³¹² Wesley describes this episode, perhaps the most well-known of any in his life, in his journal; see John Wesley, *The Heart of John Wesley's Journal*, ed. Percy Livingstone Parker (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1903), 43. For a more critical account of the veracity of this scenario and its later rhetorical and

years preceding this experience as a period of spiritual confusion, originating in his desire for a rational, comprehensible universe at the hands of a creator who could be easily explained. It does not take a great leap to suggest that Wesley saw his pre-Aldersgate experience as synonymous with the religion of his father. As the establishment aimed to inspire rational contemplation, Wesley's *Appeal* depicts the pulpit as the place for inciting social and behavioral change by displacing the rational religion so long in place in England. Much more the provocateur, George Whitefield attacked the establishment veneration of John Tillotson as a preaching model, spitefully (and perhaps symbolically) comparing him to "Mahomet." While Wesley encouraged Methodist leaders to ameliorate rather than exacerbate the tenuous connection between their inspiration-based movement and the rational religion of the Church of England, Whitefield's complaint affirms the growing sentiment that a sense of complacency and secular reason had overtaken any efforts to address the spiritual struggles of its parishioners.

Compared to the charismatic Whitefield, Wesley represents a more sedate faction of Methodism. After Whitefield's death in 1770, the term Methodism could be limited to those who followed Wesley because of his "endless manœuvres to retain control of them."³¹³ Wesley's organizational genius was in his ability to act equally as the inspirational and spiritual model for the movement and its foremost agent in uniting geographically and socially disparate followers toward a common cause. In the years before his death, Whitefield, who disliked administrative responsibilities, faced an already fracturing movement that would continue to diminish into the nineteenth

evangelical use as a conversion narrative, see Chapter IV, "The Road to Aldersgate Street: The Wesleys' Conversion" of Henry Rack's *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 137-157.

³¹³ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 286.

century.³¹⁴ Yet at their inaugural moments, the factions were largely untroubled as they pursued expansion through conversion. In those early years, Wesley defends his preaching by revealing the alarmist claims of his detractors as pure fiction. As the conciliatory title of his *Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* indicates, he does not provoke his critics by pointing out the staleness of their rationalism. Rather, he scrutinizes their critiques and responds with a rational argument built on a keen understanding of scripture that shows the theological integrity that underpinned the movement. In so doing, Wesley meets the conjectural claims of his establishment opponents by pointing out their fallacies, politely indicting their exclusive empire of reason that nonetheless failed to inform their critiques of Methodism. That rationalism, flawed both in argument and in spiritual practice, needed to be invigorated through a passionate momentum that Wesley and his pastors encouraged through the pulpit, not merely in spite of it. In one of his “appeals,” Wesley asks,

What then will your reason do here? How will it pass from things natural to spiritual; from the things that are seen to those that are not seen; from the visible to the invisible world? What a gulf is here! By what art will reason get over the immense chasm? This cannot be till the Almighty come in to your succor, and give you that faith you have hitherto despised. Then upborn, as it were, on eagles’ wings, you shall soar away into the regions of eternity; and your enlightened reason shall explore even “the deep things of God;” God himself “revealing them to you by his Spirit.”³¹⁵

Wesley shrewdly yet amicably shifts the interrogation to the questionable possibility of a rational belief that could exist outside of the thrall he describes here. The “gulf” is one that exists in all “men of reason and religion,” and must be bridged by a kind of proto-Kierkegaardian leap, an existential dilemma that exists outside of any rational category

³¹⁴ Henry D Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, 3rd ed (London: Epworth Press, 2002), 282–86.

³¹⁵ John Wesley, *The Works of the Reverend John Wesley, A. M.*, 10 vols. (New York: J. Emory and B. Waugh, 1831), 5:16.

and can only be encountered through religious faith. Far from advocating further separation, Wesley points out that he has merely offered a more complete and emotionally satisfying version of the Anglicanism of his youth. The appropriate response of his critics is similar to the contemporary responses of his audiences characterized by a physical reaction instead of a merely cerebral one.

As a preacher, Wesley did not employ the intense tactics of Whitefield or the fiery self-flagellating Calvinist Howell Harris did. The opening anecdote of this chapter reflects the narrative that many preachers of the Methodist movement enacted, turning from the referent of the text to the exhilarating marvel of the extemporaneous in order to affect more powerful audience responses. In his rules for preachers, first published in 1763, but probably circulated sooner in manuscript form, Wesley urges his itinerants, “Do not affect the gentleman. A preacher of the Gospel is the servant of all.”³¹⁶ Wesley’s concern was that the polish and posture of the establishment would alienate his listeners, and thus he encouraged a rustic simplicity combined with the passion of unrehearsed testimony and exhortation. Methodists appeared surprisingly similar to their converts because they frequently were. Itinerant preachers were often former tradesmen who had been recently converted and had decided to take up the unordained calling of field pastor. Despite some unease about the messages that were being disseminated, Wesley was supportive and encouraging toward these peripatetics, claiming, “I know that were I to preach one whole year in one place, I would preach both myself and most of my congregations to sleep.”³¹⁷ This statement can be read as an accusation against the establishment, and instills Halevy’s comment about the “extinct” nature of the

³¹⁶ Ibid., 5:219.

³¹⁷ Quoted in John Munsey Turner, *Conflict and Reconciliation: Studies in Methodism and Ecumenism in England 1740-1982*, 1st ed. (London: Epworth Press, 1985), 12.

establishment missionary spirit. The enduring legacy of the Methodists – their progress from a sect into a significant denomination both in England and in America – is largely due to their consistent disregard for the conventional wisdom of contemporaneous religious demeanor.

In his sermons, Wesley’s rhetorical strategy is a contrast to the teachings of the establishment because of the vigor he brings to the spiritual experience of the sermon. Though the language of his sermons is possessed by an intense seriousness that shows the influence of his Anglican background, his persuasive methods frequently point to a manner of inward response that cannot be found in reason alone. While his demeanor might suggest a composed rational clergyman, the sermons encourage his audiences to respond with the passion that characterized his own conversion at Aldersgate. In a 1742 sermon tellingly titled “Awake, Thou Sleepest,” Wesley brilliantly recreates his own conversion in the form of the sermon itself. The first half of the sermon is composed of a judicious explanation – a thorough delineation of the apathy that causes spiritual sleep. Wesley does not immediately attack those who should be awakened, calling this lethargic parishioner instead “a quiet, rational, inoffensive, good-natured professor of the religion of his fathers.”³¹⁸ While at points Wesley describes the “wretchedness” of this position, he mostly offers an undisparaging description of those for whom “spiritual sensation itself is . . . the foolishness of folly.” In these lucid analyses, Wesley shows an understanding of the concerns that possess those who reject the devout inward reactions that he will later attempt to animate. However, he sets up this rational actor in the clearest language so that he can deconstruct the sterility that stifles true religion.

³¹⁸ John Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions*, vol. 1 (London:T. Tegg, 1829), 17.

If I speak to any one of you, more than to another, it is to thee, who thinkest thyself unconcerned in this exhortation. "I have a message from God unto thee." In his name, I warn thee "to flee from the wrath to come." Thou unholy soul, see thy picture in condemned Peter, lying in the dark dungeon, between the soldiers, bound with two chains, the keepers before the door keeping the prison. The night is far spent, the morning is at hand, when thou art to be brought forth to execution. And in these dreadful circumstances, thou art fast asleep; thou art fast asleep in the devil's arms, on the brink of the pit, in the jaws of everlasting destruction!³¹⁹

The dual voices in "Awake, Thou Sleepest" reveal Wesley's skill for ventriloquizing a sedate and crippling reason only to show what it is: an inadequate remedy for the spiritual stagnation that has become so widespread. Wesley responds with vivid images of condemnation designed to stir the passive believer out of apathy: the images of the "pit," the "devil's arm," and the "jaws of everlasting destruction" would not be out of place in Jonathan Edwards' *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* (1741). Wesley's audiences most likely responded likewise, identifying themselves as those who "sleep" and letting the sermon stir them out of complacency. While he did not operate with the same kind of inflection and charisma of Whitefield, Wesley constructs his sermons to animate conversions to a new spiritual happiness that can only be found outside of the conventional wisdom of the establishment.

As Goldsmith's passage reveals, even establishment critics could not deny the efficacy of Methodist preaching. As I will show in my next section, the critics who attack their pulpit stylings do so on grounds of production rather than reception. Goldsmith's sympathetic response to Methodism offers one example of an opposing doctrinaire who might nonetheless be energized by adopting Methodist tactics. Yet to the deist Benjamin Franklin, Whitefield's preaching was equally a scientific phenomenon. Theologically,

³¹⁹ Ibid.

Whitefield and Franklin could not have been more different: the former firm in his predetermined Calvinism, the latter a rational deist suspicious of evangelical motives. Given this chasm between their respective religious beliefs, the sincerity and genuine respect that grew out of their friendship is inspirational in its bridging of what could have been divisive differences. The relationship began because of business motives, as Whitefield needed Franklin to print and publish his sermons, yet continued into a friendship because of shared political values and mutual respect.³²⁰ Later, the shared cause of revolution made them political allies as well, as they became vocal leaders of the opposition to the Stamp Act.

In his *Autobiography* (1771-90), Franklin describes Whitefield as a mentor and an influence, while distancing himself from Whitefield's Christian orthodoxy. Whitefield rose to the defense of his friend and later served as a character witness when Franklin controversially appeared in England before Parliament. As opposite extremists on religious matters, they found themselves close political compatriots. In the *Autobiography*, Franklin's laudatory, perhaps even hyperbolic, description of Whitefield's preaching offers a key account of the oral factors of the Methodists' success. Perhaps predictably given his secular humanism, Franklin never discusses the content of these sermons, but instead vividly articulates Whitefield's general ability to hold an audience captive, and more particularly to his nearly otherworldly ability to reach even the most distant listeners wherever they stood. Describing an outdoor sermon before "streets

³²⁰ See Harry S. Stout, "George Whitefield and Benjamin Franklin: Thoughts on a Peculiar Friendship," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 103 (1991): 9-2. As Stout notes, both authors also "left their contemporaries and later historians with a carefully scripted role that forever hid the man behind the prose" in presenting narratives "of self-made men who, through sheer determination, tapped the new forces reshaping their society" (13). In a speculative psychological claim, Stout also contends that "both suffered an emptiness in their private lives that they filled with unceasing public service" (14)

... fill'd with his hearers to a considerable distance," Franklin decided to see exactly how far Whitefield's words could be comprehended.³²¹ After walking from one end of the street to the other, Franklin "computed that [Whitefield] might well be heard by more than thirty thousand," which reconciles him to "to the newspaper accounts of his having preach'd to twenty-five thousand people in the fields, and to the antient histories of generals haranguing whole armies, of which I had sometimes doubted."³²² Ever the scientific enthusiast, Franklin is more interested in the audible than the spiritual. Yet his comparison to those incongruous accounts of ancient orators and generals is telling because it bridges a connection between vocal performance and audience response. Whitefield's performance allows Franklin to account for the power of rhetoric both historically and contemporarily. Also, this analysis from an opposing religious perspective offers an objective report of the force that converts had experienced firsthand.

In Franklin's further praise, however, lies the seed of suspicion (here, an amicable one) toward the apparently artless nature of this kind of preaching. When he summarizes his further experiences hearing Whitefield, Franklin remarks on his continual improvement:

By hearing him often, I came to distinguish easily between sermons newly compos'd, and those which he had often preach'd in the course of his travels. His delivery of the latter was so improv'd by frequent repetitions that every accent, every emphasis, every modulation of voice, was so perfectly well turn'd and well plac'd, that, without being interested in the subject, one could not help being pleas'd with the discourse; a pleasure of much the same kind with that receiv'd from an excellent piece of musick. This is an advantage itinerant preachers have over those who are stationary, as the latter can not well improve their delivery of a sermon by so many rehearsals.³²³

³²¹ Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Penguin, 1986), 120.

³²² *Ibid.*

³²³ Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, 120.

Franklin continues to extol Whitefield's ability, but connects that improvement to "repetitions," "rehearsals," and the persistent attitude of perfection that caused Whitefield to dedicate himself constantly to rhetorical self-training. If part of the phenomenon of Whitefield's preaching skill was that it came so naturally, from inspiration and spiritual gifts rather than intense rehearsal, Franklin points out that the act of preaching itself is still a premeditated one. The "advantage" that Franklin contends itinerant preachers have over those situated in a local parish suggests that itinerants use their travels to test and improve their rhetorical conceits. The comparison between the sermon and a piece of music extends Franklin's interest in the aesthetic rather than the spiritual, further implying a prior organization through comparison with another artistic form. At no point does this become a criticism of Whitefield or the movement. Yet such an understanding of the development of technique suggests that the momentary phenomenon is rooted not in inspiration but in incessant fine-tuning and elocutionary improvement.

The intimation of rehearsal challenges the classification of a truly "extemporaneous act," connecting its success to one crafted through an incorporation of the artificial methods of invention found in the rhetorical tradition. David Garrick, in Whitefield's time the most celebrated actor in England, shared Franklin's sense of awe, but insinuates a similar suspicion that no speaker can be that effective from inspiration alone. Himself a master of moving the passions, Garrick nonetheless marveled at Whitefield's ability to "weep or tremble merely by varying his pronunciation of the word Mesopotamia."³²⁴ Garrick confirms the identity of Whitefield as what Harry Stout calls a

³²⁴ Quoted in Mahaffey, *Preaching Politics*, 47.

“Divine Dramatist.”³²⁵ When Garrick the actor comments on Whitefield’s oral ability, he suggests the performative qualities that Methodists often claimed to suppress. Rather than unplanned, one can picture Whitefield, like Garrick, practicing the “o”s that would have made “Mesopotamia” roll so musically off his tongue. Even in praise, there is an aura of suspicion – however sympathetic – on top of the celebratory language that suggests that, at their root, Methodist practices were finely honed rather than extemporaneous, plotted through methods of rehearsal and calculated self-projection. In an early biography of Whitefield, the Scottish minister John Gillies also speculates about the source for his performance of inspiration:

He had a strong and musical voice, and a wonderful command of it. His pronunciation was not only proper, but manly and graceful. Nor was he ever at a loss for the most natural and strong expressions. Yet these in him were but lower qualities. The grand sources of his eloquence were, an exceeding lively imagination, which made people think they saw what he described; an action still more lively, if possible, by which, while every accent of his voice spoke to the ear, every feature of his face, every motion of his hands and body, spoke to the eye; so that the most dissipated and thoughtless found their attention involuntarily fixed, and the dullest and most ignorant could not but understand.³²⁶

In Gillies too, the “lively imagination” is tellingly described as a “source” of his eloquence, emphasizing a prior conception to those “natural and strong expressions.” Further, Gillies describes Whitefield as operating on a firm, perhaps even shrewd, understanding of the psychology of his audiences, tailoring sermons so that “the dullest and most ignorant” were captivated. While clearly pithier than Gillies’ praise, Garrick’s flattering quotation also suggests preconceived tactics perfected through Whitefield’s long experience among provincial audiences. Rather than preaching from the heart, these

³²⁵ See Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1991). Stout connects Whitefield’s early fascination with the theater with the dramatic intensity of his preaching.

³²⁶ John Gillies, *Memoirs of the Life of the Reverend George Whitefield* (London, 1801), 75.

critics claim, Whitefield employed an ever-increasing, time-tested bag of rhetorical tricks that could be applied to an appropriate occasion. Seizing on this, anti-Methodist critics began an elaborate attempt to make visible these tactics so the passionate itinerants would be easily identified as counterfeit spiritualists using premeditated rhetorical conceits.

If the congratulatory praise of Franklin, Garrick, and Gillies offers the seeds for condemnation, appraisers with more at stake would capitalize on the apparent artifice of Methodist preaching to displace the Methodists from the platform they had developed, a forum in which they could appear as speaking forcefully from the heart. As accounts of Whitefield celebrate the “wonderful command” that Gillies describes, critics had to denaturalize it. As my next section reveals, turning the “features” and “motions” into a rhetorical device allows critics a space to conceive of the Methodists as possessing a shrewdness that belied their attractive purity.

“Hosannas of the Giddy Mob”: Theorizing Extemporary Discourse

When attacking and attempting to cauterize Methodism, anti-Methodists primarily attempt to deconstruct the sermons that they view as giving the movement its earliest and continuing success. This leads to them to visualize scenes of intense spiritual fervor ignited by a preacher whose aims, they contend, were less than honest. It also requires critics to challenge the ethos of the highest and lowest orders of Methodism: whether Wesley and Whitfield or the itinerants their movement spawned. Writing in his journal on December 5, 1739, Wesley describes the effect of his preaching on a woman who was “raving mad, screaming and tormenting herself continually.”³²⁷ He explains, “I had a strong desire to speak to her. The moment I began [preaching] she was still.” Wesley’s calming of the mad-woman can be seen as a counter-image to the sharpest rejoinders that

³²⁷ Quoted from Wesley, *The Heart of John Wesley’s Journal*, 46.

would be leveled against both him and his movement; that counter-image, of parishioners going mad and interpreting that madness as an inspirational call, is an attack on the susceptibility of workers and rustics to be preached a gospel they cannot understand. Theophilus Evans, one of the most vocal opponents of all forms of religious enthusiasm, writes that the Methodists possess, “the natural tendency of their behaviour, in voice and gesture and horrid expressions, to make people mad, which very frequently has indeed been the case with a great many of their followers.”³²⁸ Methodism and madness were two sides of the same coin, or at least they could be, and this was the characterization their attackers aimed to propagate.

Emphasizing the artificiality of a discourse, marking the means through which a speaker attempts to achieve his or her persuasive intent, dissects substance from performance and emphasizes the latter in an attempt to oppose appearance to reality. In Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s terms, this is the critical act of “branding discourse as a device.”³²⁹ In *The New Rhetoric*, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca note, “The transformation of an act into a means often destroys the fortunate effects it could have: it is disqualified as a ‘device.’” They add, “It is often sufficient to qualify what has been said as ‘rhetorical’ to rob it of its effectiveness.”³³⁰ Emphasizing the artificiality of a discourse, marking the means through which a speaker attempts to achieve his or her persuasive intent, dissects substance from performance and emphasizes the latter in an attempt to oppose appearance and reality. This dissociation “affects the discourse itself”

³²⁸ Theophilus Evans, *The History of Modern Enthusiasm, from the Reformation to the Present Times* (London, 1757), 110.

³²⁹ Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, 453.

³³⁰ Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 450.

and “strike[s] the hearer as a process.”³³¹ Crucially, much of the impetus for the dissociation between the verbal and the real is predicated on the values that the auditor does or does not share with the speaker. Anti-Methodists sought to undermine the Methodist movement through a selective criticism of its protocols.

These attacks are motivated by a diverse, perhaps indecipherable collection of theological, political, and social interests, yet what is most germane to this project (and overlooked elsewhere) is their targeting of rhetorical practice as a way of exposing Methodist preaching and containing its effects. These strategies are linked insofar as they dissociate inward purpose and outward expression, or reality and appearance. Together, they brand the pathos of Methodist preaching as a device. By doing so, contemporary critics externalize Methodist faith in such a way that it can be critiqued as a mere performance dominated by factors that reveal its calculated formation, which challenges the unique feature on which the public face of the movement relied. For these critics, the performance of faith should be refined, not given to immediate reaction. In attacking Wesley and his followers, they seek to perpetuate a legacy of preaching from which the Methodists deviated.

The inward motions that the Methodists came to rely on were ostensibly a defiance of the artificial and a reliance on the truly spiritual. In a nearly uniform critical posture, anti-Methodists would reverse what Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca note in their analysis of “rhetoric as process.” Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca discussing the way the exposure of a “process” can be avoided:

To avoid the accusation of ‘device,’ a better explanation of the behavior must be given . . . Thus the cult of spontaneity in art, and the presentation of art as a means

³³¹ Ibid., 450–51.

to social or religious ends, are different ways of showing that the techniques of the artist are not devices.³³²

In this analysis, spontaneity appears as a more authentic alternative to the premeditated rhetorical “device.” To their opponents, the Methodists definitely must have seemed, to employ the terms of *The New Rhetoric* in a different way, as a “cult of spontaneity” that kept drawing new members. The anti-Methodists’ critical effort reverses Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s terms by proving that such seemingly natural discourse was actually the product of carefully designed artistic proofs. It was a challenge that critics met with intense fervor, though never quite successfully.

Since Methodists claimed that their intense spiritual devotion led to feelings of inspiration that were authentic expressions of spiritual passion, exposing the rhetorical enterprise of preaching became a means of highlighting the enterprising yet dubious aims of preachers who privileged passion over reason. If Methodists consistently claimed that inspiration came from within, and that such motivation was not premeditated, establishment Anglicans argued that it came from outside, the result of calculated methods designed to appear spontaneous. In *The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compared* (1754), George Lavington describes “this new dispensation” as a “composition of enthusiasm,”³³³ a sentiment shared throughout attacks and diagnoses of Methodists. In many attacks, this evangelical enthusiasm is portrayed not as a disorder of the mind, but as a calculated method with obvious techniques that need to be described so that auditors can recognize them as a counterfeit spirituality. Rather than being produced by frenzied imaginations, it instead targeted them. Out of necessity, this strategy reverses the “rhetoric as process” that Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca note, which acts as a

³³² Ibid., 273.

³³³ George Lavington, *The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compared*, vol. 1 (London, 1754), 99.

“devaluation [which] reaches the point where the spontaneous, unprepared speech, whatever its imperfections, is preferred to the considered, premeditated speech which the hearer considers as a device.”³³⁴ Lavington inverts this devaluation toward the “unprepared speech” and instead marks the apparently improvised moment as a planned rhetorical conception. This could especially be seen in the case of texts like *The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compared*, which sought to demystify and offer self-interested motives for enthusiastic rhetoric.

Anti-Methodists found it crucial to emphasize an “off-book” sermon through the negative association of “rhetoric as process,” going to great lengths to theorize the unseemliness *and* the impossibility of spontaneity that the Methodists were pursuing. In this regard, one of the common turns of phrase in anti-Methodist sermons is to refer to itinerant preachers as “mechanics.” In his 1767 poem *The Methodist*, Evan Lloyd mockingly writes that “Evr’y Mechanic will commence / Orator, without mood or Tense” and then narrates a catalog of rustic laborers who decide to take the road as preachers.³³⁵ For instance, a “Baker, now a *Preacher* grown, / Finds Man *lives not by Bread alone*, / And now his Customers he feeds / With *Pray’rs*, with *Sermons*, *Groans*, and *Creeds*.”³³⁶ Like other satirists writing about the emerging phenomenon of lay preachers, Lloyd relies on two connotations of “mechanic,” both as one skilled (often only) in perfunctory but mindless tasks, but also as a description for the preaching such laborers would employ: contrived, derivative, often plagiarized, aimed for raising emotions rather than participating in the rational discourse of polite preaching. The anonymous author of the

³³⁴ Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 451.

³³⁵ Evan Lloyd, *The Methodist. A Poem. By Evan Lloyd Author of The Powers of the Pen, and The Curate.* (London, 1766), 32.

³³⁶ *Ibid*, 33.

1778 poem *The Fanatic Saints* complains of the even more dangerous, if harder to substantiate, results of this apparently specious call to service, by connecting the deficiency to a crisis of authority and duty that leads to an unkempt natural landscape. In a footnote, the author analyzes the now-fomented religion on its inaugural terms, claiming that Whitefield “blew up the embers of hypocrisy to such a flame” that “the agriculture of some counties was almost totally neglected, and other species of mechanic Labour ceased.”³³⁷ Making the link even more explicit, Samuel Bowden’s *The Mechanic Inspir’d* (1754) argues that sermons are produced through a mindless but repetitive labor: “Where weavers expound, as they sit at a loom; / Where mechanics inspir’d, the gospel explain, / And weave at a text, as well as a chain.”³³⁸ Bowden’s characterization of the lay-preacher as a weaver at a loom strikes back against claims to inspiration, arguing that even the rustic itinerants are more calculated than they appear. Having no training and no ordination, they had to be. Yet in their vituperative satirical aim, Bowden and Lloyd betray an anxiety toward the success of the Methodists that requires them to explain these uneducated amateurs who were “commenc[ing] orator.” The need to explain this phenomenon, even by mocking it, occupies a large portion of attacks on Methodists. The unconvincing answer by these satirists – that laborers untrained in preaching were actually shrewd improvisers with covert motives – testifies to the pressure that such critics felt by the growing population of Methodist converts and their encroachment on a threatened establishment.

One of the more prominent and provocative pieces of anti-Methodist literature, Theophilus Evans’ *The History of Modern Enthusiasm* (1757), develops a genealogy of

³³⁷ Anonymous, *The Fanatic Saints; or, Bedlamites Inspired* (London, 1778), 9.

³³⁸ Samuel Bowden, *Poems on Various Subjects* (London, 1754), 213.

enthusiasm and speculates on its effects in an age of tolerance that has allowed such figures as Wesley to continue to prosper. The general thesis of Evans, A Welsh clergyman provoked by the growing number of converts in the area, is that enthusiasm eventually leads to atheism. He also begins by announcing, “Methodism is now almost quite extinct.”³³⁹ In 1757, he could not have been more wrong. While the *History* focuses on several branches of enthusiasm, historical and contemporary (Quakers, Ranters, Anabaptists), Evans dedicates two chapters to the Methodists and the most significant influence on them, the German Moravians. As Goring indicates, Evans depicts enthusiasm as a “singular and monstrously deviant force, manifesting itself in offensive bodily behavior.”³⁴⁰ He claims that true forms of inspiration might exist, particularly in the tradition of poetic enthusiasm that can be traced to Socrates’ divine madness,³⁴¹ but that such behaviors are dangerous and almost always lead to negative effects rooting from an “eager Zeal violently attached to some extravagant Opinion or other.”³⁴² Evans’ most compelling contribution to anti-Methodist discourse lies in his explicit speculation that enthusiasm can be used rhetorically as a means to impel audiences. The “impostor,” Evans writes, “acts against the Dictates of his own Conscience, pretends to Raptures and Visions knowing they are counterfeit and false, and his sole Purpose is to deceive knowing himself to be a Deceiver.”³⁴³ The *appearance* of enthusiasm can be just as powerful as the thing itself, and Evans dedicates himself to exposing the techniques and methods that such “impostors” usually employ.

³³⁹ Evans, *The History of Modern Enthusiasm*, b.

³⁴⁰ Goring, *The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 76.

³⁴¹ See Chapter 1, “Of Natural Enthusiasm,” of Evans, *The History of Modern Enthusiasm*, .

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*

Evans spends much time describing the actual tactics that Methodist preachers employ when facing crowds. For instance, he impersonates the style of a Methodist preacher replete with the overwhelming repetition of a fire-and-brimstone message:

The preacher now grows more tempestuous and dreadful in his manner of address, stamps and shrieks, and endeavours all he can to increase the rising consternation, which is sometimes spread over a great part of the assembly in a few minutes from its first appearance. And to compleat the Work, the Preacher has his recourse still to more frightful representations; that he sees Hell-flames slashing in their faces; and that they are now! Now! Now! Dropping into hell! Into the bottom of hell! The bottom hell! This boisterous Method seldom or never fails to set them screaming.³⁴⁴

Evans emphasizes that a lack of sanction from an authorizing denomination allows *anyone* to be a preacher, and he clearly hopes to instill this suspicion in audiences who view Methodist sermons. In imitating Methodist speech, and particularly tactics such as the repetition of imperatives (“Now! Now!”), Evans highlights the artificiality and plays on the word “method” in order to link overwrought rhetoric with false spirituality. Evans elsewhere writes that the “general Method is to turn Exhorter,” and that “every one of these illiterate vagrants pretends to expound by Inspiration.”³⁴⁵ Evans cites *The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compar'd* in viewing the Methodists as pursuing a “composition of enthusiasm.” By echoing and reapplying this allusion, Evans characterizes such preaching as a calculated attempt to inspire what he calls “the hosannas of the giddy mob.”³⁴⁶ Throughout this text, the unsanctioned vehement preaching must be moderated through a kind of censorship. Because itinerant preachers operated outside of any sanction, they could obviously rely only on “frightful

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 119.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 116.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 111.

representations” to inculcate not mere belief, but the shrieking “hosannas” that signify assimilation through calculated emotional proofs.

In a less earnest presentation, George Alexander Stevens’ enormously popular 1764 dramatic production, *Lecture upon Heads*, reproduces the stylistic excesses of Methodist preaching in a burlesque form. This extended monologue features paper-mâché busts and wig blocks and allows Stevens to riff on contemporary and historical types as far-ranging as Alexander the Great and a Billingsgate Fishwife. The most popular character, the Methodist Parson, appears last in the presentation and is often reproduced out of context in revues or in introductory routines appended to plays.³⁴⁷ The rest of the characters are presented as genial and well-meaning, if ultimately daft and misguided. Yet perhaps because of the Methodist opposition to the theater, the Parson is a particularly vicious caricature. Clearly meant to be a negative version of George Whitefield, he looks “with one eye . . . up to Heaven” and with the other, “he looks down to see what he can get.”³⁴⁸ Evans’ satire of Whitefield’s motives works through a familiar attack on his severely-crossed eyes that alternately made him an easy target for insults regarding his appearance *and* such an unforgettable presence to his listeners.

When the Parson is finally allowed to give a speech, Stevens ventriloquizes the same repetition that Evans replicates and lampoons the assonance and alliteration used to provoke reaction. He opens by shouting, “Bretheren! Bretheren! Bretheren! The word bretheren comes from the tabernacle, because we all breathe there-in – if you want

³⁴⁷ For an exhaustive account on the popularity and production history of Stevens’ work see the introduction to *George Alexander Stevens and the Lecture on Heads*, ed. Gerald Kahan (Athens: Georgia UP, 2008). It is from this edition that I quote the *Lecture*.

³⁴⁸ George Alexander Stevens, *George Alexander Stevens and the Lecture on Heads*, 89.

rousing, I'll rouze you."³⁴⁹ He continues by calling attention to his own rhetorical prowess as a sign of inspiration, spiritual integrity, and evangelical motive: "from the top of my voice, will I bawl . . . and the sweet words that I shall utter, shall sugar candy over your souls."³⁵⁰ By announcing the method by which he preaches, he reveals it to be designed to give false assurance and to incite rapturous responses. The Parson's motive is clearly financial, as the repetitive language recurs in the conclusion when the parson reminds his listeners of their monetary obligation. After warning about the ways of the devils, he exhorts the audience to address the temptation by tithing. The dramatic gesture closes the play, as the parson shouts, "Do put some money in the plate – Put some money in the plate; - and then all your iniquities shall be scalded away, even as they scald the bristles off the hogs back; and you shall be cleansed from all your sins, as easily as the barber shaveth away the weekly beard from the chin of the ungodly."³⁵¹ While audiences found Stevens' burlesque uproarious, they were also witness to the spectacle of Methodist preaching and given its suspicious financial motive. For Stevens and his audience, preachers like Whitefield were deliberate charlatans who crafted sermons to swindle their rustic prey. Stevens' caricature of Whitefield implies that to debunk Methodists, one only needed to see one in action. The classist assumptions underneath such a critique are obvious: to an Anglican elite, the Methodists can be seen for the fools they clearly are. The urban and rural working classes, however, were easy prey for these tactics because of their inability to respond to such scenes with an appropriate level of critical repose. However, Stevens' barbed portrayal did not take into account the growing

³⁴⁹ Ibid, 89.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ Ibid., 90.

number from the leisured class who were participating in and financially supporting the Methodist cause.

In addition to claiming that they deduce and exploit the Methodists' financial motives, anti-Methodists also aim to depict Whitefield using his sexual charisma to provoke female audiences. Given the prim character of the establishment, these sexual speculations showed that Methodist arousal of passion aimed at an altogether unspiritual effect. Stevens' "lecture" is rife with scatological language and insinuations of sexual deviances. The Parson's crossed eyes have opposing purposes; one is spiritual, while the other is carnal. When he begins by announcing, "If ye want rousing, I'll rouze you," Stevens emphasizes that the seductive potential of Methodist discourse lies in a spiritual deception that has a decidedly sexual motive toward the women (and perhaps men) in his audience. Though Stevens operates at the level of farcical caricature, he might be recalling the early romantic behavior of bachelor preachers like Whitefield and Howell Harris.³⁵² The "rousing" works as both a threat and a promise and, given the sexual connotation the language of his following lines reveals, his increasingly seductive aims: "the organ pipes of my lungs shall play a voluntary among ye; and the sweet words that I shall utter, shall sugar candy over your souls, and make carraway comforts of your consciences."³⁵³ In explicitly broadcasting his hypnotic abilities, the parson's arrogance extends to his belief in an irresistible sexual control. In order to "rouze" his listeners, he will utter "sweet words" that will make their consciences submissive and susceptible. Such Methodist "sweetness" eradicates any rational faculties that might put up an

³⁵² See Watts 418-420. Before marrying, Harris had several romantic interests over the courses of his travels. After marrying, Watts writes, "[Since] Mrs. Harris refused to accompany her husband on his evangelistic tours, he took with him in her place the wife of Caernarvonshire squire, and the indignant squired replied by threatening to kill the Welsh Methodist leader" (419).

³⁵³ Stevens, *George Alexander Stevens and the Lecture on Heads*, 90.

adequate defense. Stevens devalues spiritual conversion by linking its efficacy with a worldly desire for seduction.

If rhetorical deviance can be interpreted as sexual in Stevens' portrayal, the anonymous 1763 satire, *A Plain and Easy Road to the Land of Bliss set up by Mr. Orator; on which a man may travel more miles in one day, than on any other highway in forty years*, asserts that Whitefield's sexual charisma is his primary, devious method for attracting converts. Building off the brilliant absurdity of Jonathan Swift's *A Tale of A Tub*, *A Plain and Easy Road* acts as its unauthorized sequel, moving from the allegorical divisions of Martin (the Church of England), Peter (the Catholic Church), and Jack (Calvinists) to the briefly mentioned Eolists (presented here without the diphthong that Swift uses).³⁵⁴ In Swift, the AEolists stand in for a radical dissent that surpasses even Jack's rigid nonconformists. For this sect, belching is "the noblest act of a rational creature," as such winds "pervade and enliven the Universe."³⁵⁵ By caricaturing the uncontrollable impulses of a body no longer grotesque but now endowed with a sense of spiritual purpose, Swift highlights ridiculous religious practices that are ordered according to absurd feats of interpretation, and disseminated through media proliferation. Yet even in their charlatan performances, the narrator cannot deny the effectiveness of "subterraneous Effluviiums of the winds" and "Oratorical gusts" on the too-malleable

³⁵⁴ As the title indicates, the Eolists create an easier path to heaven, reflecting the misguided pilgrims in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* who attempt to steer Christian to by-ways, secret passages, and shortcuts to the Celestial City. In particular, the spiritual leader of the AEolists, Mr.Orator _____ might be seen as recasting of Bunyan's Worldly-Wiseman as a contemporary evangelist. The writer also channels Laurence Sterne with excursions into discussions about textuality itself, writing a chapter on chapters that questions the necessity of divisions and deviations in contemporary novels while justifying his own need to use them. As expected, these sections show none of the gothic invention of Bunyan, nor the sharp wit and innovation of Sterne. If anything, the aspects most like Sterne and Bunyan might be read not as homage but as spoof, yet even in that sense it is a not a very sharp send-up of either author.

³⁵⁵ Jonathan Swift, *A Tale of a Tub and Other Works*, ed. Marcus Walsh (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), 101.

mind of uneducated rustics and, in typical Swiftian misogyny, women, “whose Organs were understood to be better disposed for the Admission of those Oratorical Gusts.”³⁵⁶ Picking up where Swift leaves off, *A Plain and Easy Road* is most compelling when it attempts to justify the Methodist’s preaching power by emulating the rhetorical strategy of Swift’s hack who is “an embodiment of the zeal, enthusiasm, and various kinds of eccentricity which he may *seem* to talk about satirically.”³⁵⁷ By putting figures such as Whitefield and Wesley in lineage with the dangerous fanaticism of the seventeenth century, the author fashions an imaginative account of the motives that attend Methodist conversion.

The narrative of *A Plain and Easy Road* focuses on the rise of Mr. Orator _____, who is so clearly meant to resemble Whitefield that the author includes exact dates and incidents from his life to distinguish him from other Methodist figures. The author satirically acts as the kind of enthusiastic disciple whom Mr. Orator creates through forceful rhetoric, defending him adamantly against an Anglican soteriology that stresses individual morality as a prerequisite for salvation. By contrast, the Eolists exhort a practical judgment and reductive spiritual code divorced of any doctrinal affiliation. In a large sense, their skill in making converts relies on the expedient and less stringent vehicle for salvation they propose, yet the writer continues to exhort their methods. But the Eolists are primarily successful because, as in Swift, they use powerful “puffs” with which the Orator is able to fill his audiences. Seeking to belittle those Methodist converts who hung on every word of preachers such as Whitefield and who acted without deliberation, the author of *A Plain and Easy Road* goes into more elaborate detail in

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 102.

³⁵⁷ Ronald Paulson, *Theme and Structure in Swift’s Tale of a Tub* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1972), 29.

condescendingly describing the stirring of evangelical impulses in the audience. After hearing Mr. Orator, the zealous “holders-forth” internalize the message and carry it forth into their communities:

As then it is the property of air to rush in from all sides toward the rarefied part, it happeneth – that when any well-qualified holders-forth chuse to take a walk into the country for the edifying of the brethren, or the conversion of reprobates, they empty themselves to a very few globles of air – the heat of their zeal immediately rarefies what remains; so that (as I said before) they become next door to a walking vacuum. The business thus advanced, if they pass by any barn or field, the thrasher in the one, and the plower in the other, (if *Eolists*) begin in an involuntary manner, to move. The air within the orator – and for a certain circle without, being, by hot zeal, attenuated, causes that which is contain’d within the thrasher, or the plowman, immediately to have a tendency towards it; upon which their insides become tickled . . . This wonderful rarefaction draws also your mowers, swine-dwellers, carters, nay farmers themselves, to leave their servants to do just as they please, for weeks and days on end.³⁵⁸

Driven by impulse, the passion spreads all over the countryside, inspiring more of the “brethren” to “leave their servants to do just as they please.” Similar to the example from Evan Lloyd’s *The Methodist* I quote above, this passage combines mockery and anxiety in its descriptions of mechanics and agricultural laborers who give up their trade to become untutored evangelists because of “a few globles of air.” A single sermon has the potential to disrupt the pastoral landscape with a zealous fervor that can be replicated merely because of the inspired passions of its listeners. We can view the wind as a kind of extemporaneous speech, yet the author’s description of its generation and ultimate effects characterizes the phenomenon of itinerant preachers as an endless chain of replication in which the message is corrupted further as it goes from Mr. Orator’s mouth into the bodies of its converts, and through their evangelical efforts.

³⁵⁸ Anonymous, *A Plain and Easy Road to the Land of Bliss, a Turnpike Set up by Mr. Orator -; on Which a Man May Travel More Miles in One Day, Than on any Other Highway in Forty Years. With a Dedication, such as Never Was, or Will be, in Vogue.* (London, 1762), 83–85.

The Plain and Easy Road provides a complicated, fantastical origin story for Whitefield's ability to attract audiences rooted in his ability to connect kinetically with his audiences. In this case, the emerging scientific discourse of magnetism serves to explain the paradox of Methodist attraction. In an increasingly absurd series of events, perhaps drawing on the burgeoning genre of the gothic, Mr. Orator _____ has a dream in which he travels to the south of France and ends up in a hidden underground domain, where a charismatic figure named Towdrionello, "the great founder and encourager of magnetical experiment,"³⁵⁹ holds sway over an audience of mostly female listeners. When Towdrionello "used violent motions with his head, face, and hands," women are compelled toward him by magnetic force. Thus follows similar depictions of magnetism toward "the wife of a custom house officer," "a fat, hard-favour'd lady," and "very pretty nun."³⁶⁰ Desiring the same ability, Mr. Orator _____ speaks to a "charming maid" who tells him that the speaker's gift comes from his ability to apply "this most efficacious magnetic operation."³⁶¹ After a lengthy discussion in which Mr. Orator strangely restates, with little variation, everything that the reader has just seen happen to him, the woman explains that Towdrionello "has found out that, in every male and female, there is much magnetic virtue, and that what we call Love is a forcible exertion of it: That the female carries about her the magnet, and the male bears the needle: That the attraction between them is not – like your common magnet and needle; that is to say, polar; no, 'tis equatorial."³⁶²

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 102.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 104–05.

³⁶¹ Ibid., 110.

³⁶² Ibid., 116.

In this fanciful explanation, the author depicts the magnetic reaction between speaker and audience as a consubstantial one. Audiences respond to the speaker because they share the same subversive desires to attain individual worth outside of a traditional authority such as the establishment church. By connecting these forces to nature, enacted through the irresistible and coercive powers of Towdrionello and later Mr. Orator _____ after his dream journey, the author shows that artificial processes inhabit the persuasive moment and become naturalized through association with a mystical internal process, a spiritual stirring that cannot be represented but must be taken as a profound act of faith. As it is elucidated here in the use of female bodies drawn in through the intensity of magnetic attraction, the rational explanation of this power becomes associated with a sexual seduction that lures the object of seduction through calculated acts crafted to appear as an internal force. Attributed to a powerful spirituality, the manufactured force is instead deviously coded as natural, thus giving it an even greater allure. In this satire, magnetism is symbolic of the superstitions that surround Methodist rhetoric and the use of such spectacle to target audiences who cannot resist it. The claims of calculated sexual seduction do not only apply to the more apparently predatory acts attributed to Howell Harris, but also become evident in the delivery of Methodist messages to audiences too dull-witted to resist them. This condescending posture toward the very audiences that critics aimed to influence surely did not help their cause.

Thomas Green's *Dissertation on Enthusiasm* (1755) is a much calmer consideration of the Methodists and their use of the extemporaneous, yet it nonetheless employs some of the same techniques as other texts presenting a fraudulent methodology passed off as pure. Green dedicates a large part of his *Dissertation* to dissecting the

connection between extemporaneous performance and spiritual assistance. He explains the typical signs that should be seen as contrived: audience members should not “mistake the suggestions of a heated imagination for an extraordinary illumination of the Spirit.”³⁶³

He writes,

but those sudden emotions raised by that means in the breasts of the hearers, (which they consider as a true and spiritual edification) may be excited in a great measure by unusual tones of voice, solemn affected looks, vehemency of words and action, warm exclamations and the like means.³⁶⁴

Also, Green explains, a typical extemporaneous performance will begin with a preacher petitioning God for inspiration. However, given what a calculated endeavor this is, such a gesture can even be read as blasphemous. Green’s purpose is ultimately didactic – the extemporaneous is, he writes, “evidently the effect of art and study,” and his goal is to inform audiences of its feigned nature.³⁶⁵

By calling attention the factors of production, anti-Methodists are unified in highlighting supposedly unforced moments of inspiration as rhetorical rather than spiritual. Doing so allows them to reduce the Methodists’ rise to a styled intensity formulated to ignite those most vulnerable to pathetic appeals. In policing the rigid standards that spiritual response should take in a polite age, Methodist critics stress a proper model of audience reaction predicated on an understanding of the signs of false enthusiasm. To avoid the possible hostilities that writers such as Glanvill and Burnet attempt to ameliorate through rational discourse, these critics turn toward a category of deceptive rhetoric and, throughout these voluminous texts, announce its specious presence. Methodism is effective because it targets, Green writes, “ignorant persons;

³⁶³ Thomas Green, *A Dissertation on Enthusiasm* (London, 1755), 2.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

whereas the wiser part of mankind are only to be moved by reason and sound arguments.”³⁶⁶ In closing, Green warns, “Christians must then be careful that they mistake not upon any occasions the sudden motions of the *animal* or natural spirits for divine and spiritual operations; or be deceived with the outward appearance of godliness, without the inward power and virtue of it.”³⁶⁷ Simply, for Green, Christians must be suspicious of orators. Sincerity operates through a plain style that announces its own transparency and simplicity; anything else must be seen as a calculation on the part of the rhetor.

As presented, the stakes for the established church are articulated in terms of practice, but take on their polemical power through a general understanding of imagined consequences. By describing practice, through the grotesque presentational form a Methodist sermon takes, establishment figures could focus on the moment from which impolite revolt would follow. Critics such as Green and Evans attempt to theorize the process by which extemporary preaching can be produced, as well as to identify its distinctive features so listeners can more critically audit such performances. By attacking the preachers themselves and reminding readers of their humble roots and lack of proper training, they hope to render suspect *all* Methodist preachers who might appear unannounced in an open setting to preach. The extempore becomes a tactic employed by those who have neither the knowledge to preach (or memorize) a theologically consistent sermon, nor the ability to present the text in a calm, reasoned manner. Yet the anxiety about a renewed state of religious division at lower levels of society, resulting from vehement messages, derives from an audience psychology initiated during the civil war

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 35.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 37.

and affirmed over the seventy years before the Methodists began rapidly drawing members. As I note above, Glanvill's recommendation that preachers should craft sermons that are cognizant of the weaknesses of auditors lives on through Methodist critics. When the Methodists emerged, they represented the sharpest challenge to nearly a century of pulpit imperatives that marked preaching off book are as not only inappropriate, but also (as Burnet claims) ineffective. To account for the success of itinerant preachers, the effort appears almost unified in its attempt to discredit the phenomenon by revealing both the factors of production that prompted extemporary speech and the devices that one could expect when hearing a Methodist sermon. Ultimately, based on the Methodists' continued growth, missionary expansion, and enhanced organizational structures, the anti-Methodists were preaching to a choir dedicated to mocking and attacking dissenters, encouraging reactive responses from potential audiences who might see the techniques elaborated in their polemics.

Preaching the Authorized Text: An Irenic Act of Plagiarism

Discussions about rhetoric in the years between the civil war and the appearance of treatises from Scottish writers on rhetoric (I address the latter in my final chapter) address rhetoric as a phenomenon more than a theory, as a thing that *happens* more than a thing that can happen, or that occurs only in the abstract. Yet in dealing with practice, new rhetoricians inevitable assert an underlying theory in the form of cultural proclamations, critiques aimed at marginal groups, or value statements. Reading discussions of different kinds of rhetoric renders visible the cultural concerns that shape these ideas. For instance, much like his reflections specifically on pulpit rhetoric, Oliver Goldsmith's essay, "Of Eloquence" (1759), negatively portrays the stakeholders in

British eloquence as incapable of reaching a nation that desperately needs moving. Preachers and speakers sacrifice too much in order to gain the appearance of composure. Goldsmith offers the vivid contrast of the Methodists as proof that a more vehement program will invigorate the country. He writes, “When I think of the Methodist preachers among us, how seldom they are endued with common sense, and yet how often and how justly they affect their hearers, I cannot avoid saying within myself, had these been bred gentlemen, and been endued with even the meanest share of understanding, what might they not effect!”³⁶⁸ Again, Goldsmith endorses the techniques of Methodism at the same moment that he cautiously challenges its doctrines. In this statement lies a subtle and simple desire that was more than likely shared by many of their more sympathetic opponents: if the Methodists could only preach appropriate messages, their effects would not be dangerous. Goldsmith’s impossible hope – “had these been bred gentlemen” – at once looks down on the rural itinerants and leads him to long for a combination of rhetorical skill with a sanctioned theology. Sympathetic critics like Goldsmith wished that their own denomination would aim for the passions the Methodists were so successfully engaging.

In closing, I offer one effort toward conciliation between the world of spiritual inspiration and the more composed world of letters. Samuel Johnson commented several times on Wesley and his movement, often contemplating how Methodists might be reformed. In *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791), James Boswell asks about the Methodists and Johnson responds by praising the “plain and familiar” tone of their preaching, particularly in contrast to the “homely manner” of Boswell’s Scottish

³⁶⁸ Goldsmith, *Collected Works*, 481-82.

clergy.³⁶⁹ Noting the link between vivid presentation and moral and spiritual response, Johnson adds, “To insist against drunkenness as a crime, because it debases reason, the noblest faculty of man, would be of no service to the common people: but to tell them that they may die in a fit of drunkenness, and shew them how dreadful that would be, cannot fail to make a deep impression.”³⁷⁰ Johnson pits plainness as a virtue against the “homely” manner that plagues preaching, arguing that common audiences are less likely to pursue moral reform unless it follows personal and emotional engagement – in this case through fear. Here, Johnson shares Goldsmith’s belief that the church has become too reserved to address sin and debauchery, and that arousing proofs are necessary to “shew them” the error of their ways. Later, during a period when Boswell admits “there was a total cessation off all correspondence,” he offers through “Dr. Maxwell of Falkland” the report of Johnson’s developing attitude toward the Methodists:

Something might be necessary, he observed, to excite the affections of the common people, who were sunk in languor and lethargy, and therefore he supposed that the new concomitants of Methodism might probably produce so desirable an effect. The mind, like the body, he observed, delighted in change and novelty, and even in religion itself, courted new appearances and modifications. Whatever might be thought of some Methodist teachers, he said, he could scarcely doubt the sincerity of that man, who traveled nine hundred miles in a month, and preached twelve times a week; for no adequate reward, merely temporal, could be given for such indefatigable labour.³⁷¹

What was the “something” that might ignite the lethargic “common people?” Here and elsewhere, Johnson hesitantly proposes an adoption of Methodist techniques; like many Anglicans who saw the rise of Methodism, he doubts its theology while confirming its efficacy. He does not question the sincerity of the itinerant Methodist, even if that sincerity is misguided, as he responds suggestively to “whatever might be thought.”

³⁶⁹ James Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 324–25.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 441.

Whatever differences in doctrine may exist, Johnson admires the Methodists' sheer ability to instill and perpetuate lasting conversions.

If only, Johnson thinks, the Methodists could unite their affective and effective preaching with the language of politeness and reason. An encounter between Wesley and Johnson offers a telling illustration of the possibility that Wesley could use the tools of his media to preach a sort of authorized message. In 1775, Johnson published a transatlantic pamphlet advocating against revolution to the American colonists. Admonishing hawkish members of Parliament, he writes, "But let us interrupt awhile this dream of conquest, settlement, and supremacy."³⁷² In urging members on both side of the debate to decrease the intensity of their quarrel, and to think candidly about the challenges shared by both Americans and their British opposition, Johnson isolates the issues and addresses them using logical proofs. Johnson carefully yet vigorously lays out the case for taxation, deconstructs the flawed claim for representation, and ultimately argues both for the self-suppression of seditious measures and the cessation of any plans on Britain's part to increase aggressions. However, though the pamphlet remains a trenchant statement of pre-1776 British sentiment toward the colonies, it had little immediate influence by the time it circulated in a climate that had quickly progressed to the point of impending war. More than likely, it would have been quickly forgotten if not for what ensued.

Six months later, Wesley produced his own pamphlet titled *A Calm Address to Our American Colonies*. Intention and approach are not all that Wesley's pamphlet shares with Johnson's; it also imitates the structure and reappropriates the theme to be consistent with Methodist policies. The final point comes to the same conclusion, and the ruling

³⁷² Samuel Johnson, *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, 10:454.

logic of Johnson's argument remains that taxation was justified, given the bounties the colonies enjoyed from their mother country. Though such practices of "borrowing" were not that uncommon, even within religious publications, this text incited vigorous criticisms from those looking for ammunition to further discredit Wesley.³⁷³ Caleb Evans, a Baptist minister, published an accusatory pamphlet in which he claimed Wesley used "contemptible sophistry" by stealing from Johnson "verbatim, without acknowledgement."³⁷⁴ In addition, Wesley's pamphlet offered a sharp reversal on his earlier pro-American position. On this charge, even fellow pro-American Methodists joined Evans on the offensive.

Following the plagiarism charges, Wesley almost immediately published a corrected edition with a preface to address Evans' charge. He made no modifications at all to the text itself, maintaining the same irenic imperative. Yet while the preface addresses Evans' angry response, he spends only the first two sentences explaining the charge of plagiarism, asserting that he had indeed restated Johnson's pamphlet and "judged it my duty to impart it to others."³⁷⁵ This addition allows Wesley to strike back using the language that others had used against his followers and himself, accusing Evans of using florid provocations to incite public opinion against him. The new edition effectively ended the controversy. Though Wesley's plagiarism was indeed a violation of the current copyright, no charges were brought against him. Johnson's response to the occasion was measured and concise. When faced with Wesley's offense, he acted

³⁷³ On Wesley's practices of republishing works by other authors without attribution, see Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 376–77; Henry Abelove, "John Wesley's Plagiarism of Samuel Johnson and Its Contemporary Reception," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (January 1, 1996): 73–79.

³⁷⁴ Quoted in Abelove, "John Wesley's Plagiarism of Samuel Johnson and Its Contemporary Reception," 74.

³⁷⁵ John Wesley, *A Calm Address to our American Colonies. By John Wesley, ... A New Edition, Corrected, and Enlarged*. (London, 1775), 2.

consistent with his long-held views on the limited rights of authors to own their texts. According to Boswell, Johnson felt that while intellectual property laws should respect the authors, the enduring public benefit of the work is essential. For Johnson, stringent copyright laws imply “a metaphysical right, a right, as it were, of creation, which should from its nature be perpetual;” rather, the work “should be understood as no longer in his power, but as belonging to the public.”³⁷⁶ By these standards, Wesley had fulfilled his duty to Johnson by sharing his work with a larger audience. Yet against the numerous opinions toward the tendency for Methodists to act rashly, the pamphlet offers Johnson’s advice in terms of a “calm address,” attempting to quell rather than stir up dissent. Johnson sent a letter to Wesley after the occasion, not even acknowledging the charge of literary theft. Instead, he thanks Wesley for “the addition of your important suffrage to my argument.”³⁷⁷

What mollified Johnson, besides his general lack of concern for the legal technicalities that defined the act plagiarism? Faced with the master of the movement dedicated to both extemporary tactics and sharp diversions from Anglican orthodoxy, Johnson seems almost comforted by the fact that Wesley was – in a sense – preaching his message. It came perhaps as a relief when Wesley critically asked his followers, “But whence then is all this hurry and tumult? Why is America all in an uproar?”³⁷⁸ Those Anglican figures who feared further dissent must have been, like Johnson, thoroughly satisfied when Wesley issued “a calm address” to Methodist converts in the colonies. In this moment, a meeting between perhaps the foremost figure of the establishment and the most notorious figure of dissent was an irenic one. The incident provided, at least for a

³⁷⁶ Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 546.

³⁷⁷ Samuel Johnson, *The Letters of Samuel Johnson*, 2:290.

³⁷⁸ Wesley, *A Calm Address to our American Colonies*, 13.

moment, the possibility of a Methodist church relying on the text over the inspiration that consumed it.

Conclusion

My first two chapters have focused on attempts to recognize rhetorical conceits where they are apparently absent. By stressing the artificiality of speaking and writing practices, critics of experimental philosophy and Methodist preaching hope to devalue the principles of these respective movements. By criticizing Methodists, for instance, these antagonists attempt to instill nostalgia for earlier oral practices (post-Restoration plainness) by challenging an emerging one (Methodist tactics). As the Methodists promote a revivifying spirituality, the various forces of the establishment look to muffle the sounds which are making more obvious its own inefficacy.

Anti-Methodists such as Theophilus Evans and the author of *A Plain and Easy Road to the Land of Bliss* do not offer much hope that Methodists might be reformed. Rather, they present images of excessive enthusiasm encourage audiences to worry about what further trouble these “Fanatic Saints” might provoke. In my introduction, I argued that Tobias Smollett links the reform narrative of the sentimental novel with the potential to assimilate the Methodists into the culture that they ostensibly reject. Johnson and Goldsmith share the imperative by imagining the Methodists as participants in, rather than threats to, a sophisticated religious culture; if only, Goldsmith laments, “had [they] been bred gentlemen.”³⁷⁹ Of course, since the Methodists eschewed the trappings of the milieu of gentlemen, and sought out those who were clearly *not* gentlemen, their success could so haunt those who lamented their rise.

³⁷⁹ Goldsmith, *Collected Works*, 481-82.

The next two chapters ask both: “what has oratory done?” and “what will oratory do?” with an intensity that produces numerous anxieties. In my next two chapters, I take what I see as the next logical step by showing engagements with what oratory *might* do, or more specifically, what the orator might *be*. Before turning to the changes in rhetorical theory as reconfigurations of the orator’s motive and goal, I engage Alexander Pope’s attempts to describe a proper office of rhetoric. Pope mostly presents rhetorical activity through its failure, which I argue is an attempt to elevate the value and affective efficacy of poetry over oral forms. Pope’s presentation of oral moments is rife with conflicts that are embedded in his other poetry: a belief in his own poetic skill that prompts a desire for control over the reception of his work.

Chapter 3: “He Spoke no more than just the Thing he ought”:

Alexander Pope and the Practice of Rhetoric

Dullness’ Army

In all of his versions of *The Dunciad*, Alexander Pope paints a particularly grim picture of the oratorical culture that persisted during his lifetime. Pope’s portrayal of cultural excess, so vividly yet sympathetically portrayed in *The Rape of the Lock* (1712-17), takes a turn to the grotesque in *The Dunciad*. As Fredric Bogel astutely claims, Pope’s vision is “expanded to apocalyptic scope: the world is seen as a demonic pattern, a lucid tableau of horror, uncomplicated by saving qualifications or recalcitrant details.”³⁸⁰ The inherent order that Bogel finds underneath the anarchy of nonsense and self-presentation is built on the artifice that the Queen of Dulness mobilizes. For Dulness to thrive, she must be protected and enhanced by an army of publicists who will – to modify a phrase from *An Essay on Criticism* – “hide with ornaments [her] want of art” (296).³⁸¹ Dulness’ reign is one of ostentation and self-celebration; her existence and persistence are the product of her subjects who continually eulogize her. In many ways she is the inverse of another passage in *An Essay on Criticism*:

Some Figures monstrous and mis-shap’d appear
Consider’d singly, or beheld too near
Which, but proportion’d to their Light, or Place,
Due Distance reconciles to Form and Grace. (171-74)

³⁸⁰ Fredric V. Bogel, *Acts of Knowledge: Pope’s Later Poems* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1981), 33.

³⁸¹ For all citations, I have consulted the *Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope*, gen. ed John Butt, 11 vols. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1967). However, I refer to the poems parenthetically by book, canto, and line numbers so they can be found in other editions as well. In some cases, I refer to the scholarly apparatus contained with the *Twickenham Edition* by page number in the references.

In the *Essay*, critical reading is defined as an act of careful adjustment and modulation to centralize the poetic vision that might be muddled by faults or prejudices of the observers. “Distance” allows the seemingly “monstrous” figure to be brought into focus and its features more clearly understood, more accurately evaluated through the necessary local contexts of “light” and “place.” However, in the *Dunciad*, the poetically distorted vision of Dulness’ majesty requires the opposite. In order for her thrive, she must be “consider’d singly” and “beheld too near,” lest her illusory “graces” be exposed. In short, she needs a good rhetorician.

Dulness relies on a militia of those most skilled in contemporary practices of technologies of mediation: booksellers, theater owners, patrons, painters, pamphleteers, publishers, editors, literary critics, preachers, and orators. She is first introduced in “clouded majesty” (B.I.45),³⁸² immediately emphasizing the vacuity that is obscured, protected, and rhetorically reinvented as “majesty.” As her true image is concealed from onlookers, she looks out at the army of conceits that color her celebrations:

There motley images her fancy strike,
Figures ill paired, and similes unlike.
She sees a mob of metaphors advance,
Pleased with the madness of the mazy dance. (B.I.65-69)

As Pope recognizes in a footnote, this poetic “madness” allows Dulness to “appea[r] in a thousand shapes” (273n4). Unlike the figure he describes in the *Essay on Criticism*, which requires a clearer point-of-view to see its graces, Dulness cannot be separated or clearly discerned from the figures that are used to shadow her true form. The Queen herself both corrupts and is corrupted by this artifice. Described as “cloud-compelling” and “tinsel’d o’er in robes of varying hues,” she “Beholds thro’ fogs” her “wild creation”

³⁸² I refer to the 1743 four-book edition of *The Dunciad*, or what is known as *Dunciad B*.

(B.I.79, 81, 82). In this mock-celebration, Pope shows the degree to which ornamentation and excess have made it impossible to sever reality from the glistening façade that enhances and conceals it.

Throughout *The Dunciad*, Pope mocks the hackneyed reliance on rhetorical devices that the dunces use to veil their empty productions. In Book III, oral persuasion receives special attention. When the shade of Elkennah Settle surveys the present state of duncery, he “behold[s] an hundred sons, and each a dunce” (B.III.138). Amongst this galley, Orator Henley receives particular notice for his oral contributions to duncery. As vociferous and indecipherable noise is a celebrated feature of Dulness’ kingdom, Henley’s voice is exceptional:

Imbrown'd with native bronze, lo! Henley stands,
Tuning his voice, and balancing his hands.
How fluent nonsense trickles from his tongue!
How sweet the periods, neither said, nor sung!
Still break the benches, Henley! with thy strain,
While Sherlock, Hare, and Gibson preach in vain.
Oh great Restorer of the good old Stage,
Preacher at once, and Zany of thy age!
Oh worthy thou of Ægypt's wise abodes,
A decent priest, where monkeys were the gods! (B.III.198-208)

Resplendent in his “strain,” Henley’s oratorical skills attract the lowest cultural common denominator. Pope’s ire is stimulated by the real-life Henley and his ability not only to draw audiences, but also to educate them in his dubious practices.

By the 1728 *Dunciad*, Henley’s so-called “Oratory” had flourished largely because of his ability to publish his methods and offer them wholesale to the public. A master of advertisement and self-promotion, Henley taught delivery and pronunciation in a way that was equally popular, affordable, and productive for his populist audiences. In addition to attending classes, a customer at the Oratory could also see Henley deliver

sermons, lectures, and orations on subjects ranging from the reformation of manners to the history of rhetoric. As his biographer Graham Midgley explains, Henley's audience consisted largely of "lower-and middle-class tradesman, often liberally sprinkled with the butchers of Newport and Clare market."³⁸³ However, though Henley appears in both the 1729 and the 1743 *Dunciad*, the later poem can be read as particularly caustic given the failure of his commercial efforts over those fourteen years. By the 1740s, the famed orator was floundering, spending more time in the tap-house than the pulpit. The 1743 *Dunciad* recognizes this by adding insult to injury: "How Henley lay inspir'd beside a sink, / And to mere mortals seem'd a Priest in drink" (B.II.425). As the 1729 edition captures Henley emerging into a broader cultural consciousness, the 1743 version shows his legacy as fading yet still relevant enough to warrant a poetic attack.

Such success clearly baffles Pope, especially because Henley outdraws the establishment doctrinaires Sherlock, Hare, and Gibson, who "preach in vain." The passionate response to Henley is opposed by the primacy of reason and subdued worship. Henley's fluency comes from a language that is familiar to the dunces and to the audiences they have no trouble finding and multiplying. As Adam Potkay notes, Pope's presentation of Henley is "a dumb show of gesture and sound, a tuned voice and balanced hands, devoid of truth or even sense."³⁸⁴ He represents "oratory's lowest ebb" and "just another player in possession of oratory's lost prerogative."³⁸⁵ Yet Henley's ability to attract followers is evident in Pope's description of him. This passage reflects a belief that his "fluent nonsense" has overcome the sensibility that Pope aims to instill throughout his works, and particularly in the *Moral Essays*. Henley offers a rhetorical

³⁸³ Graham Midgley, *Life of Orator Henley*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1973), 79.

³⁸⁴ Potkay, *The Fate of Eloquence in the Age of Hume*, 109.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

decorum appropriate for the world of the *Rape of the Lock*: what he lacks in content, he makes up for in presentation. By 1743, Pope might have envisioned the elocutionist movement, of which Henley was one of the most famous disciples, dying in a haze of insignificance. Yet with the exception of changing the names of the pastors whom Henley opposes from the 1728 version, from the near-anonymous “K**, B**, W**” to “Sherlock, Hare, and Gibson,” Pope retains Henley as a synecdoche for the bloated oral practices that he saw plaguing contemporary discourse.

Pope’s depiction of the illustrious and confident Henley is a rich contrast to his own self-described inaptitude at public speaking. In *Spence’s Anecdotes* (1820), Pope makes an explicit reference on this failure:

I never could speak in public: and I don’t believe that if it was a set thing, I could give an account of any story to twelve friends together, though I could tell it to any three of them, with a great deal of pleasure. – When I was to appear for the Bishop of Rochester, in his trial, though I had but ten words to say, and that on a plain point . . . I made two or three blunders in it: and that notwithstanding the first row of lords (which was all I could see) were mostly of my acquaintance.³⁸⁶

Pope admits a grand irony. On the page, his ability to “give an account of any story” was legendary. Yet when he imagines giving a speech before an audience of more than three, he shares the same fear as a shy college freshman sitting in a speech class. Those familiar with Pope’s physical appearance – what John Dennis cruelly described as “a Lump Deform’d”³⁸⁷ – would not be surprised that Pope rarely if ever took the rostrum. In *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, Pope admits that as a child he “lisp’d in numbers” (128-29), reflecting a prodigious ability to write meter yet an inability to read them eloquently. There can be no greater disparity between the way Pope describes himself as a public

³⁸⁶ Joseph Spence, *Observations, Anecdotes, and Characters, of Books and Men*. (London, 1820), 11.

³⁸⁷ Quoted in Tita Chico, *Designing Women: The Dressing Room in Eighteenth-Century Literature and Culture* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2005), 121.

speaker than Orator Henley. While Henley can “break the benches . . . with thy strain” (*Dunciad* 202), Pope’s art does not allow such an immediate response. As he mocks the grotesque nature of the bombastic speaking presence, he cannot help but admire its public draw.

The depiction of Henley is a vivid example of what in Pope’s poems can be read as intense reflection on the potential ethics and efficacy of persuasive speech. Critical accounts concerned with Pope and rhetoric typically focus on his celebrated use of rhetorical tropes and figures in his poetry, or the persuasive agenda of his poetry.³⁸⁸ However, though Pope offers complex representations of orators, there has been no extended discussion of the rhetorical and oral activity that he depicts in his poetry. In this chapter, I argue that these representations constitute a vexed but thorough theory of rhetorical practice that illuminates the most compelling tensions of his poetry. Pope’s broader claims about art and judgment, particularly in his *Moral Essays*, stimulate an apprehension toward the effects of rhetoric – its ability to move too greatly or its inability to move at all. Pope’s endorsement and rejection of rhetoric happen almost simultaneously; just as in the scene where rhetoric lies at the feet of Dulness, he imagines the possibility of a powerful and effective eloquence only to question it immediately. Just as Pope wrestles with his admiration for the polite culture he satirizes, moments of persuasion prompt a profound evaluation of orality and oratory.

³⁸⁸ On argument and rhetorical style, see Fredric V. Bogel, “Dulness Unbound: Rhetoric and Pope’s *Dunciad*,” *Pmla* 97, no. 5 (October, 1982); Ruben Quintero, *Literate Culture: Pope’s Rhetorical Art* (Newark: Delaware, 1992); John E. Sitter, “The Argument of Pope’s Epistle to Cobham,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 17, no. 3 (July, 1977): 435–449; John E. Sitter, *Arguments of Augustan Wit* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007): 844–855. A notable exception is Potkay, *The Fate of Eloquence in the Age of Hume*. Potkay sees Pope participating in a discourse of nostalgia toward eloquence that works to null its contemporary effects.

I begin by examining poems in which art is discussed in the abstract. In these poems – the early *An Essay on Criticism, Epistle to Cobham* (1734), and *An Essay on Man* – Pope stages a conflict between passion and reason, appearance and reality. I look to these poems because they so strikingly contrast presentation with substance, and the murky epistemology that results from confusing the former with the latter. The role that art plays in stimulating these conflicts is central, and justifies the representations of orators such as Orator Henley. These issues, so central to rhetoric, inform the presentation of persuasive scenes in Pope’s narrative poems. Pope’s questions about the effects of art more generally are essentially questions about judgment and knowledge, which correspond to his depiction of rhetoric in its potentially destabilizing effects. I then turn to *The Iliad* and *The Rape of the Lock*, which I read as companion pieces, as epic and mock-epic, for their vividly distinctive depictions of orators. In the project of translating *The Iliad*, Pope is challenged by a presentation of rhetoric different from the one he wishes to convey. As a result, he spends much time articulating the proper office of rhetoric and comes to a fairly extensive theory of rhetorical propriety. Amidst a number of competing concerns – classical orthodoxy and departure, poetic innovation, moral propriety, and the eventual public reception of the translation, Pope still finds space to wrestle with the production and reception of rhetoric. Confronted by the potentially troubling efficacy of rhetoric and the possibility of its cultural disruption, Pope qualifies the primitive power of persuasion. This potential turbulence also surfaces in the mock-epic styling of *The Rape of the Lock*. However, the cultural setting allows him to “neuter” and contain this energy by staging speeches that fail. Appeals for virtue or order fall on deaf ears; rhetoric can no more enlighten a misguided social milieu than it can physically

restore a lock of hair to its owner. Pope uses later revisions of the poem to emphasize further this incapacity. The inclusion of Clarissa, the “grave” prude, serves as a wry commentary on his own inability to appease the dueling forces to whom the poem is addressed. Throughout, I contend, Pope was deeply concerned with the potentially dangerous effects of rhetoric and used his own poetic power to contain or repurpose them.

“False Eloquence:” *Abstractions, Adornment, and Anxiety*

In this section, I focus on diverse poems that are linked by anxieties about judgment, appearance, and epistemology: *An Essay on Criticism*, *An Epistle to Cobham*, and *An Essay on Man*. Before moving to my more detailed readings of *The Iliad* and *The Rape of the Lock*, these more abstract works provide the intellectual and philosophical undercurrent that rises to the surface in the narrative poems. The themes that are central to Pope in these poems are also central to rhetoric, in particular a concern that ornamentation and presentation will create a corrupt and falsified culture that thrives on its indecencies. These poems are crucial because they anticipate the vexed role that rhetoric plays in the narrative poems. Debates about the ethics of rhetoric stage the same conflicts that Pope repeatedly invokes: about the worse appearing the better, the passions subverting or overcoming reason, and the endlessly subjective nature of observation.

Pope frequently pits ornamentation against the reality it is meant to conceal. In *The Rape of the Lock*, for instance, Pope playfully presents this opposition in the form of the “cosmetics” that can enhance and obscure appearances. This artificiality is equally evident in the machinations of poetic style. As the opening lines of the *Rape* admit, “Slight is the Subject, but not so the Praise” (I.4-5). In conforming trivial event to epic

setting, the mock-epic narrator elides the substance or emptiness that might be found beneath the “cosmetic’ pow’rs” (I.124), preferring to dwell on the glistening surfaces. The reader is constantly aware of the contrast between “subject” and “praise,” between poetry and reality, and between the “toyshop” (I.100) culture and the rhetoric its participants use to eulogize themselves. Throughout the *Rape*, Pope consistently mimics the self-fashioning tactics through which his cultural combatants elevate themselves. The mock-epic mode itself is a linguistic version of this adornment, as the participants are “exalted by their epic context, and their fall is all the sillier because it is from so high a perch.”³⁸⁹ The mock-epic heightens the narrative of the poem to the point where even the most serious of sentiments are rendered absurd. If the Baron violates Belinda’s virtue by defacing her beauty, he does so in such a way that exemplifies how subjective and frivolous those cultural values are. Pope’s “Cosmetic Pow’rs” necessary for physical embellishment are analogous to those figures and devices necessary for aesthetic exaggeration.

The connection between rhetoric and cosmetics recalls one of the earliest critiques of rhetoric.³⁹⁰ As far back as Plato’s *Gorgias*, Socrates condemns the practice of rhetoric as a “made art” or “an ability to gratify people.”³⁹¹ He compares worthwhile arts with false arts, noting that rhetoric is a corruption of justice in the same way that “self-adornment personates gymnastic.”³⁹² Like that false beauty culture, rhetoric possesses a “rascally, deceitful, ignoble, and illiberal nature [that] deceives men by forms and colors,

³⁸⁹ Geoffrey Tillotson, Preface to the *Twickenham Edition of The Rape of the Lock*, 2: 108.

³⁹⁰ This connection of rhetoric to cosmetics and painting is not unique to Plato. In the fifteenth century, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola compares the use of rhetorical devices to “beautiful appearances [that] are disfigured by white face-paint” (*Renaissance Debates on Rhetoric*, ed. Wayne Rebhorn [Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2000], 64). Immanuel Kant claims that rhetoric deceives through “a beautiful show . . . and not mere elegance of speech” and draws several comparisons to “Plastic” arts (215).

³⁹¹ Plato, “Gorgias,” in *The Rhetorical Tradition*, 97.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 98.

polish and dress, so as to make them, in the effort of assuming an extraneous sort that comes through gymnastics.”³⁹³ Plato employs the critique of physical ornamentation to enhance his related critique of rhetoric, as both create forms that have no correlation in reality, are developed through selfish motives, and are used to suggest often ignoble courses of action. Plato’s binaries between true and false arts operate on the transcendent idealism that distinguishes his philosophy, in which appearance can suggest a higher truth but cannot reflect it accurately. His famous proscriptions against art, particularly in *The Republic*, arise out of similar concerns about its “rascally, deceitful, ignoble and illiberal nature,” as well its ability to reify and substantiate a merely impressionistic view of the world.

Plato’s concerns about rhetoric may have risen out of the Athenian social and political climate in which Sophists profited from the cultural primacy of oral persuasion; however, the opposition between rhetoric and truth can also be located both in Pope’s poetry and the world-view that it encourages. As he ponders the idealistic order that undergirds nature and should be used as a model both for civil society and aesthetic order, Pope’s reverence for Plato is both implicit and explicit. In *An Essay on Man*, for instance, he exhorts man to “soar with Plato to th’empyrean sphere” (23). Pope also shows the influence of Plato’s thought in a letter to John Caryll. Commenting on the success of Joseph Addison’s *Cato* (1712), Pope tells Caryll that the play is an example of “that which Plato thought the greatest pleasure an exalted soul could be capable of, a view of virtue itself, great in person, colour, and action.”³⁹⁴ Though he never references

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, ed. George Sherburn, 5 vols, (Oxford: Oxford UP), 1:173.

Gorgias or any of Plato's other writings about rhetoric, he offers a similarly idealistic view of the role that art plays in obstructing or enhancing human understanding.

For Pope, as with Plato, questions of aesthetics, cosmetics, and oratory are essentially about epistemology and judgment. In an *Essay on Man* and the so-called *Moral Essays*,³⁹⁵ Pope concerns himself with art's ability to create shadows of reality and dangerous illusions that have monumentally dangerous effects. To both Plato and Pope, true arts restore the body and the soul, while false arts only further corrupt. Pope vividly describes the coercive effects of both art and artists to come to false conclusions that are further proliferated through persuasive activity. Like Plato's conception of rhetoric, Pope describes a negative art that is compulsive and obscuring, affective yet destructive. As Fredric Bogel notes, it results in an error "not [in] seeing only a part, but taking the part for a whole, treating the portion that we can see as though it were the entirety and, therefore, as though it were self-contained."³⁹⁶ Artifice enhances some parts, shrouds others. Though it might seem strange coming from such a master of tropes and figures, Pope nonetheless expresses an anxiety about the impulsive responses to artistic productions. The tenor of this apprehension is rarely consistent, but it can be found in the moral and aesthetic concerns that Pope engages in his poetry. Reflecting his enthusiasm

³⁹⁵ After 1729, Pope began a series of poems that were meant to coalesce into a thematic whole, which would include *An Essay on Man* and his *Essays to Several Persons* (comprised of his Epistles to Cobham, Burlington, Bathurst, and a "Lady"), as well as several other works that would comprise what he speculatively referred to as his "opus magnum." Of these, Maynard Mack notes,

Around *An Essay on Man*, both at the time and for some years after, a staggering array of complementary pieces – enough to compose a second and even a third book – were conceived, though not written, their number and shape fluctuating like the pseudopods of a hungry amoeba. What Pope finally managed to bring to fruition ... was a set of four additional "ethic" epistles, loosely, sometimes very loosely, linked to the *Essay on Man* and to each other, each addressed to a different and appropriate friend. (*Alexander Pope: A Life* 512).

³⁹⁶ Fredric V. Bogel, *The Difference Satire Makes* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2001), 218.

that *Cato* offers “a view of virtue itself,” Pope contends that art should enforce and inspire virtue rather than become lost in its external trappings.

An Essay on Criticism (1711), Pope’s earliest success, offers a critical engagement with aesthetic values that he would continue to clarify and revise throughout his career. Pope defines an ideal poetic decorum based on the study of the harmony and order that Nature teaches, or as he puts it, “Nature Methodiz’d” (89). By relying too heavily on the tradition of rhetorical figures, the poet never produces a unique creation, and only arbitrarily recycles the tropes of familiar works. In the scene from *The Dunciad* that opens this chapter, we see this at its most grotesque and ostentatious excess. To emphasize the glory of nature, he frequently contrasts the authentic with the artificial:

False Eloquence, like the *Prismatic Glass*,
Its gawdy Colours spreads on *ev’ry place*;
The Face of Nature we no more Survey,
All glares *alike*, without *Distinction* gay. (311-14)

Poets turn to the artificial, or “*False Eloquence*,” to enhance and adorn what is pure or natural, but they end up replacing it. The simile of the prismatic glass allows Pope to describe the initial effects of eloquence proliferating and corrupting to a point that “the Face of Nature” has been exchanged for the artificial spectacle. He continues:

But true expression, like the unchanging sun,
Clears and improves whate’er it shines upon;
It gilds all objects, but it alters none.
Expression is the dress of thought, and still
Appears more decent, as more suitable,
A vile conceit in pompous words expressed,
Is like a clown in regal purple dressed. (314-22)

“True expression” offers an empirical and formal ideal. Rhetorical embellishment “alters” through “vile conceit[s]” to the point that it creates flamboyant absurdities.

Throughout the passage, Pope alternates between surface and substance to accentuate the

flaws of over-embellishment in poetry, concluding that formal propriety comes from an adherence to nature rather than art. The proper aesthetic “gilds” but does not “alter”: it is “decent” without being “vile.” These passages from *An Essay on Criticism* are emblematic of the conflict between the artificial and the natural, and the degree to which the latter must be preserved and the former cautiously utilized. The description of the “vile conceit in pompous words” recalls the age-old negative characterization of rhetoric as making the worse appear the better. It recalls Robert Boyle’s description of the use of rhetoric in science writing as painting the eyeglasses of a telescope.³⁹⁷ Implicit in the *Essay* is a sense that rude audiences still enjoy the stage show of the “clown in regal purple dressed.” However, Pope’s implicit message is that the poet should think of artistic integrity before public reception, even if crude audiences typically celebrate the pompous style he attacks.

In an earlier passage, Pope chastises those who rely too heavily on poetic ornamentation rather than natural wit:

Poets like Painters, thus, unskill’d to trace
 The naked Nature and the living Grace,
 With Gold and Jewels cover ev’ry Part,
 And hide with Ornaments their Want of Art.
 True Wit is Nature to Advantage drest,
 What oft was Thought, but ne’er so well Exprest. (293-298)

The oft-quoted closing couplet can be seen as an epigrammatic sentiment of Augustan aesthetics.³⁹⁸ Lacking skill, poets turn to the overwhelming ornamentation of

³⁹⁷ Boyle, *Certain Physiological Essays and Other Tracts Written at Distant Times, and on Several Occasions by the Honourable Robert Boyle*, 12.

³⁹⁸ Maynard Mack notes that this couplet is “the best remembered and most misunderstood line in the poem” (*Alexander Pope: A Life* 174). See, for instance, Samuel Johnson’s remarks in his *Life of Cowley*. Johnson quotes Pope’s definition of wit before explaining why it did not apply the Metaphysical poets. That Johnson felt the need to reference Pope, however, shows how much this poetic definition became a commonplace in discussions of wit. Also see William Empson, “Wit in the *Essay on Criticism*.” *The*

metaphorical “Gold” and “Jewels” to hide the “Want of Art.” They are driven to amplify and adorn the surface in hoping that their own minimal artistic merits will be submerged by the gloss of presentation. Christina Knellwolf notes that Pope’s couplet proves that “Any mode of representation is a cover because it imposes a mode of seeing, perceiving and judging.”³⁹⁹ The appropriate aesthetic activity – the formal features of an ideal composition – is still “drest” by an artist’s skill, yet done in such a way that preserves whatever might be called “natural.” Setting the mechanism of “thought” against the innovation of expression, Pope concludes the opposition throughout the *Essay* between servile imitation and the truly distinct creation.

Pope argues that the poem should have a didactic purpose before lamenting that current artists aim only for displays of stylistic virtuosity.⁴⁰⁰ Further, the poetic work should not merely be a cryptic and elusive message between a creator and himself. Such writers “make themselves the measure of mankind” (453). The poet who seeks for public adulation merely aims to “catch the spreading notion of the town” (409). Rather, the poem should transcend both the immediately personal and the pragmatic goal of cultural approval. He writes,

Hudson Review. 2, no.4 (1950), 599-577. In this influential article, Empson argues that Pope expands and complicates prior definitions of Wit. Empson writes, “in making *wit* his general term, [Pope] felt not only that it was persuasive to adopt the tone of polite society but that he was working against the very thing that gives modern Criticism its character .“ (570). On the “epigrammatic givenness” of the couplet, see Roger D. Lund, “Wit, Judgment, and the Misprisions of Similitude,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 65, no. 1 (January, 2004): 53–74. Laura Brown situates this passage, along with many in *The Rape of the Lock*, within “the ideological fixation on female dress and adornment” (*Ends of Empire* [Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993], 114). For Brown, the contemporary trope of dressing internalizes the logic of Mercantile capitalism as “female adornment becomes the main cultural emblem of commodity fetishism” (119).

³⁹⁹ Christa Knellwolf, *A Contradiction Still: Representations of Women in the Poetry of Alexander Pope* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1998), 94.

⁴⁰⁰ See Sitter, *Arguments of Augustan Wit*. As its title notes, *An Essay on Criticism* is primarily about the role of the critic in evaluating the beauties of contemporary poems in light on classical proscriptions and precedents. However, Sitter reminds us that we must “recall how much it is a poem about literary praxis” (87). In the passages I quote here, I show that Pope not only exhorts critical imperatives, but also a theory of the integrity of literary production.

Yet let not each gay Turn thy Rapture move
For Fools Admire, but Men of Sense Approve;
As things seem large which we thro' Mists descry,
Dulness is ever apt to Magnify. (390-393)

The two reactions – admiration and approval – must be evaluated according to their source. Though fools celebrate using the same language that the pompous poets do, the responses of “Men of Sense” are modest and subdued, even in approval. Dull artists will take advantage of the “Mists,” relying on the showiness of poetic enhancement that cloaks an inherent emptiness in a calculation to gain admiration of “Fools.” As an early moment in Pope’s development, *An Essay in Criticism* sets in motion a poetic concern with affective deception. In her reading of *The Rape of the Lock*, Laura Claridge notes that “Art-ifice and art-full-ness in woman must be dismantled” because it possesses a “slipperiness [that] turns out to be emblematic of woman’s covert power.”⁴⁰¹ In Claridge’s claim lie the problems that *An Essay on Criticism* begins to unfold: the inherent “slipperiness” of art, its alluring potential, and its destructive effect. The precepts of *An Essay on Criticism* exist in large part to avoid continuing the poetic culture that Pope sees as endemic at the time of the poem: “Such shameless *Bards* we have; and yet ‘tis true, / There are as mad, abandon’d *Criticks* too” (610-611). In these closing lines, Pope exhorts a critical reexamination of classical models because a return to their native purity will discourage the servile imitation and audience pandering so prevalent among writers of the age.

In later poems, Pope extends the problems of reception and observation beyond the domain of the critical evaluation of poetry. Taking it out of the realm of the aesthetic, Pope offers competing versions of the ideal conditions for interpretation to avoid dire

⁴⁰¹ Laura Claridge, “Pope’s Rape of Excess” in *Pope*, ed. Brean Hammond (London: Longman, 1996), 89-90.

miscalculations.⁴⁰² More explicitly, Pope shows the results of acts of interpretive failure that have corrupted social and intellectual life. As acts of critical examination are distorted by the false principles Pope aims to correct, the later poems discuss the moral problems that ensue from errors of judgment. His 1734 *An Epistle to Cobham* contrasts an intellectual order that comes through a more correct observation against cautionary scenarios of dangerous interpretative conclusions. He uses the orator to make a central point: corruption happens both internally and externally, as the persuasive speaker first deludes himself and then others. To establish these dangers and their eventual personification, Pope begins by stressing the ease with which the senses can be deceived:

Yet more; the difference is as great between
The optics seeing, as the objects seen.
All manners take a tincture from our own;
Or come discolour'd, through our passions shown;
Or fancy's beam enlarges, multiplies,
Contracts, inverts, and gives ten thousand dyes. (23-35)

Pope widens the gap between “seeing” and “seen,” severing the connection between subject and object by emphasizing the distortions that occur in observation.

“Discolour’d” by the passions, the object appears in the divergent configuration of “ten thousand dyes.” Substantial knowledge is perpetually funneled through the flawed senses, or “in passions’ wild rotation tossed” (41).⁴⁰³ As fancy “enlarges” and “multiplies” the already problematic observation, it leads to unfortunate and misguided action. Built largely on phantasm, these actions are rarely the subject of deep analysis:

When Sense subsides, and Fancy sports in sleep

⁴⁰² See Philip Smallwood, *Reconstructing Criticism* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2003). Smallwood notes that the vitality of *An Essay on Criticism* results from its extension of aesthetics and literary criticism to a “human situation” as “Pope turns ‘criticism into one of the defining events of human life’” (173, 174). Smallwood clarifies the applicability of critical principles beyond Pope’s own analysis and projections for criticism in his own time.

⁴⁰³ On the difference between “substantial” and “schematic” knowledge, particularly as it is opposed in Pope’s poetry, see Bogel, *Acts of Knowledge*.

(Tho' past the recollection of the thought),
Becomes the stuff of which our dream is wrought:
Something as dim to our internal view
Is thus, perhaps, the cause of most we do. (46-49)

That “dim” stuff does not die in thought, but is revealed in action. It must be checked through reason, not stimulated through passion. In *Cobham*, these fantasies happen mostly in seclusion, as seen in the dream imagery of the above passage. We are driven by a tendency to trust first impressions, the “tincture of our own,” without weighing perception against reality through close study or intellectual conversation.

After these abstract ruminations, Pope’s assault on judgment, dangerous passions, and the contingent nature of accepted knowledge finds its most caustic personification in the figure of the Duke of Wharton. Wharton was an Opposition Whig, a Jacobite who had spent time with James the Pretender and would later join his army, and a member of the controversial Hell-Fire club.⁴⁰⁴ Wharton was a notorious rascal towards whom Pope had some degree of personal animosity.⁴⁰⁵ After further embarrassments that led to his being outlawed by both England and Scotland, Wharton would face the ignominy of a drunkard’s death in Spain. As David Morris notes, Wharton serves as Pope a fitting example of “internal contradiction” in which “all innate or acquired powers are rendered futile or tormenting.”⁴⁰⁶ Pope expresses this contradiction when he introduces Wharton as

⁴⁰⁴ “Wharton, Philip James, Duke of Wharton and Jacobite Duke of Northumberland (1698–1731),” Lawrence B. Smith in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29171> (accessed June 1, 2012). See also Mark Blackett-Ord, *Hell-fire Duke: The Life of the Duke of Wharton* (Kensal Press, 1982).

⁴⁰⁵ See Mack, *Alexander Pope: A Life*. Lady Mary Montague attributes her estrangement with Pope “to Pope’s jealousy of the young duke of Wharton, whom she began to see much of for a few years following 1722” (554).

⁴⁰⁶ David B. Morris, *Alexander Pope: The Genius of Sense* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984), 202.

the “scorn and wonder of our days” (181).⁴⁰⁷ Biographical accounts of Wharton also emphasize his almost unnatural skill in eloquence in the House of Lords, in particular his famous defense of Pope’s friend, Francis Atterbury.⁴⁰⁸ Pope recognizes Wharton’s oral abilities, describing him as blessed by “each gift of nature and of art” (192), in particular his “angel Tongue” (199). However, Pope modifies each of these respective talents with critical qualifications. Despite his gifts, he is “wanting nothing but an honest heart” (193). His “angel Tongue” is one which “no man can persuade.” In Wharton, Pope finds an infamous exemplar of the numerous vices and deceptions that his poetry chronicles.

By personifying the error of self-deception in the figure of a notorious contemporary rake known for his eloquence, Pope depicts oratorical power as a vehicle for conveying flawed principles and bad ideas with great force. Because of his notoriety, Wharton is an obvious victim of the “Ruling Passion” that consumes its object. As a renowned persuasive speaker, he represents the degree to which the orator finds the most receptive audience in himself through acts of self-deception and self-enrichment. Further, Wharton basks in the glory of audience’s adoration: it is “Enough if all around him but admire” (190). John Sitter argues that “His is a failure of self-knowledge, since with both eyes on the audience . . . Wharton makes no attempt to view his own life.”⁴⁰⁹ Serving as a sort-of closing parable, the image of Wharton looks to spread the deception that Pope describes as internally corrupting its host. He is most dangerous in his ability to influence

⁴⁰⁷ See Blakey Vermeule, *The Party of Humanity: Writing Moral Psychology in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 2000). Vermeule notes that these oppositions make Wharton “incomprehensible” for Pope (54), so he reverses the typical Theophrastan character model by beginning with a person and filling it with flaws. Pope finds Wharton’s fierce individualism to be an “empty formalism” that prevents self-reflection.

⁴⁰⁸ On Atterbury, Wharton, and Pope, See Maynard Mack, “Letters of Pope to Atterbury in the Tower,” *The Review of English Studies* 21, no. 82 (April 1, 1945): 117–125. See also the Twickenham edition III.ii.29 fn. 184.

⁴⁰⁹ Sitter, “The Argument of Pope’s Epistle to Cobham,” 445.

others, as he “forfeits” his life in “a thousand ways” (197). Though successful in immediate social and political actions, Pope’s Wharton is the antithesis of the calm reflection and quiet conversation that Lord Cobham models. As Sitter recognizes, in this poem Pope crafts himself as a “genuinely moral artist [who] uses poetic form to penetrate social forms and personal illusions.”⁴¹⁰ His damning obituary of Wharton serves as both a didactic argument against the dangerous pursuits of the rake, as well as a shrewd analysis of troubled psychology of the orator.

Even though the social climber and grand opportunist Wharton sought public appreciation above all else, his corruption results from, as Sitter recognizes, a “failure of self-knowledge.” A crucial implication of *Cobham* is that social interaction and self-education can resolve the problems that come from an extreme solipsism. However, *An Essay on Man* complicates this conclusion by noting the problems that come from external sources. If *Cobham* presents the life of solitude as one that encourages self-deception, *An Essay on Man* privileges the isolated intellectual life over the robust marketplace of ideas. This creates an even more muddled epistemological picture, as both domains are fraught with uncertainty and confusion. The sentiment in *Cobham* that “actions best discover man” is taken to a troubling conclusion in the *Essay on Man*:

Hence different passions more or less inflame,
As strong or weak, the organs of the frame;
And hence once master passion in the breast,
Like Aaron’s serpent, swallows up the rest. (II.129-133)

In both the first and third line of the above passage, the “hence . . . passion[s]” construction suggests the foreboding inevitability for passion to consume reason. The strategy of the first couplet is inverted in the next, as the spatial terms of “frame” and

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 446.

“breast” suggest the thinking body that will be “swallow[ed]” and “inflame[d].” Pope employs the biblical allusion of Aaron’s serpent, one of God’s many miracles for the Israelites traversing to Canaan, to negative effect to exemplify this totalizing process. In the earlier passages, Pope notes the problematic perspectives that allow the part to serve as representative of the whole, creating false knowledge through perception alone. Such error can be remedied by contemplation and an understanding of the cosmology that Pope elaborates throughout *An Essay on Criticism*. However, this hopeful conclusion is undermined by his competing depiction in *Cobham* of the errors that come from such deliberation.

In the next stanza, Pope closes his comments on passion before privileging “nature” over “art.” If man is doomed by impulse, he can be saved by relying on reason and contemplation to counter the energy of “different passions.” Reason, Pope later writes, can “rectify, not overthrow” passion by placing it within definable boundaries.⁴¹¹ However, in what marks a grim, final note, Pope shows passion physically overwhelming its subject, like a parasite consuming its host:

So, cast and mingled with his very frame,
The mind’s disease, its ruling passion came;
Each vital humour which should feed the whole,
Soon flows to this, in body and in soul:
Whatever warms the heart, or fills the head,
As the mind opens, and its functions spread,
Imagination plies her dangerous art,
And pours it all upon the peccant part. (II.133-44)

But what is that “dangerous” art? The second epistle suggests that passion can never be overthrown, but can be “rectif[ied]” through a strict rational control. Again, employing

⁴¹¹ For another reading of the ruling passion, see Rebecca Ferguson, *Unbalanced Mind: Pope and the Rule of Passion*. (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania UP, 1986). Ferguson argues that the *Moral Essays* defends an “optimistic doctrine” of the passions (90).

spatial terms, Pope shows how this “disease . . . fills the head.” The abundant imagination only accelerates this process. An earlier passage from the second epistle elucidates the effect of art as well as a potential response. Given the destructive tendency of the passions to consume judgment, art must be reconsidered within the epistemological framework that Pope delineates throughout *An Essay on Man*:

What reason weaves, by passion is undone.
Trace Science, then, with Modesty thy guide;
First strip off all her equipage of pride;
Deduct what is but vanity or dress,
Or learning’s luxury, or idleness;
Or tricks to show the stretch of human brain,
Mere curious pleasure, or ingenious pain;
Expunge the whole, or lop th’ excrescent parts
Of all our vices have created arts;
Then see how little the remaining sum,
Which served the past, and must the times to come! (II.44-52)

Just as in *An Essay on Criticism*, Pope implies that contemporary “arts” have been distorted by vices that threaten to contaminate judgment. The imperatives he uses clearly show this: “strip,” “deduct,” “expunge,” “lop.” He imagines a pure art that can stand apart, rather than among, the excesses of the polite culture that characterized the study of rhetoric analogous to *An Essay on Man*. Reflecting the theme of *Cobham*, passion “undoes” the tightly-knit project that reason is capable of weaving. Yet Pope is more specific in targeting causes – the “luxury” of learning, the “tricks” that in the later line are tellingly called “arts.” Vice animates the kind of passionate frenzy that results from “the stuff of which our dream is wrought.” The invasive quality of art impels Pope’s selective acts of expunging and sanitizing.

Throughout these poems, Pope brilliantly writes in an abstract language that poeticizes the limitations of knowledge and failures of interpretation. In other poems,

Pope defends his own aesthetic methods from the kinds of criticisms that *An Essay on Man* might direct toward his work. In *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* (1735), his frustration is evident when he asks, “Soft were my numbers; who could take offence / While pure description held the place of sense?” (146-47). *The Essay on Criticism* serves as an early example of the program that Pope purported to employ both reflexively and creatively. He exhorts the dictum that he claims to follow: “Avoid *extremes*; and shun the fault of such, / Who still are pleased too little or too much” (384-85). *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* also offers a thorough condemnation of the use of art to produce scandal or controversy:

Cursed be the verse, how well soe'er it flow,
That tends to make one worthy man my foe,
Give virtue scandal, innocence a fear
Or from the soft-eyed virgin steal a tear! (283-86)

In *An Essay on Man*, Pope extols the virtues that the “cursed” poetry perverts. The dangers of such poetry push him to pursue a morally responsible art, and much of the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* defensively points out the high-mindedness behind his own efforts. Poetry should not merely entertain, but educate and compel moral action. In *An Essay on Man*, Pope credits Bolingbroke for directing him to this worthy endeavor: “That urged by thee, I turned the tuneful art / From sounds to things, from fancy to the heart” (IV. 391-92). No longer merely “tuneful,” Pope’s verse strives to direct passion toward to the moderating grasp of reason.

These poems are concerned with the corruptive role that art plays in provoking action, as well as its potentially redemptive function that can only come about through the critical examination he so explicitly develops. In what follows, Pope views rhetoric as at once exemplifying and animating concerns about the elusive yet pervasive “art” that can control human action, in questions of ornamentation and presentation as well as

issues of argument and judgment. In the otherwise glowing encomium to Pope in *Lives of the Poets*, Samuel Johnson sees the *Essay on Man* as an “egregious instance of the predominance of genius, the dazzling splendour of imagery, and the seductive powers of eloquence.”⁴¹² Johnson sees Pope as guilty of the artifice he so vigilantly warns against. For Johnson, the greatest sin of the *Essay* is in its inability to follow its own dicta: “disrobed of its ornaments . . . left to the powers of its excellence, what shall we discover?”⁴¹³ In calling for the purification of art, the *Essay* robes itself in the artifice that it explicitly aims to reject. If we agree with Johnson’s appraisal, Pope uses “seductive eloquence” to attack the arts that produce effects similar to eloquence. Pope depicts judgment as fraught, easily susceptible, and requiring an intense system of moderation. Lacking that system, Wharton was reduced to the “scorn of our age,” capable of deceiving himself and others, possessed by a ruling passion that threatened to contaminate further through his eloquence. In *Cobham*, the eloquent Wharton becomes a composite figure for Pope’s concerns about art and its effects, yet through his almost cartoonish malevolence he risks becoming a caricature. In what follows, I discuss the orators in *The Iliad* and *The Rape of the Lock* who become early repositories for the epistemological and aesthetic tensions that Pope later defines so explicitly.

Easy Art: Rehabilitating Rhetoric in *The Iliad*

Pope began translating *The Iliad* in 1714, after the successes (even amidst some controversy) of *An Essay on Criticism*, *The Rape of the Lock*, and *Windsor Forest* (1713). Though the first volume was published in 1715, Pope was preoccupied with Homer for the better part of the next twelve years, when the final volume of *The Odyssey* was

⁴¹² Johnson, *The Lives of the Poets*, 23:1219.

⁴¹³ Ibid.

published. During this time, Pope continued to revise *The Rape of Lock*; in 1717, he introduced the “moral of the poem” by giving it voice through the character of Clarissa. In *The Iliad*, Pope turns his critical attention to violent scenes of persuasion in Homer. The “wildness” of these moments provokes Pope to qualify through extensive critical commentary and to revise them through dramatic poetic changes. In *The Rape of the Lock*, he adds a crucial revision to his poem by creating an orator modeled after a Homeric precedent. These moments prompt what Paula McDowell calls a “heightened reflection on oral communication.”⁴¹⁴ When Pope confronts an oral culture, he is struck by a peculiar sense of nostalgia that drives him to intense qualification and revision. The classical turn, whether in epic or its revision in mock-epic, pushes Pope to think more deeply and explicitly about the consequences of persuasive speech. As we will see, rhetoric can either produce too great of a change, or it can bring about no result at all. These two competing possibilities are present in both *The Iliad* and *The Rape of the Lock*.

Homer’s depiction of rhetoric plays a pivotal role in Pope’s reaction to what he perceives as primitive excess that must be reformed. In particular, Pope’s process of translation involves isolating and containing potentially dangerous persuasive energies. Even amidst the challenge of translation and the weight of its ambition, Pope turns to rhetoric and its effects in order to deal with the potentially overwhelming vigor that he finds in the original text. For Pope, translation prompts rhetorical theory when he turns to his evaluation of Homer’s configuration of persuasion. Of course, Homer lived and wrote in an age before the advent of *rhetorique*, both as a term and a discipline.⁴¹⁵ Rhetoric did

⁴¹⁴ McDowell, “Mediating Past and Present: Toward a Genealogy of ‘Print Culture’ and ‘Oral Tradition,’” 236.

⁴¹⁵ See Edward Schiappa, “Did Plato Coin Rhetorike,” *The American Journal of Philology* 111, no. 4 (December, 1990): 457–470.

not operate as a trade, an ethos, or a pedagogy in the same sense that it would in the fifth-century Athenian world of Plato and the Sophists and, later, Aristotle. In Homer, persuasion appears not at the behest of any theory, but as a coercive and often amoral means of gaining what one wants when one wants it. What makes oral scenes so fertile for scholarly attention is that Homer avoids the abstract and presents the persuasive moment as a purely narrative act. Any theorization of rhetoric is submerged in story and presented through intense and immediate action. For Homer, rhetorical activity is characterized by its violence. The totalizing power that persuasion can have in Homer's texts prompts Pope to moments of revision and prolonged commentary.

The Iliad was a monumental undertaking for Pope, one that he thought would ultimately define or discredit him.⁴¹⁶ As he would later tell Joseph Spence, the gravity of expectations haunted him:

The Iliad took me up six years; and during that time, and particularly the first part of it, I was often under great pain and apprehension. Though I conquered the thoughts of it in the day, they would frighten me in the night. I sometimes still even dream of being engaged in that translation; and got about half way through it: and being embarrassed and under dread of never completing it.⁴¹⁷

Pope's final translation met with criticism from the usual detractors, such as John Dennis.⁴¹⁸ Also, in an acerbic recognition of what he felt was Pope's opportunism and lack of antiquarian learning, Richard Bentley reportedly scoffed, "a pretty poem, Mr.

⁴¹⁶ See his "A Farewell to London in the Year 1715." In this poem, Pope announces his supreme frustration with the mounting political tensions, as well as the escalating attacks on his character. Justifying his decision to retire to the peaceful climate of Binfield to work on his translations, he writes

Why should I stay? Both parties rage;
My vixen mistress squalls;
The wits in envious feuds engage:
And Homer (damn him) calls. (21-24)

By concluding the stanza with Homer's call to duty, Pope dramatically establishes the translation as offering the potential to alleviate these crises. Yet the parenthetical "(damn him)" wittily yet emphatically shows him anxious toward the task of translation.

⁴¹⁷ Spence, *Observations, Anecdotes, and Characters, of Books and Men.*, 283–84.

⁴¹⁸ For a catalog of the attacks on Pope's translation, see Carolyn Williams, *Pope, Homer, and Manliness* (London: Routledge, 1993), 75-78.

Pope but you must not call it Homer.”⁴¹⁹ Brushing aside such antiquarian critiques, Samuel Johnson calls it, without irony, “the noblest version of poetry which the world has ever seen.”⁴²⁰ These two extremes reveal the criteria by which Pope’s Homeric translation have been judged. For Johnson, the poem’s “nobility” exists apart from the ambition of classical fidelity that Bentley sees Pope as failing – this makes it merely “pretty.” Whatever Pope’s desire to participate in a culture of antiquarian thought, his interest in showing his own poetic mastery seems to have triumphed over his desire for a faithful translation. However, Pope’s revisions are not merely poetic. In examining his changes and his protracted commentary in footnotes and explanatory essays, it becomes clear that he saw aspects of the classical world that challenged his own moral and philosophical perspectives.

In examining Pope’s translation, I eschew the more traditional categories of discussing classical engagement in the early eighteenth century as “neoclassical” in terms of imitation or departure. The problems with this term can be seen in the most relevant and influential critical studies of the period. For instance, James William Johnson’s agenda can be seen in the title of his seminal study, *The Formation of English Neo-Classical Thought*.⁴²¹ As the title suggests, Johnson historicizes a teleology of neo-classical thought by isolating a collective engagement with classicism that resulted in a specifically Augustan idea of classical literature. Johnson defines the archetypal classicist as a “man who saw within preserved Greco-Roman literature a total and applicable

⁴¹⁹ Johnson, *The Lives of the Poets*, 23:1180.

⁴²⁰ Johnson, *The Lives of the Poet*, 23: 1076.

⁴²¹ James Weldon Johnson, *The Formation of English Neo-Classical Thought* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1967). Johnson’s work is pivotal because it moved the understanding of (early) long-eighteenth-century classical engagement away from strict and unvarying veneration toward a more critical position, in focusing on the way the differences between Augustan Rome and “Augustan” England stimulated a rivalry that prompted “Augustan” writers to better than historical namesakes.

world,” whose aims were “not simply ‘literary’ but utilitarian.”⁴²² This suggests an engagement beyond mere nostalgia, as it posits an authority that I argue Pope rejects even as he clearly wants to operate from a position of classical veneration. Pope provides a crucial example of a canonical poet engaging a classicist project but forced to discrimination and revision, a far cry from the appropriation that Johnson locates in the so-called “neo-classicist.” Readings in the legacy of Johnson, such as those by Howard Weinbrot and Joseph Levine, generally follow suit in seeing literature after the sixteenth century as invested in a certain kind of classicism that reveals itself in the creation of an emergent nationalistic literature.⁴²³

By contrast, I read *The Iliad* in the context of what Adam Potkay calls “the ongoing tension between the ideals of ancient eloquence and modern manners,” and the teleology of eighteenth-century literature as one in which can be traced “a gradual shift away from the ideal of eloquence toward one of politeness.”⁴²⁴ As Laura Brown notes,

⁴²² Johnson, *The Formation of English Neo-Classical Thought*, 29.

⁴²³ Joseph Levine, *The Battle of the Books: History and Literature in an Augustan Age* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994); Howard Weinbrot, *Britannia's Issue* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007). Another aspect of the confusion lies in the proximity between the historical and textual specificity of the quarrel between “ancients” and “moderns,” a literary event that began in France in the 1690s and carried over to England through vigorous debates between such figures as Richard Bentley and William Temple. The impulse behind the argument in England was philological, as opposed to literary, centering around the veracity of classical texts like the to-be-found-spurious Epistles of Phalaris. This debate finds its most detailed and colorful satire in Jonathan Swift's *Battle of the Books*, in which the quarrel is described in absurd military terms.

However, though critics like Levine are right to see the influence of this debate as evident in later discussions of classicism, they often view the quarrel and its legacy as an evolving discourse that overwhelmingly haunts any future discussions of classical texts. Depending on whom you read, the influence of the “ancients” hangs over writers of the period like a model that must be venerated and emulated or a standard that must be surpassed. In Weinbrot's *Britannia's Issue*, this view finds writers such as Pope and Thomas Gray trying to outdo Pindar, James Macpherson trying to top Homer. In this conflict, there is a spirit of competition that pushes the most important writers of the period to rise to an occasion prompted by the greatness of classicism. However, when faced with Pope's *Iliad*, this is neither Pope's announced intention nor his covert one. As he outlines it in the preface, Pope's views his competition (Chapman, Ogilby, Dryden, Dacier) in poetic rather than classical terms.

⁴²⁴ Potkay, *The Fate of Eloquence in the Age of Hume*, 80.

Pope “makes a classical past out of his own present beliefs.”⁴²⁵ Pope’s ambition is not to do Homer better than Homer could, but to remove what would make the classical world unsettling for a modern audience. *The Iliad* can be seen as an act of what Maynard Mack calls “an act of irradiation of poetry by poetry” where “what emerges is neither narrowly Augustan nor uniquely Homeric.”⁴²⁶ Elsewhere, Mack adds, “What was barbarous, he softened, and what was gross or vulgar he mitigated.”⁴²⁷ Much like the “art” Pope describes in *An Essay on Man*, Homer must be relieved of his excesses. What is “barbarous” must be expunged and replaced through a complex act of translation.

Pope articulates these concerns through what I call “classical rehabilitation.” In this reconfiguration, the activity of rehabilitation is often prompted by a contemporary aversion to the perception of classical impropriety. Rather than the more authoritarian and corrective act of poetic revision, the act of rehabilitation suggests a curative approach that concentrates on restoring the body while removing the malady. As I will show, Pope clarifies and justifies his role as translator through this paradigm of restoration. Through translation, Pope reconfigures both the classical orator and the value of eloquence to which such speakers would aspire. Here, Potkay’s analysis is useful for evaluating the peculiar and contradictory attitudes toward classical eloquence. Potkay surveys the texts that call for the revival of the eloquence of Cicero and Demosthenes, and finds a lurking anxiety about the effects it may cause. For instance, within the emerging discourse of politeness, David Hume sees rhetoric as having largely conciliatory aims even as he nostalgically recalls the Athenian scene in which the aesthetic object of the oration is to be celebrated and revived. In *Of Eloquence*, Hume’s eulogy to eloquence is accompanied

⁴²⁵ Laura Brown, *Alexander Pope*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 25.

⁴²⁶ Mack, *Twickenham Edition* (7: clxxxvii)

⁴²⁷ Mack, *Alexander Pope: A Life*, 352.

by a belief that the power of classical oratory is inappropriate for his own contemporary scene. The “blaze of eloquence” Hume locates in Demosthenes and Cicero must be tempered by “our modern customs, or our superior good sense.”⁴²⁸ What results in terms of persuasive activity in the “Age of Hume” is an endemic plainness that, Potkay notes, “seeks to placate or stabilize rather than, as with eloquence, to make things happen.”⁴²⁹ The conciliatory impulse fits Richard Weaver’s characterization of the “neuter” rhetoric that reframes affective failure as a virtue that can be realized in disinterested discourse, or a language notable for its enlightened self-interest and philosophical objectivity. This disinterested stance, valorized in the figures of Addison and Steele’s Mr. Spectator as well as Adam Smith’s moral ideal of the “impartial spectator,” emerges from the vexed dialectic that Potkay describes, in which the energy of classical veneration is countered by a code of polite manners than must be instilled (ironically) through classical forms.⁴³⁰

The changes Pope makes are significant in that he creates, like Hume, a kind of classicism that is at once edifying and inoffensive. Pope’s fidelity to the epic narrative does not suggest that he has any interest in changing or adapting Homer at the level of action. However, Pope finds moral and intellectual aspects of Homer’s text that must be rehabilitated for the eighteenth-century reader. The Homeric world presents Pope with startling scenes of energy and passion in the form of an agonistic, warrior ethos that was

⁴²⁸ Hume, “Of Eloquence,” 99.

⁴²⁹ Potkay, *The Fate of Eloquence in the Age of Hume*, 5.

⁴³⁰ See for instance Mr. Spectator’s claim that he prefers to be a “spectator of Mankind, than as one of the Species” (*The Spectator* 1:4). Both Addison and Steele invoke classical models to justify this non-interventional approach. In Spectator #10, Mr. Spectator (Addison) famously invokes Socrates to justify his goal of bringing philosophy “to dwell in Clubs and Assemblies, at Tea-Tables, and in Coffee-Houses” (*The Spectator* 1:44). In the comparison, Mr. Spectator at once elevates his own mission and playfully mocks the grand ambition of Socrates. The radical energy of Socrates has no place in polite society, while the modest goals of Mr. Spectator are an appropriate form of social improvement. I will discuss Smith further in my next chapter.

incompatible with the manners of the age in which he was writing.⁴³¹ In the lengthy explanatory preface to *The Iliad*, Pope reflects on this passion:

Our author's work is a wild paradise, where, if we cannot see all the beauties so distinctly as in an ordered garden, it is only because the number of them is infinitely greater. It is like a copious nursery, which contains the seeds and first productions of every kind, out of which those who followed him have but selected some particular plants, each according to his fancy, to cultivate and beautify. If some things are too luxuriant it is owing to the richness of the soil; and if others are not arrived to perfection or maturity, it is only because they are overrun and oppressed by those of a stronger nature.⁴³²

Pope sets in motion a number of oppositions that must be managed in the challenge of classical rehabilitation. Just as the “great” contrasts with the “judicious,” the vehemence of the “wild paradise” is countered by the “ordered garden” in which beauty might be distinctly seen. Pope must cultivate and prune that garden of its primitive excesses.

Through these gardening metaphors, Pope gives himself license to celebrate the “richness” of the soil while seeing a garden overrun with powerful narrative and linguistic “weeds” that must be trimmed, pulled, or transformed into the flowers that they clearly could have been. “Pure and noble simplicity” and an abundant “poetic fire” are corrupted by the excesses of an uneven growth. Later in the preface, Pope notes that these concerns are both poetical and moral:

But after all, it is with great parts, as with great virtues, they naturally border on some imperfection; and it is often hard to distinguish exactly where the virtue ends, or the fault begins. As prudence may sometimes sink to suspicion, so may a great judgment decline to coldness; and as magnanimity may run up to profusion or extravagance, so may a great invention to redundancy or wildness. If we look

⁴³¹ See Nancy Worman, “Fighting Words: Status, Stature, and Verbal Contest in Archaic Poetry.” *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Rhetoric* ed. Erik Gunderson (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2009). In a rare and insightful essay that analyzes the rhetoric of Homer, Worman discusses the agonistic context of exchanges between warriors: “Whether warriors vaunt on the field of battle or dispute in assembly, their threats, taunts, and slanderous labels broadcast superiority and coerce actions” (29). Ulysses is an appropriate example of this, as “obvious prototype for the classical orator” because of his “verbal dexterity, strategic mentality, and talent for coercion and control” (30).

⁴³² Pope, “*Preface to the Iliad*,” *Twickenham Edition*, 7: 2

upon Homer in this view, we shall perceive the chief objections against him to proceed from so noble a cause as the excess of this faculty.⁴³³

He uses careful language to challenge the value of the moral virtues that are both intended by and can be extrapolated from Homer. In particular, Pope's consistent use of the conditional "may" shows his concern with offending and countering an orthodox classical position. Pope shares the "objections," even if he interprets the "excess" as coming from a noble cause. Homer's virtues "border on some imperfection" without overrunning those borders completely. Pope's task then is to contain those energies, to renovate them where necessary, while still maintaining the "spirit" that makes Homer endure.

His task falls uneasily between anachronism and fidelity, yet it underwrites all the principles he will apply to the translation. This is where Pope's most notable act of poetic "irradiation" occurs; in the gauging of the potential for magnanimity to become extravagance, the careless translator can only further steer the Homeric vision toward excess. Pope must manage that extravagance even as he keeps alive the "great virtues" and originary "richness." Though the "wildness" of the text must be preserved in some form, Pope makes clear that he is going to rehabilitate the classical text, to qualify and amend the classical text's pre-Christian, pre-modern excesses and conceits, and to give it the level of sophistication that he feels it deserves. The "faults" must be removed and the "virtues" heightened. In his preface, this is the act that Pope symbolizes as turning a "wild paradise" into an "order'd garden."

Pope views himself as maintaining an equilibrium between his unique poetic style and Homer's primitive energy. However, Matthew Arnold finds Pope elevating the

⁴³³ "Preface to the *Iliad*," 12-13

former over the latter to awkward effect. In his 1861 lecture “On Translating Homer,” Arnold takes Pope’s intentions at face value and uses them as symptomatic of a general error that translators make when approaching classical texts. Arnold criticizes Pope’s translation for “an artificial evolution of thought and a literary cast of style.”⁴³⁴ At the heart of Arnold’s critique is a conservative reverence for the original text and a critique of its corruption at the hands of translators who seek to produce an *Iliad* more fitting for their own age than the one in which it was written. Pope deserves special notice because, Arnold argues, he violates the original by placing his immediate cultural and personal concerns above the task of translation. Through the enhancement of poetic couplets, for instance, Pope replaces rather than restores Homer’s language. Perhaps most incisively, Arnold claims:

One feels that Homer’s thought has passed through a literary and rhetorical crucible, and come out highly intellectualised; come out in a form which strongly impresses us, indeed, but which no longer impresses us in the same way as when it was uttered by Homer.⁴³⁵

What exactly does Pope do to Homer? He certainly does not submit to Homer’s altar, but he also clearly expresses a desire for fidelity to preserve the original character of the epic. The “literary and rhetorical crucible” invites further qualification that Arnold does not make. In what follows, I consider Arnold’s allegation literally, in arguing that Pope takes the persuasive scenes and characters of the Homeric world and channels them through rhetorical sentiments more appropriate to the climate in which Pope lived. Far from embracing the classical orator, he follows in the line of Anglican ideologues and experimental philosophers who saw themselves as fighting a battle to defend language

⁴³⁴ Matthew Arnold, *On Translating Homer: Three Lectures Given at Oxford* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1861), 18.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

from the rhetorical excesses that had overtaken it through centuries of disciplinary involvement. In a strange contrast to his own often extravagant poetic voice, Pope uses *The Iliad* to elevate plain and purified sentiment above the surface pleasantries of style in an even more forceful way.

Book III of *The Iliad* contains a scene in which two kinds of oratorical style provoke Pope to significant analysis. The captive beauty Helen, wife of the Spartan king Menelaus, stands at the walls of Troy with king Priam and a company of nobles. Helen offers her captors inside intelligence, identifying the Grecian commanders and describing their virtues and deeds. When she sees Odysseus, the Trojan elder Antenor recalls a pre-war moment when Odysseus and Helen's husband Menelaus came to persuade the Trojan council to return her, thus avoiding any potential war. In Antenor's account, Menelaus delivers a brief, lucid, but ultimately unimpressive speech. However, when Odysseus rises, Antenor is struck by his strange yet powerful eloquence. What follows is the most vivid image of the orator in either of Homer's poems. As a point of reference to clarify the eventual departures that Pope and his contemporaries would make, here is what might be considered the most literal translation of the passage:

he would just stand and stare down, eyes fixed on the ground beneath him
nor would he gesture with the staff backward and forward, but hold it
clutched hard in front of him, like any man who knows nothing.
Yes, you would call him a sullen man, and a fool likewise.
But when he let the great voice go from his chest, and the words came
drifting down like the winter snows, then no mortal
man beside could stand up against Odysseus. Then we
wondered less beholding Odysseus' outward appearance.⁴³⁶

⁴³⁶Homer, *The Iliad of Homer*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2011). For all translations, I refer to the original Greek, as collected in the Loeb Classical Library edition, and have consulted the faithful translation by A.T. Murray (in the side-by-side analogues of the Loeb) and Richmond Lattimore – whose 1951 translation attempts a word-for-word transliteration. Unless there is a noteworthy departure in Lattimore (which is normally not the case), I quote his translation. I use Lattimore not so much as an authority, but as an example of a more precise translation. For a defense of Lattimore's line-by-line

Odysseus' speech is paradoxically gentle and overpowering. He captivates his audience and causes them to overlook his odd speaking manner and physical inferiority. While Odysseus is apparently unsuccessful in his persuasive goal (Helen still remains with her captors, obviously), he establishes an ethos through the skill of his performance. Antenor remembers Odysseus' rhetorical presence even if he does not remember his exact words. That presence is brought about through the speech, and contrasts greatly with Antenor's initial judgment of the "outward appearance." The empirical image is replaced by the more suggestive mental one that Odysseus manufactures for his listeners through his performance. Despite his curious and unimpressive manner (he is older and smaller than Menelaus), his speech gives him the power to indicate a presence that contrasts with his appearance. Odysseus uses words that flow like "the winter snows," separating him from any other mortal.

For seventeenth-century translators, whom Pope cites as precedents,⁴³⁷ this scene is reduced to its most basic description. As Antenor offers little in the way of moral commentary, neither do the translators. John Ogilby, for instance, renders the passage to emphasize only the metaphorical "snow" and the soft fluency with which Odysseus/Ulysses speaks:⁴³⁸

A torrent swift as featherd snow
Not any with Ulyffes duft contend

fidelity, see Simeon Underwood, *English Translators of Homer from George Chapman to Christopher Logue* (London: Northcote House, 1998).

⁴³⁷ In the preface, Pope discusses (and ultimately dismisses) translations by Thomas Hobbes, John Ogilby, and George Chapman (*Twickenham* 5.21-22). He holds the highest esteem for John Dryden's partial translation ("He has left us only the first Book and a small Part of the sixth") and notes that he would not be attempting his own version had Dryden completed his.

⁴³⁸ Henceforth, I will refer to Odysseus by the Roman equivalent – "Ulysses" – as is uniform in the 17th and 18th translations. For the issues at stake in such choices, see Phillip Young, *The Printed Homer* (Jefferson: Mcfarland, 2008), 86-87.

Though vve his gesture could not much commend.⁴³⁹

In this abbreviated version, Ogilby still conveys the fundamentals of Antenor's description – Ulysses' gesture is strange, but his words are strong. However, Ogilby ends by inverting the order of Antenor's narration, closing with the strangeness of the gesture rather than its transformation through Ulysses' oral skill. George Chapman's earlier translation offers a similar approach. Though noted for his protracted and hyperpoetic stylings, Chapman nonetheless summarizes this scene briefly, "And words that flew about our eares like drifts of winter's snow, / None thenceforth might contend with him, though nought admird for show."⁴⁴⁰ These versions share a fidelity to the original in briefly describing Ulysses' superiority contrasted with his strange appearance, while comparing words to falling snow.

When Pope turns to this scene, he extends the description longer than his predecessors:

But, when he speaks, what Elocution flows!
Soft as the Fleeces of descending Snows,
The copious Accents fall, with easy Art;
Melting they fall, and sink into the Heart!
Wondering we hear, and fix'd in deep Surprize,
Our Ears refute the Censure of our Eyes. (3.283-88)

Pope's revision seems, at first glance, a glowing encomium to the orator and his skills. However, his description of the effects of speech inscribes the scene with implications upon which neither Homer nor Pope's prior translators expounded. These added details are significant to Pope's vivid portrait of the classical orator. In this depiction, he brings in a modern sensibility and casts the scene as a cautionary moment rather than an

⁴³⁹ John Ogilby, trans. *Homer His Iliads Translated, Adorn'd with Sculpture, and Illustrated with Annotation by John Ogilby* (London, 1660), 80.

⁴⁴⁰ George Chapman, tran., *Chapman's Homer: The Iliad* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998).

aesthetic triumph. The connotation of “Elocution,” a word no prior translator uses, is highly anachronistic. In Latin, elocution equates to style rather than delivery (*pronunciato*), the context in which Pope utilizes the term. Pope’s use of the term mirrors its contemporaneous usage amongst the figures of the emerging Elocutionary movement dedicated to teaching pronunciation and delivery. These speakers and their elocutionary texts dominated the rhetorical landscape of the early eighteenth century. The use of “elocution” is the first sign that Pope is conflating classical and contemporary rhetorical sentiments. Ulysses’ elocution may be “soft,” but it has a potentially damaging effect.

In the following couplet, Pope continues to describe Ulysses’ skill by using terminology that characterizes him as modern orator: his “Accents” fall with “easy Art,” a term that does not have any clear corollary in Homer’s Greek. When Pope invokes “easy Art” here, his connotation recalls the corruptive prospects of art in the *Moral Essays*. After introducing the “art,” he immediately describes its effect through a series of illusory images that conclude with sound refuting sight. The words melt and sink, and appearance overcomes reality through the vehicle of persuasive speech. It is the kind of artifice that Pope argues in the *Essay on Man* must be “expunged” because of its potentially dangerous qualities. In the body of the translation, the language that Pope uses to characterize persuasion articulates the specific threat he later repudiates in the *Moral Essays*.

As I have noted, Pope later makes a satirical target of the elocutionary movement for prioritizing and popularizing their culture of flamboyantly empty speaking practices through the composite figure of Orator Henley. However, the description of Ulysses anticipates this critique through its characterization of rhetorical practice as dedicated to

show rather than substance. Pope maintains the celebration that Antenor intended, but includes these striking additions that qualify and refocus the passage toward the orator's potential for disruption. The final couplet can be read as a kind of chaos, in which nothing is as it seems, and meaning and coherence have been disrupted so that the orator can control and create an artificial reality to his benefit. He is a representative of what Lanham has called the "rhetorical man" who "is trained not to discover reality but to manipulate it."⁴⁴¹ Pope's embellishments convert Ulysses from a gifted fluent and persuasive speaker to the kind of arch-manipulator Lanham describes. When Antenor describes the result of persuasion as "Our Ears refute the Censure of our Eyes," he confirms the transformation that a *kairotic* application of artifice has occurred. The performance dominates the senses and bypasses the reason. By augmenting the simile of "fleeces of descending snow," Pope's translation reveals the totalizing power of rhetoric when exploited by a gifted speaker like Ulysses.

However, while Pope breaks precedent with his elongated, anachronistic description of Ulysses, his revision of Menelaus is even more telling as it elevates an appropriate speech practice over the "melting" words of an "easy art." When Menelaus speaks before Ulysses, Pope's translation of Antenor's description emphasizes the virtues of his plainness:

When Atreus' Son harangu'd the list'ning Train,
Just was his Sense, and his Expression plain,
His Words succinct, yet full, without a Fault;
He spoke no more than just the Thing he ought. (3.275-278)

Unlike Ulysses, Menelaus speaks with clarity and precision. His speech is short and "succinct," and does not attempt to overwhelm argument with artifice. In the second

⁴⁴¹ Lanham, *The Motives of Eloquence*, 4.

couplet, Pope emphasizes the propriety of the speech with the qualifier “yet full, without a Fault.” The description reveals that, despite an apparent brevity or simplicity, the speech is composed with more attention to substance than to style. Antenor’s description of Ulysses’ performance focuses on the performance itself – the way the words melt like snow and overwhelm the listeners in ostentatious display. When Pope celebrates Menelaus’ “plain” discourse, he evokes the cultural and linguistic ideals that I have described in my last chapters. Menelaus achieves the kind of empirical accuracy and linguistic decorum that ideologues such as Sprat and Burnet were promoting in scientific and preaching texts.

By valorizing plainness, Pope departs from other translators who use this moment to highlight Ulysses’ fluency against Menelaus’ coarseness. George Chapman translates the scene using language that casts Menelaus as an inarticulate brute:

And when their counsels and their words, they wove in one, the speech
Of *Atrous* sonne was passing loud, small, fast, yet did not reach
To much; being naturally borne Laconicall: nor would
His humour lyc for any thing, or was (like th’other) old.⁴⁴²

In Chapman, Menelaus (here “Atrous sonne”) does not speak with faultless clarity, nor does Antenor’s description of him emphasize the virtues of his speech. Rather, the terse language Antenor uses to characterize the speech is analogous to Menelaus’ discourse itself: “loud, small, fast.” In a footnote, Chapman writes that the shortness “maketh even with his simple character at all parts – his utterance being noisefull, small or squeaking, an excellent pipe for a foole.”⁴⁴³ Figured as inconsequential and unmemorable, it mainly sets up the portrayal of Ulysses’ vocal talent.

⁴⁴² Chapman, *Chapman’s Homer*, 89.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*

In his commentary on this passage, Pope directly challenges Chapman and explains the choices he makes in presenting Menelaus' plainness as a virtue. Even though he is engaged with oratory throughout his corpus, Pope makes his longest direct statement Pope makes about oral protocols and propriety in this note. In particular, Pope frames his commentary as a response to Chapman's coding of Menelaus' speech as proof that he is a "foole":

Chapman in his Notes on this Place on the second Book, has described *Menelaus* as a Character of Ridicule and Simplicity. He takes advantage from the word $\lambda\upsilon\epsilon\zeta$ here made us of, to interpret that of the *Shrillness* of his Voice, which was apply'd to the *Acuteness* of his Sense; He observes that this sort of Voice is a Mark of a Fool . . . In short, that he was a weak Prince, play'd upon by others, short in Speech, and of a bad Pronunciation, valiant only by fits, and sometimes stumbling upon good Matter in his Speeches, as may happen to the most slender Capacity. This is one of the Mysteries which that Translator boasts to have found in *Homer*. But as it is no way consistent with the art of the Poet, to draw the Person in whose behalf he engages the World, in such a manner as no Regard should be conceiv'd for him; we must endeavour to rescue him from this Misrepresentation. First then, the present Passage is taken by Antiquity in general to be apply'd not to his Pronunciation, but his Eloquence. So *Ausonius* in the foregoing Citation, and *Cicero de claris Oratoribus: Menelaum ipsum dulcem illum quidem tradit Homerus, sed pauca loquentem* [Menelaus is a pleasant speaker even if he is a man of few words]. And *Quintilian. Homerus brevem cum animi jucunditate & propriam (id enim est non errare verbis) & carentem supervacuis, Eloquentiam Menelao dedit, &c . . .* [Homer has attributed to Menelaus a style of eloquence agreeably concise, appropriate (for such is the quality meant by not mistaking in words), and free from superfluity, and these are the merits of our first species of eloquence].⁴⁴⁴

After summarizing the supposed deficiencies of Menelaus, Pope counters Chapman with classical sources that present the scene in a different light. Though Pope is not particularly committed to a strict classical agenda, he relies on the writings of antiquity here to "rescue [Menelaus] from this Misrepresentation." Pope then moves to a more general discussion of Menelaus' virtues before concluding, "Thus his Character is compos'd of Qualities which give him no uneasy Superiority over others while he wants

⁴⁴⁴ *Twickenham Edition*, 7:206n.278

their Assistance, and mingled with such as make him amiable enough to obtain it.”⁴⁴⁵ He uses Menelaus’ style as a way of restoring what he sees as Homer’s true character. With the contention that such brevity is eloquent, Pope’s long defense reframes what Chapman views as an affective failure into an appropriate rhetorical protocol. Menelaus is characterized by his “eloquence,” even if the speech he gives does not match a conventional definition of the term. By invoking Cicero and Quintilian, allusions that evaluate Menelaus’ terseness as positive, Pope uses classical texts to defend contemporaneous stylistics. Both describe the style of Menelaus as appropriate for the occasion and as an example of a useful, if pithy kind of eloquence. We might assume Pope is merely doing the same in reclaiming Menelaus’ propriety from misguided predecessors like Chapman. Yet Pope’s defense of Menelaus throughout Book III is so meticulous that it extends this discussion beyond a simple act of archival commentary. In an earlier note that appears at the beginning of Antenor’s narration, Pope claims that the “close Laconick Conciseness of the one, is finely oppos’d to the copious, vehement, and penetrating Oratory of the other.”⁴⁴⁶ This turns into an extensive celebration of Menelaus. Pope refuses to characterize Menelaus with the deficiencies that previous translators assign him. If Chapman connects the “*Shrillness* of his Voice” with “the *Acuteness* of his sense,” Pope’s critical effort is to “rescue him from this Misrepresentation.” By “rescuing” him from this caricature, Pope emphasizes that his plainness should not be read as uncouth, but as an intentional rhetorical choice that reflects on his integrity and prudence.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁴⁶ *Twickenham Edition*, 7: 205n.271

In Pope's translation, Menelaus' speech comes across as a desirable rhetorical ideal when contrasted with the overly ornamental words of Ulysses', characterized by descriptors that stress the artifice he employs. To invert Pope's description, Ulysses speaks "more than the Thing he ought." Pope depicts this "oratory" as an "easy art" aiming at selfish motives. By emphasizing the premeditated aspects of Ulysses' speech, Pope reminds his contemporary reader that beneath the surface of a pleasing oratorical performance is the sinister "vehemence" that Ulysses' manipulates. The ability to make words "soft as the fleeces of descending snow" is an "easy art," a hypnotic artificiality that should be distrusted.

While Menelaus offers one positive model of rhetorical style removed from ornamentation and premeditated performance, Pope offers the most productive use of rhetoric and its effects through the character of Nestor. In Homer's text, Nestor is depicted as a wizened, eloquent mentor, whose purposes are often best served in an advisorial capacity. Nestor shares the integrity of Menelaus, but brings it to more violent scenes that require his calming presence. Further, Nestor's persuasive activity allows Pope to conceive appropriate rhetorical protocol in the form of an orator whose impulse is to quell rather than to incite, who provokes rational thought by dissecting and placating passionate impulse. Though he is a seasoned warrior, his old age makes him a liability on the battlefield; in Book IX, he is wounded and must be rescued by Ulysses. Nestor's gifts lie in his remarkable persuasive abilities. In Book I, Nestor first appears as a mediator of conflict when he calms the fiery scene that develops from Agamemnon igniting Achilles' wrath. In the action that stirs the narrative, Agamemnon demands that Achilles return his war prize, the Trojan beauty Bryseis, to her rightful nation. As the action grows so violent

that Athena appears to stop them from killing each other, Nestor responds to the tense moment. Chapman's translation emphasizes the lucidity of Nestor as "cunning":

The cunning Pylian Orator; whose tongue powrd foorth a flood
Of more-then-hony sweet discourse: two ages were increast
Of diuerse-languag'd men; all borne, in his time, and deceast
In sacred Pylos, where he reignd, amongst the third-ag'd men:
He (well seene in the world) aduisd, and thus exprest it then.⁴⁴⁷

Chapman stresses Nestor's history and the powers of his "tongue." However, Pope situates the scene within the familiar moral context of the destructive "passions:"

To calm their passion with the words of age
Slow from his seat arose the Pylian sage,
Experienced Nestor, in persuasion skill'd
Words, sweet as honey, from his lips distill'd. (I.329-333)⁴⁴⁸

These two introductory couplets establish Nestor's responsible use of language. Nestor intervenes between disputing warriors to calm, rather than to ignite passions. In describing the passion that Nestor will calm, Pope reflects on the hard-earned wisdom that he will bring to the moment. Unlike Ulysses, who uses language as a means to construct alternate realities in order to realize his persuasive ends, Nestor's gift lies in assuaging and moderating the tensions that those like Ulysses create. Ulysses offers the model of the rhetor as provocateur and verbal magician. Even as he is "slow" to rise, he emits a calm demeanor that counters the violent animosity of the feuding warriors.

Throughout the poem, Nestor exemplifies the pacifying function that Potkay locates at the heart of polite rhetorical protocol. While these actions are in the original

⁴⁴⁷ Chapman, *Chapman's Homer*.

⁴⁴⁸ By contrast, here is Richmond Lattimore's translation:

... and between them Nestor
the fair-spoken rose up, the lucid speaker of Pylos
from whose lips the stream of words ran sweeter than Honey (1.248-250)

Pope amends Homer's description of Nestor's oral grace by adding the qualifying phrase, "To calm their passion with the words of age." Along with the next line, he also emphasizes the age of Nestor.

Homeric text, Pope reserves a special ardor for the language and criticism that surround Nestor's oratorical appearances. When Nestor intervenes in Agamemnon and Achilles' feud, Pope commends him in a lengthy note:

The Quarrel having risen to its highest Extravagance, Nestor the wisest and most aged Greek is raised to quiet the Princes, whose Speech is therefore fram'd entirely with an opposite Air to all which has been hitherto said, sedate and inoffensive. He begins with a soft affectionate Complaint which he opposes to their Threats and haughty Language; he reconciles their Attention in an awful manner, by putting them in mind that they hear one whom their Fathers and the greatest Heroes had heard with deference. He sides with neither, that he might not anger any one, while he advises them to the proper Methods of Reconciliation; and he appears to side with both while he praises each, that they may be induc'd by the Recollection of another's Worth to return to that Amity which would bring Success to the Cause . . . and yet that the Eloquence of his Nestor might not be thrown out of Character by its proving unavailable, [Homer] takes care that the Violence with which the Dispute was manag'd should abate immediately upon his speaking.⁴⁴⁹

Crucially, Pope adds that Homer invokes Nestor in "all the great Emergencies of the Poem." Nestor is able to bring about change in a way that Ulysses and Menelaus cannot. As delineated in this note, Pope finds the ideal of Nestor's eloquence in his ability to reconcile rather than animate. He combats "threats and haughty language" with affection and sensibility. In addressing the violence between Agamemnon and Achilles, he reminds them of their mutual respect for each other and appeals to transcendent virtues. As the final line of the above passage reveals, he is a manager of disputes.

In the speech that follows his intervention, Nestor emphasizes his role as resolver of conflicts by recalling a history in which his rational language played a crucial role. He reminds the feuding warriors and the audience who watches them of the company he kept amongst "the Godlike Race of Heroes once I knew" (I.345). As a companion of these more prudent warriors, Nestor claims, "with these soft, persuasive arts I sway'd / When

⁴⁴⁹ *Twickenham Edition*, 7: 104n.339

Nestor spoke, they listen'd and obey'd" (I.358-59). Again, the adjective of "soft" is Pope's addition; it has no parallel sentiment in Homer. In his reconception of the classical scene, "soft" persuasion is the best kind. Rather than compelling to action, it halts commotion that could grow more dangerous, serving as an alternative to the problems posed by the agonistic epithets that Achilles and Agamemnon shout at each other.

Nestor's valor lies in his ability to intervene with "softness" amongst violent words. As his fellow warriors are quick to use aggressive speeches or rhetorical gestures, Nestor reacts with rational language. In Book II, Nestor's services become necessary again to remedy the wrongs of a colossally misguided speech given by Agamemnon. In a shrewd act of manipulation, Agamemnon exhorts his soldiers to return to their homes rather than continue to fight an unwinnable war. Pope describes the speech in terms of the premeditated "art" Agamemnon uses to plan this rhetorical strategy. The speech "lab'r[s] in his artful breast" (II.66) until he stands before his army and "artful thus pronounc'd the speech designed" (II.137). He produces an oration that emphasizes their weakness when facing the fate of the gods. Because they are weary of an already prolonged war, the soldiers do not fall for Agamemnon's tricks and retreat to their ships. Once again, Nestor must intervene with calm words to diffuse a potentially dangerous situation. Pope describes Nestor as possessing a "Gravity" that "covers and strengths the other's Arguments" (146). Nestor's restraining practicality counters an energy that threatens to move its listeners to immediate regrettable action. In his attempt to marshal the volatile and emotive power of persuasive speech, Agamemnon brings about a climate of confusion and hostility. In response, Nestor tells his listeners to ignore the artfully composed speech and think instead about virtues that exist outside of language. In his

opening gesture, he commands, “These vain debates forbear” (II.402), characterizing both the effort of this speech and his rhetorical motives more generally. The unproductive arguments keep them from serving a higher duty: “While useless Words consume th’ unactive Hours, / No wonder *Troy* so long resists our Pow’rs” (II.409-10). After further stressing their obligation to king and country, Nestor closes by suggesting that the invading troops be organized by tribe and nation to ensure a patriotic and militaristic unity. This practical directive steers the climate from words to action, from unproductive argument to strategic action. Fittingly, Nestor’s speech about the problematic potential of speeches effectively settles the tensions. As Pope notes in his commentary, Nestor opposes “Threats and haughty language” with “proper Methods of Reconciliation” so that the “Violence with which the Dispute was manag’d should abate immediately upon his speaking” (104). In so doing, Nestor annuls the negative effects that Agamemnon’s rhetorical misfire provokes.

Much like the goal that Pope establishes in his preface for his role as a translator, Nestor’s aim is to contain and calm the energy that threatens to prevail. Through his irenic presence, he vocalizes a prudence that Pope uses his translation to increase and clarify. In the “rhetorical crucible” that Arnold sees the spirit of Homer traveling through and coming out “intellectualized,” Pope qualifies a violent argumentation and the animosity that could ensue by valorizing Nestor’s more modest and productive goals.

Pope’s extensive commentary reveals his critical attention to these orators and their potential effects. Concerned with Ulysses’ ability to replace one reality with another through “melting” words, Pope makes a detailed case for the unadorned and straightforward method of Menelaus. Nestor’s intervention is necessary to combat the

inherent violence of Agamemnon's language. As we will see, when epic turns to mock-epic, Pope restages this conciliatory ideal for a comic effect. In the genteel world of *The Rape of the Lock*, he wonders whether those effects are possible at all. In *The Iliad*, the persuasive moment is a vexed one. If it offers the potential for positive change, it does not fulfill that potential. If it is the product of artful composition, its impulses are to be distrusted. For Pope, rhetoric is bound in a dense and indiscernible matrix of intention and effect. Even as Ulysses' performance is magnificent, Pope elaborates on the disruptive potential of that performance through suggestive phrasing and critical commentary. As a translator, Pope manages these tensions through acts of commentary, qualification, and rehabilitation. In the epic absurdity of *The Rape of the Lock*, Pope engages in further acts of isolation and containment for the power of speech. The best way to render a persuasive attempt innocuous is to place it in the mouth of a speaker whose speech falls on deaf ears. The continuing revisions of *The Rape of the Lock* offer Pope opportunities to expand and exaggerate affective failure.

"Restore the Lock!": *The Rape of the Lock* and the Efficacy of Rhetoric

As I have shown, as rhetoric prompts revision, Pope channels the classical moment through contemporary ideals. In *The Rape of the Lock*, he conveys a contemporary moment in classical terms, turning a drawing room practical joke into a mock-epic scenario. The violent efficiency of the titular activity of the poem – the severing of Belinda's lock – stands in stark contrast to the many persuasive speakers who have no effect on their audience. The presentation of these failed persuasive speeches allows Pope to privilege his own aesthetic ideal over the one that rhetoric offers. Tita Chico has argued that the most significant conflict in the poem is not between the feuding coquettes

and rakes, but between Pope's belief in the superiority of his poetry against the "art" of cosmetics.⁴⁵⁰ Comparable to the "aesthetic rivalry" in which poetry endures while cosmetics fade, we might consider a similar battle between the written and the spoken word. This conflict is most apparent in a key moment in which "airy" Belinda ignores the earnest spoken advice of Ariel as soon as she eyes a "billet-doux" that offers her titillating possibilities (I.118). However, when we consider Pope's ambitions for the poem as he stated them in letters and other material that circulated with the poem, it becomes clear that he wonders about the persuasive potential of both writing and speech.

The earliest two-canto version of *The Rape of the Lock* was an immediate success in its covert publication in 1712. It was "the talk of the town,"⁴⁵¹ and while its success did much to enhance Pope's fast-growing reputation, the poem was taken as an affront by its barely concealed subjects.⁴⁵² As Pope based the poem on a real situation, the "snipping" committed by Lord Petre on Arabella Fermor, the subjects were not happy seeing themselves even in this playful satire. In 1714, Pope expanded the poem to include the epic machinery of the sylphs and the war-like game of ombre. Affixed to the 1714 publication was an open letter to Arabella Fermor in which Pope apologizes for the unintended shame she felt it had brought her. The letter is often read as part of the satirical project, particularly in its gentle mockery of its subject's offense at such a trifle.⁴⁵³ We might still imagine Pope and his circle snickering at the satirical necessity of its inclusion even as Arabella and her entourage read it in earnest. However, the letter

⁴⁵⁰ Tita Chico, *Designing Women: The Dressing Room in Eighteenth-Century English Literature and Culture* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2005), 121.

⁴⁵¹ Maynard Mack, *Alexander Pope: A Life* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), 331.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*

⁴⁵³ Christina Knellwolf claims, "The joke of dedication appears to be that only a woman would be gullible enough to swallow such twisted logic" (*A Contradiction Still* 180).

apparently mollified Belinda.⁴⁵⁴ To Arabella, Belinda is meant to “resembl[e] you in nothing but beauty.”⁴⁵⁵ In the letter, Pope states that he only intended to ameliorate the tensions between the Petre and the Fermor families by making light of the event that caused them. He contends that his intentions were and are (in the wake of this revised version) nothing but noble. The success of the poem, he claims, baffles him: “as it was communicated with Air of a Secret, it soon founds its Way into the World.”⁴⁵⁶

Interestingly, Pope uses the surprising reception of his own poem to symbolize the slippery nature of the written utterance, as well as the lack of control its author has after it is published. This clearly has a euphemistic quality; Pope likely suspected and hoped that poem would be popular and made continual revisions to capitalize on that popularity.⁴⁵⁷

Whatever the case, the affixed letter at least offers the façade of conciliation. Pope later told Spence that he was prompted by John Caryll to poeticize the event in the hope that by representing the scenario in a playful way, he could “make a jest of it, and laugh them together again.”⁴⁵⁸ In this recounting, his intentions were ameliorative even if the effect was nothing of the sort. If the poem aims to assuage the tensions resulting from a conflict Pope only heard about, then the letter to Arabella attempts to alleviate the animosities and embarrassments the poem caused. According to the letters to the Fermors and to Caryll, he sees a tense social moment that can be resolved by stepping back and examining the situation rationally. Therefore, the *Rape* can be read as having a similar interventional purpose as Nestor in the *Iliad*: aiming to calm selfish passions with

⁴⁵⁴ In a letter to John Caryll, Pope comments on her response: “the young lady approves.” (*The Correspondence of Alexander Pope* 1:207.)

⁴⁵⁵ *Twickenham Edition*, 2: 143

⁴⁵⁶ *Twickenham Edition*, 2: 142

⁴⁵⁷ See Tillotson’s introduction to the *Twickenham Edition*, 2:94-95. Pope insisted the rush to publication occurred because he was afraid of literary pirates who would steal the poem and publish it without giving him credit.

⁴⁵⁸ *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, ed. George Sherburn, 5 vols, (Oxford: Oxford UP), 1:20.

rational argument. As Nestor stood between the feuding Agamemnon and Achilles, and attempted to redirect the violence to rational discussion, Pope moves to diffuse the tensions by “laugh[ing] them together.” Even if the sincerity is undercut by his pervasive wit, the impetus of intercession is the same. Pope presents himself as wanting to calm the hostility first between his veiled subjects, and next between those subjects and himself. As a direct address, the letter to Arabella attempts to persuade toward conciliation, both with Lord Petre and Pope.

In the poem, orators surround and amplify the success of the central “rape,” emphasizing the Baron’s violent success alongside the failures of rhetorical activity. In the first two cantos, Ariel delivers two warnings that are ignored. As Belinda wakes, he expresses a lengthy speech impelling her to avoid falling victim to the “gay ideas [that] crowd the vacant Brain” (I.83). Ariel concludes, “Beware of all, but most beware of Man!” (I.114). Ariel serves as a representative figure for an intense system of moderation that is necessary to avoid the excesses of culture and commodity:

Know farther yet; Whoever fair and chaste
Rejects Mankind, is by some *Sylph* embrac'd:
For Spirits, freed from mortal Laws, with ease
Assume what Sexes and what Shapes they please.
What guards the Purity of melting Maids,
In Courtly Balls, and Midnight Masquerades,
Safe from the treach'rous Friend, and daring Spark,
The Glance by Day, the Whisper in the Dark;
When kind Occasion prompts their warm Desires,
When Musick softens, and when Dancing fires?
'Tis but their *Sylph*, the wise Celestials know,
Tho' *Honour* is the Word with Men below. (I.68-78)

The epic machinery is suggestive of all the acts required to “guard the Purity of melting Maids” when the young women are surrounded by forces that aim to corrupt them.

Ariel’s advice is performative in the sense that the duty of a sylph is to serve as the

guardian of the ideals of chastity and purity. As Ariel explains, the ethereal sylph is synonymous with the abstraction of the “honour” characterized by “men below” that results from their unseen protection. Whether through the magical presence of the sylph or through the system of control and protection he describes, Ariel’s directives serve as the kind of moral instruction needed to resist the compulsions that lead to Belinda’s humiliation. Much to his consternation, all of Ariel’s moral proscriptions are ignored. Pope does not waste much poetic space on Belinda’s deliberation over this solemn warning. Upon waking, Belinda sees a “billet-doux” and “all the Vision vanish’d from thy Head” (I.119-20). Ariel’s counsel foreshadows the events of the narrative, in which “gay ideas” and the dangers of a self-interested man lead to Belinda’s tragic embarrassment. Ignoring the high-minded lecture, Belinda is swayed by “wounds, charms, and letters” of the billet-doux. Ariel possesses an intense loyalty to Belinda and advocates the pursuit of a higher virtue that should animate all human action. However, Belinda ignores the oral advice for the more titillating aspects of the written. In the next verse paragraph, she further replaces Ariel’s vision of self-moderation with a more powerful visualization of self-importance when she steps into the toilet to glance at her own “heav’nly image in the Glass” (I.125). Ariel’s speech is eloquent, poetic, and full of moral dicta that any principled reader should follow. That Belinda *immediately* ignores this advice emphasizes not the mediocrity of Ariel’s attempt, but the futility of oratory itself on such genteel audiences as Belinda who can so quickly turn to more enticing options. Ariel valorizes the abstract while Belinda is driven to the glistening yet empty particulars that surround her.

Ariel alludes to a power that romantic language can hold when wielded by an effective user:

What tender Maid but must a Victim fall
To one Man's Treat, but for another's Ball?
When Florio speaks, what Virgin could withstand,
If gentle Damon did not squeeze her Hand. (I.95-98)

When Pope refers to the conflict of Florio, he most obviously alludes to a conflict between two caricatured gentlemen for the hand of the “tender Maid.”⁴⁵⁹ However, Pope also relies on a double-meaning apparent in the homonymic quality of “Damon” and “Daemon.”⁴⁶⁰ If we read the line as two lovers competing for the maid's hand, Ariel's advice suggests going from one negative prospect to another, as both fall firmly in the category of suspicious and dangerous men. In that sense, “gentle” is clearly meant as a seductive gesture, perhaps referring to a male suitor possessing a feminine softness. However, the homonym offers the alternative to understand the “gentle Da[e]mon” as serving Ariel's function in assisting the virgin from resisting the alluring words of Florio. Like a Platonic Daemon,⁴⁶¹ the sylph helps fortify the defenses against seductive language. Unfortunately, as the poem will vividly reveal, the sylphs' ethereal nature limits their ability to intervene. When a sylph tries to throw itself between the scissors to prevent the cutting of the lock, it is “cut . . . in twain” (III.151). However, in the scenario between Florio and the gentle “Damon,” the presence of the moderating impulse

⁴⁵⁹ For a reading that makes this connection, see Debra Fried, “The Stanza: Echo Chambers.” *A Companion to Poetic Genre*. Ed. Erik Martiny. (Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2012) 53-64. On a similar note, many editions of Pope's poetry include explanations that the commonly used names are similar to “Tom, Dick, and Harry.”

⁴⁶⁰ In the *Pastorals*, Pope follows Virgil in the Eclogues by naming the representative shepherd of Spring, “Damon.” Damon serves as judge in a poetic contest between Strephon and Daphnis. Damon shares the transcendent and moderating judgment of Ariel, who could also be categorized as a Daemon.

⁴⁶¹ In various Platonic texts, Socrates refers to a “daemon” as an invisible or immaterial presence who warns him but never tells him what to do. Like that mythical daemon (which vaguely resembles the literary idea of a “conscience”), Ariel's opening speech offers little in the way of prescribed action, but is full of cautionary advice.

successfully wards off the scheming suitor whose words would otherwise be overwhelmingly forceful. Florio's speech requires the temperate response that the sylph personifies. The opening canto establishes a paradigm of rhetorical response that the rest of the poem will restage. In Canto II, Ariel rallies his sylphs to arm themselves against those "black Omens [that] threat the brightest Fair / That e'er deserv'd a watchful Spirit's care" (II.101-102). Though Ariel's command is strong and his words reflect his profound sense of duty, this effort will only end in the failure of defend against the "rape."

Throughout the poem, Pope calls attention to the "Force of Female Lungs" only to characterize that force by its boisterous futility (IV.84). After the "rape," the choleric Thalestris attempts to characterize the injustice of the event through a passionate invective. However, Thalestris also admits her own ultimate powerlessness. Thalestris' goals are to defend Belinda and compensate for this injustice. However, she recognizes that in mending the lock, she primarily aims to restore Belinda's reputation. Since the lock cannot be restored through any physical or rhetorical action, Thalestris recognizes her own incapacity:

Already hear the horrid things they say,
Already see you a degraded Toast,
And all your Honour in a Whisper lost!
How shall I, then, your helpless Fame defend? (IV.106-110)

The first three lines of this passage assert the toxic effects of speech, in the form of gossiping whisperers who will rearticulate this story in the most corruptive fashion.

Thalestris recognizes that her ceremonial speech is helpless against another form of oral persuasion, the persuasive whispers that will destroy Belinda's "Honour." Belinda's already-tattered reputation will become further tainted through the destructive and persuasive acts of conversation against which she is "helpless." Despite her righteous

anger, Thalestris cannot vindicate Belinda from the court of public opinion. The final rhetorical question has a resigned tone. The lines that follow emphasize the losing battle that language alone can fight. The only possible alternative is the physical restoration of the lock, which leads Thalestris to implore the Baron to return it. Unmoved, the Baron refuses.

Thalestris calls attention to the impotence of both the orator and the redemptive rhetoric she might attempt. She succeeds only in fanning the flames of Belinda's anger. Interestingly, this unintended effect is comparable to Pope's description of the result of his poem in the letter to Arabella. Pope's self-described ambition is to remedy the embarrassment he has inadvertently aggravated. In the poem, the Baron's response characterizes the dual effort of Pope's announced poetic ambition and Thalestris' attempt at restoring Belinda's name: "It grieves me much (reply'd the Peer again) / Who speaks so well shou'd speak in vain" (IV.131-32). Realizing that she is incapable of restoring Belinda's reputation, she provokes her entourage instead to turn to the impossible: the restoration of the lock. Until this point, persuasive speech has been considered a potential catalyst for change and restoration but shown to be inadequate. When Clarissa appears, she is the embodiment of this inefficacy.

In 1717, Pope released what would be the most familiar version of the poetic text, though later editions included additional explanatory footnotes and introductory material. While previous versions included a character named "Clarissa," whose function is largely to provide the instrument for the "Rape," the 1717 poem gave Clarissa a lengthy speech that would serve (a later footnote would explain) "to open more clearly the MORAL of

the Poem, in a parody of the speech of Sarpedon to Glaucus in Homer.”⁴⁶² In case that moral was not clear in the original two canto version – and apparently it was not, much to Pope’s consternation – this latest version made it inescapable. Pope gradually expanded the moral and social significance just as he incrementally increased the presence of Clarissa. By voicing this moral through a character who is duplicitous, Pope seemingly undercuts the seriousness with which it is supposed to be taken. In addition to serving the didactic moral, Clarissa’s narrative purpose as a speaker is to intervene between hostile combatants. Compared to Nestor in *The Iliad*, Clarissa would seemingly exemplify a noble purpose, as does the content of her speech which calls for moral correction and the elevation of merit over appearance. However, it ultimately proves to be consistent with the rest of the persuasive speeches in the poem insofar as it fails to bring about its intended effect. Her speech is *immediately* ignored and forgotten, only serving to interrupt the narrative.

As Pope explains in the footnote, Clarissa’s oration is modeled on Sarpedon’s plea to Glaucus. In 1709, Pope translated Sarpedon’s activity (which spans the twelfth and sixteenth books of *The Iliad*) and grouped it together as *The Episode of Sarpedon*.⁴⁶³ Contending that their “extended reign” as privileged warriors and members of Trojan society requires “Deeds transcending our command” (27, 40), Sarpedon incites Glaucus to second him in retaliating against the Greeks, even though their deaths might result, linking their social and physical advantage as heroes to the responsibility they have to deserve their reputation. They must “give to Fame what we to Nature owe” (50).

⁴⁶² See the Twickenham edition of *The Rape of the Lock*, 2: 199n4. In the 1736 edition of the poem, the last seven words (explaining that it was a “parody”) appeared. In 1751, the opening clause was added to explain that Clarissa expressed the “moral of the poem.”

⁴⁶³ For the publication history of this translation, see the *Twickenham Edition* I:448. The *Episode* first appeared in *Poetic Miscellanies: The Sixth Part*.

Sarpedon urges an obligation to making appearance and reality meet, for heroic presentation to be enacted through heroic action. As Pope notes in the epic “Argument” that precedes the translation, this is an “admirable Speech.” The translation emphasizes Glaucus’ immediate positive response: “His Words the list’ning Chief inspire / With equal Warmth, and rouse the Warrior’s Fire” (53-54). Sarpedon successfully gives life to the abstraction of honor to provoke virtuous action. The effectiveness of the speech is realized instantaneously, a stark contrast to Clarissa’s oration. Clarissa clearly views herself as a reformer whose task is to maintain the distinctions of a sociable and aristocratic culture while remedying some of what she perceives as its most misguided values. Mirroring Sarpedon, she urges a shift from aristocratic vanity to a responsible humility occasioned by rank. Even if Clarissa’s virtue is questionable, the speech she gives vividly and plainly articulates the opposition between ornamentation and simplicity that Pope repeatedly stages. However, it is useful to remember that when Pope removes Sarpedon’s speech from the narrative of *The Iliad* to be a stand-alone translation, he does so to preserve the moral imperatives. When Pope uses Sarpedon’s model as a moral for the *Rape of the Lock*, he does something quite the opposite. He adds a valuable moral to a narrative in which no moral is otherwise present.⁴⁶⁴ If Pope wanted the moral to be taken seriously, why would he put it in the mouth of Clarissa? And if he would ventriloquize the moral through the prudish, “grave” Clarissa, why even include it all?

Clarissa’s role has generated interesting critical accounts of her function and Pope’s reason for her late inclusion. The speech is often viewed as transformative

⁴⁶⁴ See Mack, *Alexander Pope: A Life*: “[When] Pope brings Sarpedon’s challenge into the fashionable drawing-rooms of Hampton Court and makes its phrases echo and re-echo beyond the chit-chat we hear there, the tantrums we witness there, and the decidedly shrunken moral application it receives there, it is a moment of revelation and judgment . . .” (131-32).

because it offers moral clarity in the form of a challenge to both the fictional listeners of the poem and the genteel culture they are meant to represent.⁴⁶⁵ This reading is perplexing given Clarissa's inability to move any of her listeners even slightly. Yet these analyses underscore the positive moral value of the speech regardless of its reception. From this perspective, the vitality of Clarissa's message transcends its frivolous setting, suggesting that the reader affirms what Pope's aristocrats ignore. Though Clarissa issues a sharp challenge to the combatants, the only effect of the speech is to emphasize her prudishness. If Clarissa is a critic, she serves as one only in the sense that her critiques focus attention on her own failures. John Trimble argues that Clarissa's prudish nature "complicates and enriches" the moral she conveys because "she is as blind to her own vanity as she is aware of it in others."⁴⁶⁶ For Trimble, Clarissa is "the poem's only character with a brain."⁴⁶⁷ Ellen Pollak convincingly locates the central conflict of the poem not between the Baron and Belinda, but between Belinda and Clarissa, or "the twin freaks of coquette and prude."⁴⁶⁸ As Pollak claims, every move Clarissa makes is to ingratiate herself with the Baron, as the "two-edged weapon" of the scissors is equivalent to the powers of speech she attempts to use to put Belinda in her place.⁴⁶⁹ In their conferral of agency and intelligence on Clarissa, Trimble and Pollack still do not account for the swiftness with which her entreaty is rejected. Thomas Woodman sees Clarissa's speech as opposing an ideal politeness to the ostentatious behavior of her companions,

⁴⁶⁵ See Howard Erskine-Hill, "Alexander Pope: The Political Poet in His Time," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 15, no. 2 (1981): 131. Morris, *Alexander Pope*, 86. John Trimble, "Clarissa's Role in The Rape of the Lock," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 15, no. 4 (1974): 689.

⁴⁶⁶ John Trimble, "Clarissa's Role in *The Rape of the Lock*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 15, no. 4 (1974): 689.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 673.

⁴⁶⁸ Ellen Pollak, *The Poetics of Sexual Myth: Gender and Ideology in the Verse of Swift and Pope* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1985), 80.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

and thus the failure of her speech shows the inability of vain socialites to evaluate themselves and their behavior.⁴⁷⁰ These readings emphasize Clarissa's representation of virtue amongst a culture of excess even as they undermine on her as a deliverer of these values. Even if she has little effect on her immediate listeners, the moral of the poem is not to be rejected by the discerning reader.

This critical attention emphasizes the complexity of both Clarissa's failure within the narrative as well as the strange degree to which Pope subverts his own didactic purpose by placing it in the voice of a character who will be immediately ignored. The violent potential that Pollak locates in Clarissa's linked verbal and physical assault is undercut by the inefficacy that Woodman recognizes. Further, her moral authority is undermined by her participation in the Baron's activity that stems from her petty rivalry with Belinda. If Clarissa is a reformer, she is not a very good one; if she is the poem's most intelligent character, she is still blind to her own excesses that she condemns in others. Clarissa's effect, like Nestor's in the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles, is not only to referee the violent moment, but also to restore an earlier honor by recalling the guiding virtues that were obeyed and modeled. By calling attention to the decadent present, both rhetors nostalgically evoke the past. Like Nestor, Clarissa aims for conciliation and to elevate the culture beyond its starkly agonistic impulses.

Within the context of the narrative, the ambition of Clarissa's speech is remarkable. While her companions complain about social niceties, Clarissa presents a restorative vision: she apparently wants nothing less than for *this* moment to serve as the beginning of a cultural shift from the ostentatious and the trivial to more fundamental

⁴⁷⁰ Thomas Woodman, *Politeness and Poetry in the Age of Pope* (Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ Press, 1989), 124.

virtues outside of contemporary social practice. Clarissa's entry is preceded by scenes in which persuasive speech has mixed effects. The fourth canto ends with Belinda lamenting her newly deprived state. The fifth Canto opens with "the pitying Audience melting in tears" (V.1) in response. However, the primary audience, the Baron, is unmoved. His ears are "stopp'd" by "*Fate and Jove*" (V.2). In the action of this opening couplet, the affective reaction of Belinda's sympathetic audience, especially Thalestris, is balanced by a more significant non-response by the Baron, the only one with the power to resolve the grief. Thalestris repeats her recognition of the inability for language to remedy the situation when she asks, "For who can move when fair *Belinda* fails?" (4) Finally, Clarissa rises to speak. She makes a dramatic physical gesture in waving her fan to quiet the clamors. Pope immediately establishes Clarissa as a "grave" orator giving a speech before a captive audience (7). She moves from appearance to reality and concludes by reiterating the conflict between the two. She declares,

Say, why are Beauties prais'd and honour'd most,
 The wise Man's Passion, and the vain Man's Toast?
 Why deck'd with all that Land and Sea afford,
 Why Angels call'd, and Angel-like ador'd?
 Why round our Coaches crowd the white-glov'd Beaus,
 Why bows the Side-box from its inmost Rows?
 How vain are all these Glories, all our Pains,
 Unless good Sense preserve what Beauty gains:
 That Men may say, when we the Front-box grace,
 Behold the first in Virtue, as in Face!
 Oh! if to dance all Night, and dress all Day,
 Charm'd the Small-pox, or chas'd old Age away;
 Who would not scorn what Huswife's Cares produce,
 Or who would learn one earthly Thing of Use?
 To patch, nay ogle, might become a Saint,
 Nor could it sure be such a Sin to paint.
 But since, alas! frail Beauty must decay,
 Curl'd or uncurl'd, since Locks will turn to grey,
 Since paint'd, or not paint'd, all shall fade,
 And she who scorns a Man, must die a Maid;

What then remains, but well our Pow'r to use,
And keep good Humour still whate'er we lose?
And trust me, Dear! good Humour can prevail,
When Airs, and Flights, and Screams, and Scolding fail.
Beauties in vain their pretty Eyes may roll;
Charms strike the Sight, but Merit wins the Soul (V. 8-34)

In the opening lines, Clarissa uses rhetoric to attack rhetoric, noting that occasions for ceremonial speech often lead to a celebration of false virtues or vain appearance. Physical beauty, even attained through artificial means, is elevated through “The wise Man’s Passion, and the vain Man’s Toast.” Clarissa shows the obvious degree to which all men are taken by physical appearance, but puts it in the specifically oral terms of the “Toast” (V.10). The toast represents the kind of ceremonial rhetoric that is used only to celebrate ceremony itself, or outward appearances that reveal nothing about the lurking character or virtue or lack thereof.

She contradicts appropriate oral celebrations of artificially-achieved beauty (“Why Angels call’d, and Angel-like ador’d?” [V.12]) with celebrations of virtue (“That Men say, when we the Front-box grace, / Behold the first in Virtue as in Face” [V.17-18]). Moving from the “angel-like” to the clearly virtuous allows Clarissa to shift from the contemporaneous vogue for beauty found in rhetorical and poetic celebrations to an ideal language that elevates action and character above appearance. The structure of this initial section establishes the vain focus of the genteel world, echoing the actions that Pope has just narrated. After introducing “Virtue,” Clarissa more openly attacks the perception of beauty. By noting its finite quality and the artificial means with which it is attained, her oration itself is like removing the powder from what the poetic voice earlier calls a “painted vessel.” Just as Pope’s poem unveils the toilet, Clarissa attempts to

deconstruct and lay bare the “frail Beauty” that obsesses the culture to which she belongs (V.25). Unlike Sarpedon’s exhortation, this effort to level distinction happens at a physical rather than a social level. Her stated interest is to refine genteel behavior within firmly established boundaries, not to demolish those standards for inclusion.

In her final four lines, Clarissa imagines a future not only for her sentiment, but also for herself and her speech. Her grand optimism that “good Humour can prevail” comes in spite of the excess that surrounds her. In the “Screams” and “Scolds,” she again points to the unproductive speaking that threatens to further corrupt. The last couplet finalizes the move from appearance to reality, from charm to merit, and from vain rhetoric to true sentiment. The emphatic shift of the final line from sight to the soul prepares the auditors for the grounds on which the speech should be judged.

Just as in the precedent by Sarpedon, the response to Clarissa’s oration is immediate. Yet where Glaucus is inspired, Clarissa’s audience views her effort as wasted energy. Pope has his characters immediately dismiss the moral that has become increasingly explicit over the course of five years of revisions. The response is limited to a couplet: “So spoke the Dame, but no Applause ensued; / Belinda frown’d, Thalestris call’d her Prude” (35-36). In addition, the reader of the poem has seen Clarissa’s complicity in the “Rape” and can easily cast her as a hypocrite. A footnote affixed to the 1736 edition again calls attention to the classical contrast: “*It is a verse frequently repeated in Homer after any speech, So spoke – and all the Heroes applauded*” (II.199).⁴⁷¹ As the note delineates the epic parallels of this poem, mockingly comparing Homeric heroes with the “toyshop” participants, it also unfavorably compares the response to Clarissa’s speech with Homer’s auditors.

⁴⁷¹ *Twickenham Edition*, 2:199n.4

Pope consistently presents the inability for language to bring about favorable ends for any of the characters. It cannot mend Belinda's reputation, nor can it repair her damaged beauty. As the poem draws to a close, Belinda's frustration leads to a final oral attempt to remedy the grievances committed against her. Unlike Clarissa, Belinda does not connect injustice with the culture around her, but myopically focuses only on her own survival ("ah let me still survive") and disrepute. In this crescendo of Belinda's anger and desolation, Pope characterizes her response as a failed speech act:

Restore the Lock! she cries; and all around
Restore the Lock! the vaulted Roofs rebound.
Not fierce *Othello* in so loud a Strain
Roar'd for the Handkerchief that caus'd his Pain. (V.103-107)

In this last vocal moment of grief and indignation, Belinda looks only to the past. She cannot share Clarissa's vision to use the incident as an impulse to change. She remains defiant that the only salvation can come through an impossible restoration. That Pope compares her to the famous tragic fate of Othello signifies and foreshadows a similar doom. In J.L. Austin's terms, Belinda's statement is an illocutionary act that fails.⁴⁷² Because Pope notes the *immediate* lack of response to each of the speeches – Ariel's warning, Thalestris' appeal, Clarissa's didactic oration, and now Belinda's plea – they can all be characterized by Austin's description of ineffective performatives that are defined by a lack of a desired reaction. Because the request is so strongly worded, it emphasizes the failure that follows. Of all the speeches, Belinda's closing cry is the most deafening and passionate of them all, even as it shares a similar futility. It has no effect in the reality of the poem, where her lock remains detached, nor for the reader who knows Belinda's desire will not be satisfied. Only the poet can give the lock meaning by

⁴⁷² J.L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1975), 116-17.

imagining its future in the heavens, an unlikely fate, where “mid’st the Stars inscribe Belinda’s name!” (V.150)

The re-envisioning of the epic, albeit in a “mock” form, in *The Rape of the Lock* is one in which successful rhetoric has no place. In his explicit contrast with the affective and effective persuasion of *The Iliad*, even the most thoughtfully composed and morally admirable speeches have, at best, limited effects. These stand in sharp contrast to the violent accomplishment of the Baron, which leads to drastic ramifications. If the physical act of the “rape” acts as the centerpiece of the poem, it is surrounded by moments when speech fails to bring out its intended effect. These frustrated efforts heighten the violence of the Baron’s action while emphasizing the impossibility of its remedy. In conjunction with the specific moral and social purpose that Pope uses the inclusions of the revisions to clarify, Pope casts the failure of rhetoric in the personal terms he uses the letter to Arabella to establish. The addition of Clarissa and her moral purpose, much like that letter, is an attempt to give purpose to the frivolity and to assuage the tensions that the poetic missive had caused. Even if its tone is satirical, the affixed letter asks its audience to remedy their own quarrels and animosities with what Clarissa calls “good Humour.” Pope announces his intentions to point out the frivolities that should cause gentle laughter rather than spiteful division. Clarissa’s speech extends the conciliatory gesture of the letter to the narrative of the poem. If we take Pope at his word, which is often difficult to do, Clarissa’s inclusion and addition are in themselves an argumentative justification for the poem itself. Like Pope and his later rendition of Nestor, Clarissa intervenes between angry warriors, magnanimous in their own way as Agamemnon and Achilles are, who overreact to the passions sparked by a seemingly insignificant offense. Pope sees all sides

as guilty and offers, as he tells Caryll, to “laugh them together again.” Through “soft words,” he attempts to restore order and harmony to a scene that could grow increasingly hostile. And like Clarissa, instead of alleviating the spite, Pope was unsuccessful at doing anything other than further drawing attention to himself.

Clarissa might be seen as a satirized figure who speaks a moral she *herself* does not perform, yet the moral itself is admirable and presented mostly without satire. In regard to the language itself, the high tone of its sentiment stifles the silliness that surrounds it, suggesting the restorative potential of the orator. As Maynard Mack notes, Clarissa’s speech is a “moment of revelation and judgment.”⁴⁷³ When it builds to its climax, in which charm is vituperated and merit exalted, it hints at the cultural vision that Pope would endorse in his ambitious *Moral Epistles*. In the *Essay on Man*, he exhorts his reader to “deduct what is but vanity, or dress” (II. 45), “to “expunge” the arts that have been created out of “vice.” Clarissa’s oration argues just that – to aim for higher abstractions even if the surrounding culture offers the pleasures that Ariel warns against. Clarissa’s speech further affirms the sylph’s caustic speech that opened the poem. Yet like Ariel’s address, the attention to that moral is immediately diverted. In a poem in which the abstract language of restraint is frequently opposed by more vivid images of indulgence, even the most appropriate persuasion has no effect.

Of course, throughout his career Pope alternately met the inability to control the interpretation of his own work with frustration or amusement. In 1715, following critical attacks on his most recent revision, Pope adopted the pseudonym “Esdras Barnivelt” to publish a pamphlet titled *A Key to the Lock: Or, A Treatise Proving Beyond all Contradiction, the Dangerous Tendency of a late Poem, Entitled, The Rape of the Lock,*

⁴⁷³ Mack, *Alexander Pope*, 133.

To Government and Religion. As the title indicates, the *Key* mocks any who would find a “Dangerous Tendency” in such a seemingly innocent poem. “Barnivelt’s” anxious interpretation sees the Baron becoming the Earl of Oxford, Belinda as the recently departed Queen Anne, and the various spirits as the “two contending parties of this nation.”⁴⁷⁴ In the *Key*, Barnivelt offers a competing reading in which the poem conveys the “Popish doctrine” represented in the figure of Belinda, or the “Whore of Babylon.”⁴⁷⁵ As the poem opens, Barnivelt claims, “It is a common and just Observation, that when the Meaning of any thing is dubious, one can no way better judge of the true Intent of it, than by considering who is the Author, what is his Character in general, and his Disposition in particular.”⁴⁷⁶ Directing the ad hominem attack to Pope’s religious identity, his mock-epic must be the vessel for Papist prophecy, and so on and so forth. This passage could, from Pope’s perspective, be used to characterize any and all of his critics, who turn their engagement from the text to the person composing it. The *Epistle to Cobham* discusses with greater gravity the escalating problems of interpretation and the injurious problems that arise from such frenzied leaps of imagination. Knowing he could no longer control the reception of *The Rape of the Lock*, Pope offers an exaggeration of the language that is used to attack it. What Barnivelt calls “secret designs” are going to be found even in the most innocent of poems, just as valuable morals are going to be dismissed by those who focus instead on the moralizer.

Since he cannot moderate the way readers extrapolate meaning from his poetry, he is left to deal with a host of assumptions and explanations. Therefore, the offense that

⁴⁷⁴ Alexander Pope, *A Key to the Lock. Or, A Treatise Proving, Beyond All Contradiction, the Dangerous Tendency of a Late Poem, Entitled, The Rape of the Lock, to Government and Religion* (London, 1715), 12–17.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

Arabella Fermor took to the poem left Pope, apparently in spite of his conciliatory letter, can be seen as a spark that led to the expansion of *Clarissa*. In the poem, he characterizes his own attempts to “laugh them together” through the vehicle of a speech that is ignored. In this regard, Pope *is* *Clarissa*. Equally exasperated and bemused by the confounding reception of his poem, Pope’s inclusion of *Clarissa* represents his inability to get his point across no matter how clearly or responsibly he makes it.

Conclusion

In Book IV of *The Dunciad*, Pope gives a grim sense of finality to the decaying state of persuasion. Because of charlatans like Orator Henley who “break benches” and seduce audiences with their bombast, Dulness has replaced virtuous arts with their dark opposites:

There foam'd rebellious *Logic*, gagg'd and bound,
There, stript, fair *Rhet'ric* languish'd on the ground;
His blunted Arms by *Sophistry* are born,
And shameless *Billingsgate* her Robes adorn.
Morality, by her false Guardians drawn,
Chicane in Furs, and *Casuistry* in Lawn,
Gasps, as they straiten at each end the cord,
And dies, when Dulness gives her Page the word. (B.IV.23-30)

Captured by Dulness, replaced by the zany and popular fluency of Henley, rhetoric has been replaced by what Plato saw as its “sham” alternative – sophistry. Rhetoric’s consignment to the feet of Dulness suggests two possibilities: it is either the tool that Dulness has manipulated to publicize and evangelize the salvation she provides, or it is the virtuous activity that she and her followers have no need for. Either way, the fate of the “languish’d” art is grim. Now, “Art after Art goes out, and all is *Night*” (IV. 640). This apocalyptic scenario describes the opposite of Pope’s imperative in *Essay of Man* where the pursuit of knowledge can be improved through “Expung[ing] the whole, or

lop[ping] th' excrescent parts." Instead, the world of the *Dunciad* presents bloated arts practiced by equally bloated figures.

But if the closing book of *The Dunciad* visualizes the death of rhetoric, Henley's earlier appearance shows it existing with a dangerous vitality and an unquestionable effect. Based on the examples surveyed here, we might ask what exactly is "fair" about "Rhet'ric" at all. Perhaps what lies at Dulness' feet is the conciliatory virtue that finds success through Nestor and failure through Clarissa. What remains is the worst version of what Ulysses offers: "melting" manipulative words that replace one reality with another, much like the devious "art" of the *Moral Essays*. Like "fair Rhet'ric" at the feet of Dulness, these speakers are confined by a powerful poet who does not allow their speeches to be persuasive. Pope frequently dramatizes aesthetic failure as an unthreatening response to the vehement orator. Contained in the satirical, comic, or classic is a notable anxiety toward the ability of rhetoric to move too strongly. What we are left with is a dangerous art that must be neutered by the controlling author who depicts it.

Where could rhetoric go from here? Pope suggests that it will be replaced by a crude and selfish art practiced by the sophists of Billingsgate. He could not have foreseen the new direction rhetoric would take in the years that followed, particularly in the 1750s in Scotland. Though the elocutionists would continue and even thrive in the work of Thomas Sheridan, the move by such thinkers as Adam Smith, Hugh Blair, and George Campbell to recapture rhetoric as a worthwhile study was clearly successful. But what to do with these competing representations of the orator that I have described: the disruptive and dangerous Methodist preacher, for instance, or the futile Clarissa? If these two

figures are two ways of depicting the affective potential of rhetoric, they must be accounted for by those who would reconfigure its pursuit.

To characterize the Scottish rhetoricians and their ambitions, it is useful to employ and evaluate terms that share the prefix of “re-“: “revise,” “rehabilitation,” “reform,” “reexamine,” “reevaluate,” “reject.” For this reason, the rhetoric of the latter half of the eighteenth century is distinguished as the “New” rhetoric. At various points, in various projects, each of these terms seems appropriate. In revising the rhetorical tradition, the new rhetoric theorists also train their students and readers to be suspicious of oratory and to recognize its dubious qualities. In so doing, they carry on the cultural project that I have described in my previous chapters through a revived intellectual discourse. However, I argue that these theorists do not merely revive, but *rehabilitate* the rhetorical tradition. I consider the excesses located in rhetorical practice that I outline in the previous three chapters as prompting the kind of work that these inheritors pursue. This tension toward language and its possibilities underwrites the future of rhetorical theory.

Chapter 4: “We Forget the Orator”: The Orator in Rhetorical Theory

Rethinking the New Rhetoric

In my previous chapters, I have argued that representations of orators *are* theory. By presenting orators in practice, writers offer theories of language, persuasion, and judgment as well as examinations of the ethics and efficacy of rhetoric. However, I now turn to thinkers who were consciously producing or reproducing rhetorical theory. For the earlier neoclassicists (John Ward, John Lawson, John Holmes) and elocutionists (Orator Henley, Thomas Sheridan, John Mason), the enduring classical theories were perfectly relevant in spite of or because of emerging Enlightenment forms of epistemology and moral philosophy. The so-called “new” rhetoricians (Adam Smith, Hugh Blair, George Campbell, and Joseph Priestley) saw themselves as advocating a more appropriate rhetorical protocol for the age in which they lived.⁴⁷⁷ But as they crafted new theories that incorporated and rejected earlier models, these seemingly more progressive rhetoricians possessed a general anxiety toward and suspicion of the orator that also animated the critics of rhetoric from Sprat to the anti-Methodists. Once again, those who challenged the practice of rhetoric were dedicated to posing new theories of persuasive speech. Yet in this case, they were knowingly teaching rhetoric and calling their work rhetorical theory. In their lectures, Adam Smith and Hugh Blair were responding to a practice and

⁴⁷⁷ In this chapter, I adopt Howell’s problematic term of “new” rhetoricians to include the category of theorists who he describes. It is a helpful and brief distinction to describe a group of theorists who defined themselves on their sense of classical revisionism, or (at least) against the perhaps uncritical reception of classic rhetoric. At no point did the post-1750s rhetors define themselves this way (as do Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca in *The New Rhetoric*). So by referring to new rhetoricians, I refer primarily to the later subjects of this chapter – Adam Smith, Hugh Blair, and Joseph Priestley – as opposed to the earlier classical adherents such as John Ward and John Lawson.

theory that they found inadequate and thought needed to be changed. As Wilbur Samuel Howell explains in his influential *Eighteenth-Century British Logic and Rhetoric*, the state of the discipline “was not so much in need of repair as replacement. And so they formulated a new rhetoric to replace the old.”⁴⁷⁸ As I will explain in more detail, Howell posits a teleological narrative that culminates in the success of a “replacement,” as the defect of classical theory is supplanted by the improvement of a “new rhetoric.” Here, I examine what was at stake in this transition: specifically, that new rhetoricians reject the priority of the orator as the central feature of rhetorical theory. By examining the role that orators play within the new formations of rhetorical theory, I expose the philosophical agendas and cultural anxieties that stimulated such changes. My previous chapters argued that attacks and satires on orators reveal a central anxiety toward their potential to ignite the wrong passions and disrupt tranquil scenes. This chapter develops my argument by revealing the anxieties that rhetorical theorists inherited and channeled through their theories, which can be viewed as a response to these vexed conceptions of orators.

To see the contrast between the previous configuration of the rhetorical tradition and that instantiated by the new rhetoricians, I begin by describing the reception of classical theory both from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. In their missives about the lack of eloquent characters in England, David Hume and Oliver Goldsmith celebrate the idea of classical oratory while questioning the way it is taught and institutionalized. They respond to early eighteenth-century neoclassicists such as John Ward and John Lawson, who uncritically adopted classical forbearers such as Cicero and Quintilian through their representations of the heroic orator, who unites wisdom and eloquences in the promotion of public and private virtues. Along with the elocutionists, who possessed

⁴⁷⁸ Howell, *Eighteenth-Century British Logic and Rhetoric*, 193.

an equal classical ardor, neoclassical views of rhetoric dominated the thinking about rhetoric in the early eighteenth century, setting the stage for their eventual invalidation by later theorists. I then move to Adam Smith as an inaugural figure for the new rhetoricians, both in his explicit rejection of classical ideals and in his reconfiguration of the dynamics of persuasion. As Smith's moral philosophy and his rhetorical theory intersect, he contends that sympathy is found outside of artifice and through seemingly naturalized and arhetorical speaking and writing practices. Convinced that orators obstruct rather than encourage sympathy, Smith doubts that the traditional rhetorical performance is capable of bringing out the affective response it is designed to achieve. I then turn to Blair's *Lectures* and his rejection of what rhetoric had become, as well as his anticipation of what it would be. In his own words, Blair "forget[s] the orator" and articulates new persuasive strategies and theories of language that depart from the emotion-based persuasion that had dominated previous approaches. Blair revises and "replaces" the old rhetoric with a new philosophy of affective speech and linguistic precision because of his anxieties about passionate oratory. Finally, I look to Joseph Priestley, who incorporated the work of the association psychologist David Hartley to craft a theory of the function of the emotions in the production and audition of rhetoric. Priestley's theory of the listener serves as a response to the power of the emotional orator.

"We Should All Be Orators"

"In enumerating the great men, who have done honour to our country, we exult in our poets and philosophers; but what orators are ever mentioned?" David Hume asks in his 1742 Essay "Of Eloquence."⁴⁷⁹ As a point of comparison, Hume offers the classical forbears to whom British writers so often looked to celebrate the masculine force of

⁴⁷⁹ Hume, "Of Eloquence," 99.

language. Ostensibly, Hume writes to encourage a native strand of eloquence that reflects the dynamic oratory of the classical speakers. He explicitly notes the stark contrast between Athens and London:

We are told, that, when *Demosthenes* was to plead, all ingenious men flocked to *Athens* from the most remote parts of *Greece*, as to the most celebrated spectacle of the world. At *London* you may see men sauntering in the court of requests, while the most important debate is carrying on in the two houses; and many do not think themselves sufficiently compensated, for the losing of their dinners, by all the eloquence of our most celebrated speakers. When old *Cibber* is to act, the curiosity of several is more excited, than when our prime minister is to defend himself from a motion for his removal or impeachment.⁴⁸⁰

While British speakers such as Cibber are capable of performing in the theater, politicians in Parliament have no comparable oratorical qualities. Cibber's ability to produce "excited" response is all but absent in the "two houses." In the Athens of Hume's imaginative reconstruction, audiences flocked to see a political speech. In England, they can only be counted on to fill the theaters to watch the dramatic eloquence of an "old" actor. In order to find the settings of persuasive and energetic oral moments outside of the theater, one cannot look to the history of England for models, but to a classical world in which the moderated protocols of politeness had not yet "reject[ed] as wholly monstrous and gigantic" the stirring "blaze of eloquence."⁴⁸¹ Through his nostalgia for classical eloquence, Hume advocates the recovery of the ancient "blaze" in order to make politics more interesting, coherent, and attractive. Yet as Adam Potkay has argued, *Of Eloquence* finds Hume curiously vexed about those "monstrous" possibilities, as his desire for rousing language is tempered by his concern about its effects.⁴⁸² Much like Pope in his

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 99–100.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 101.

⁴⁸² See particularly Chapter One, "Ancient Eloquence and the Revival of Virtue" in Adam Potkay, *The Fate of Eloquence in the Age of Hume*, First (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994), 24-59.

translation of *The Iliad*, Hume is at once enlivened and concerned by what he finds when he imagines Athenian oratory.

In his uneasy exhortation for eloquence, Hume reflects that *something* must be done to invigorate the general mediocrity of oratory. In 1759, Oliver Goldsmith took to the pages of *The Critical Review* to argue that, while the models of classical speakers should be celebrated, the contemporary approaches to teaching their theory had resulted in an endemic monotony. In his review of the posthumous publication of John Ward's lectures, Goldsmith maintains that "eloquence is born with us before the rules of rhetoric."⁴⁸³ He denounces the prescriptive classicism of Ward and his contemporary, John Lawson, for only providing "they who seek to understand rhetoric" with "the disgusting dryness of names and definitions."⁴⁸⁴ Here and elsewhere,⁴⁸⁵ Goldsmith challenges contemporary methods of formal instruction: such precepts obstruct rather than assist eloquence, and are symptomatic of the meek oral culture. In a homogenizing move, Goldsmith asks the provocative question that opens this project, "We would all be orators: we live in an age of orators: our very tradesmen are orators. Were it not worthwhile to ask what oratory is?"⁴⁸⁶ Though he does not make the connection explicit, Goldsmith signals the transition away from classical influence that rhetorical theory had already taken in the academy, and that would continue in publications throughout England, Scotland, and America.

Hume and Goldsmith operate on different sides of the dialectic that this project engages between rousing language and attempts to systematize it. Writing in the middle

⁴⁸³ Goldsmith, *Collected Works*, 1:169.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁵ As I noted in Chapter Two, Goldsmith was particularly interested in the fate of preaching, writing about this topic in two articles in *The Lady's Magazine*.

⁴⁸⁶ Goldsmith, *Collected Works*, 1:169.

of the eighteenth century, both see the inadequacy of British eloquence and offer competing solutions that nonetheless share a concern about the affective potential of rhetoric. Pivotaly, both writers deal with the problem not merely of what rhetoric should be, but also of what kind of orator is appropriate for a contemporaneous audience. And both find a discord between the classical theory and polite practice. The question that animates Goldsmith is, how might an orator energize a dormant public? Hume believes that the energy of classical rhetoric can invigorate the contemporary setting, while Goldsmith contends that the reliance on ancient methodologies and precepts has stifled eloquence. Hume pushes for the revival of eloquence and the orator in the vein of the “spectacle” of Demosthenes. Goldsmith sees the commercial world as a new “age of orators” in which tradesmen are more naturally persuasive than those who study the mundane generative prompts of Cicero and Quintilian. If Hume argues for a more vigorous approach to encourage passionate orations, then Goldsmith suggests that “[n]ature alone is the mistress of the art.”⁴⁸⁷ Hume admires the aesthetics of eloquent speech while seeking to isolate and contain its results. Goldsmith questions the formalities involved in preparing the speech and only wants to see the result, defining “Oratory [as] nothing more, than the being able to imprint on others, with rapidity and force, the sentiments of which we are possessed ourselves; thus sometimes even silence is elegant, and action persuades when words might fail.”⁴⁸⁸ Goldsmith longs for the return of eloquence, but is deeply skeptical of the system of rhetorical training that endures in Ward. After all, Demosthenes did not study the Ciceronian precepts that would later be associated with the production of persuasive speech. Yet if Hume and Goldsmith differ

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., 1:171.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

on the creation of orators, both lament their absence and explain the necessity for the improvement of public speaking.

Enter the new rhetoricians. They invigorated a discipline that, in England at least, had become fragmented and somewhat irrelevant since the strictures of the Royal Society and the denunciations by Hobbes and Locke. During the Scottish Enlightenment, the study of rhetoric was culturally relegitimized, beginning with Adam Smith's groundbreaking lectures at the University of Edinburgh in the 1750s. As a professor of rhetoric, he grapples with ideas of exchange and propriety that would become central to his later thinking; his discussion of communication lays the seeds of his work both as moral philosopher and economist. Smith's student, Hugh Blair, began his own lecture series in 1759 in Edinburgh, which resulted in the 1783 publication of his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres*. Blair's lectures produced students "virtually anywhere the English language was spoken."⁴⁸⁹ George Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric* was reprinted forty times between its original 1776 publication and the end of the nineteenth century.⁴⁹⁰ Expatriate John Witherspoon's lectures at Princeton influenced James Madison, among others. Witherspoon later became a member of the Continental congress, where he was a vocal advocate for, and a signer of, the Declaration of Independence. In England, Joseph Priestley, primarily known to history as the "discoverer" of oxygen, delivered an important series of lectures on rhetoric at Warrington Academy from 1761 to 1767.

⁴⁸⁹ Don Paul Abbott, "The Influence of Blair's Lectures in Spain," *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 7, no. 3 (August 1989): 275.

⁴⁹⁰ Shelley Aley and Winifred Bryan Horner, "George Campbell," in *Eighteenth-Century British and American Rhetorics and Rhetoricians*, ed. Michael Moran (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994), 52–64.

In their reconfiguration of rhetoric, the new rhetoricians shift their attention from production to reception, from the development of the orator to the psychology of the audience, and from speaking to writing. They reject classical theories of invention and arrangement. Their lectures serve as a training ground for audiences to audit oratorical performances more effectively, particularly those retaining the features that classical rhetors evoke. Centralizing and celebrating the empirical privilege of the written word, they seek an equivalent precision in oral discourse. Because of these dynamic thinkers and the influence of their published lectures, rhetorical historians tend to narrativize the period chronologically from indolence to excess to progress, or more specifically, from Royal Society attacks in the seventeenth century to the bombast of elocutionists like Orator Henley to the recovery of Blair, Campbell, and the Scots. As Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg summarize in their anthology, *The Rhetorical Tradition*, “Within a hundred years of Sprat’s strictures, rhetoric’s estate was considerably improved.”⁴⁹¹ Perhaps recalling Wilbur Samuel Howell, who sees the matter of transition as “replacement,” Bizzell and Herzberg describe it in terms of recuperation. Nonetheless, their reading of the period shares a similar understanding of a narrative in which new rhetoricians pursue a necessary transformation from misguided antiquarian tedium or the anachronism of a Ciceronian approach, to a rhetoric appropriate for the Enlightenment.

The orator prompts some of the most crucial shifts in rhetorical theory. As H. Lewis Ulman argues, the rhetorical theories that arose as a revision of these “old” rhetorics can be viewed as solutions to the problem of language, a set of concerns that he traces back to experimentalists and empiricists (such as Locke) imagining corrective

⁴⁹¹ Bizzell and Herzberg, *The Rhetorical Tradition* (Boston: Bedford St. Martins, 2001), 812.

language protocols.⁴⁹² This is a semantic problem that has effects beyond merely philosophical and scientific discourse. In this chapter, I look to the efforts of new rhetoricians to address the crises that orators pose toward audiences who should be informed through reason rather than assaulted by passion. Fearing an overwhelmingly affective response, new rhetoricians reject, or in Hugh Blair's term "forget," the orator as the central subject of a rhetorical program. In moving from speaking to writing, new rhetoricians cannot completely abandon the orator. In sections that deal primarily with oral discourse, its production and its analysis, the orator remains as a kind of negative energy that puts these thinkers on the defensive, forcing them to develop strategies to contain him.

The Good Man Speaking Well: Rhetorical Optimism in the Ciceronian Tradition

When Goldsmith rejects the models of Cicero and Quintilian in *The Critical Review*, he anticipates the critiques of the new rhetoricians. Writing that their rules threaten to stifle the orator, he complains:

Their precepts might have guarded their successors from falling into faults, but at the same time they deterred them from rising into beauty . . . But if rules in general of this kind are of such inutility, how much more must they lead us astray, when we cite the precepts given to the orators of one country to direct the pleadings of another; rules drawn from the ancients to direct a modern barrister, would make him thoroughly ridiculous; and yet this custom prevailed in Europe till about a century ago.⁴⁹³

For Goldsmith, Cicero and Quintilian confuse a "talent" with an "art" by relying on prescriptions rather than imitable models. There is also, as he notes in this passage, a problem of translation between cultures and countries. Even if these precepts work, they will produce a ridiculous scene of affected and artificial speech. However, as Goldsmith

⁴⁹² Ulman, *Things, Thoughts, Words, and Actions: The Problems of Language in Late Eighteenth Century British Rhetorical Theory*.

⁴⁹³ Goldsmith, *Collected Works*.

laments, these “custom[s]” prevailed as Roman models dominated rhetorical treatises through the medieval period. While Cicero and Quintilian disagree about some minor points, they are unified in their view of the civilizing and virtuous potential of the orator. This potential is actualized through disciplined rhetorical training that their treatises systematically detail and that Goldsmith argues stifles persuasive ability. The Roman optimism toward what the well-trained orator can achieve is nearly limitless. This optimism led Cicero and Quintilian to see the effects of rhetoric as overwhelmingly positive because of the link between rhetorical education and moral development.

In *De Inventione*, Cicero presents a vision of the orator that later treatises would endorse and restate:

At this juncture a man – great and wise I am sure – became aware of the power latent in man and the wide field offered by his mind for great achievements if one could develop this power and improve it by instruction. Men were scattered in the fields and hidden in sylvan retreats when he assembled and gathered them in accordance with a plan; he introduced them to every useful and honourable occupation, though they cried out against it at first because of its novelty, and then when through reason and eloquence they had listened with greater attention, he transformed them from wild savages into a kind and gentle folk.⁴⁹⁴

That transformative vision of that final sentence, in which the orator unites “reason and eloquence” to turn savages into “gentle folk” is perhaps the most optimistic of any sentiment ever expressed about rhetoric. Its celebration of the curative and humanizing potential includes both the natural ability to speak and its eventual disciplinary instantiation (“if one could develop this power and improve it by instruction”). Though *De Inventione* is often read as an early moment in the development of Cicero’s theory, it is still characteristic of his valorization of both a native, natural eloquence and its necessary systemization. In *De Oratore*, he argues that while the mythical “great and

⁴⁹⁴ Cicero, *De Inventione, De Optimo Genere Oratorum, Topica*, trans. H.M. Hubbell, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1949), 5–7.

wise” man who brought about idyllic order may have possessed an untrained virtuosity, a public speaker needs artistic training in order to conform natural eloquence to rules that will direct it toward its proper end. He concludes,

There is to mind no more excellent thing than the power of oratory, to get a hold on assemblies of men, win their good will, direct their inclinations wherever the speaker wishes, or divert them for whatever he wishes. In every free nation, and most of all in communities which have attained the enjoyment of peace and tranquility, this one art has always flourished above the rest and ever reigned supreme.⁴⁹⁵

When Cicero praises “oratory,” he admires an eloquence maximized through study, rather than an innate genius. Though he occasionally qualifies this optimism by noting its misuses, he emphasizes that this is why responsible use should be taught through a firmly grounded discipline.

Quintilian avoids some of the qualifications Cicero makes by arguing even more explicitly for the connection between morality and oratory:

The first and chief difference of opinion on the subject is, that some think it possible even for bad men to have the name of orators; while others (to whose opinion I attach myself) maintain that the name, and the art of which we are speaking, can be conceded only to good men.⁴⁹⁶

For Quintilian, “orator” is not a morally neutral term. In order for one to be an orator, one must have a strong moral character. When he discusses the potentially “pernicious” application of rhetoric, he acknowledges that while speech itself may be used to destructive effect, the “orator” will never employ his art in this way. He writes, “if eloquence be the art of speaking well . . . a true orator must be, above all, a good man.” In both Cicero and Quintilian, the link between political virtue and eloquence is stable,

⁴⁹⁵ Cicero, *De Oratore*, ed. T.E. Page, trans. E.W. Sutton, vol. 1, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1942), 25.

⁴⁹⁶ Quintilian, *Quintilian's Institutes of Oratory*, 139.

instilled through training and discipline. One may use persuasive speech to his or her personal advantage or as an act of espionage against the state, but that person (particularly in Quintilian) is not an orator. Implicit in both writers' conception is a near-assurance that submission to oratorical training instills virtue. The link between character and technique is grounded in an idealistic conception of rhetoric.

As Thomas Conley notes, Cicero's influence in England grew as his works were made more available through translation. The medieval emphasis on Cicero centered not on his politics or rhetoric, but his stoic philosophy of a "flight from active life."⁴⁹⁷ By the sixteenth century, Latin works such as *De Oratore*, *Orator*, and *De Inventione* had been rediscovered and disseminated broadly enough to have a strong influence on rhetoric in the Italian and English Renaissance. In addition, Quintilian's *Institutes* instilled "the core relation between *virtus* and eloquence."⁴⁹⁸ Conley writes, "these new discoveries provided a firm philosophical basis for the celebration of eloquence."⁴⁹⁹ In England, the early modern rhetoricians embraced this celebration by linking Christian virtue with the Ciceronian power of eloquence.

The inspiration of Cicero and Quintilian is most evident in Thomas Wilson's popular 1553 treatise *The Arte of Rhetorique*. Wilson's ambitious text is the most comprehensive in the sixteenth century, focusing equally on all five canons in his adaptation of classical rhetoric for the humanist audience that consisted "not only of schoolboys and perhaps preachers, but students of law as well, young noblemen at the Inns of Court who did not have the time or patience to master rhetoric from the Latin

⁴⁹⁷ Thomas M Conley, *Rhetoric in the European Tradition* (New York: Longman, 1990), 112.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 114.

textbooks.”⁵⁰⁰ In the first book of *The Arte of Rhetorique*, Wilson rehearses the Ciceronian narrative of savagery to civilization through the empowering virtuosity of the orator. Wilson’s only departure from Cicero is yoking the origin narrative to Christian theology and noting God’s providence as the divine factor that allows the orator to thrive. By invoking the biblical concept of a fall from grace, Wilson ably replaces the secular origins with a teleology that can be linked to Christian salvation and redemption.⁵⁰¹ In particular, Wilson crafts the orator as an evangelist who brings God’s word to the rustic and fallen savages. Wilson articulates this origin narrative through scattered men living “Brutyshlye in open felde,” but brought together by “these appointed of God [who] called them together by utteraunce of speache, and perswaded with them what was good, what was bade, and what was gainefull for mankind.”⁵⁰² Wilson adds, “Suche force hath the tongue, and such is the power of eloquence and reason,”⁵⁰³ and continues to posit eloquence as the basis for civilized, Christian society, and the orator as the ordained vehicle for such change. In empowering the orator-civilizer, Wilson emphasizes the barbaric inadequacies of the “audience,” the receivers of both speech and civilizing motive. As Wayne Rebhorn astutely notes, “the assumed inadequacies of human beings render the orator indispensable and make his activities appear unmitigated blessings.”⁵⁰⁴ Wilson’s rhetorical theory is representative of a contemporary optimism toward rhetoric; as Brian Vickers explains, “for Wilson rhetoric and persuasion are the *sine qua non* of an ordered society,” a theme that he asserts through an imaginative retelling that “obviously

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 138.

⁵⁰¹ On Wilson’s revisionary engagement with a pagan tradition, see Mark E. Wildermuth, “The Rhetoric of Wilson’s ‘Arte’: Reclaiming the Classical Heritage for English Protestants,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 22, no. 1 (January 1, 1989): 43–58.

⁵⁰² Wilson, “The Arte of Rhetorique,” 703.

⁵⁰³ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁴ Wayne A. Rebhorn, *The Emperor of Men’s Minds: Literature and the Renaissance Discourse of Rhetoric* (Cornell UP, 1995).

expresses the Renaissance's setting of order against chaos, harmony against discord."⁵⁰⁵

The sixteenth-century rhetorician Henry Peacham, without irony or qualification, states, "the emperor of men's minds and affections and next to the omnipotent God in the power of persuasion by grace and divine assistance."⁵⁰⁶ But far from the hypnotic deceiver that such an "emperor" might become by abusing such eloquence, Peacham also links persuasive power with Christian moral character.

By the eighteenth century, this veneration toward classical texts, Cicero's and Quintilian's in particular, remained strong in university settings. One of the most diligent expounders of the classical tradition was John Ward, who served as Professor of Rhetoric at Gresham College from 1720 to 1759.⁵⁰⁷ The setting is a familiar one for this project, as it was also the spiritual and at points physical home of the Royal Society. Gresham was also unique for serving as a center of adult education offering public lectures for common people with a focus on practical utility in everyday life. Ward was a crucial agent in the transition from lectures being presented in Latin to English, thus making them available to those without the privilege of a classical education.

Ward was deeply invested in perpetuating the energizing and humanizing civic possibilities of Cicero. The orator must be dedicated to "persuading men to good and virtuous actions, and dissuading them from everything that is ill and vicious; nothing can be more commendable in itself, or useful to human societies."⁵⁰⁸ Ward was explicitly concerned with the practical effects of the study, not merely its antiquarian revival. In his

⁵⁰⁵ Brian Vickers, "The Power of Persuasion," ed. James J. Murphy (Berkeley: California UP, 1983), 411–435.

⁵⁰⁶ Peacham, "The Garden of Eloquence," 226.

⁵⁰⁷ On Ward's biography see Howell, *Eighteenth-Century British Logic and Rhetoric*, 83–89; Kathleen Massey, "John Ward," in *Eighteenth Century British and American Rhetorics and Rhetoricians*, 235–245; Howell, *Eighteenth-Century British Logic and Rhetoric*.

⁵⁰⁸ John Ward, *A System of Oratory*, 2 vols. (London, 1759), 1:28.

opening lecture, when Ward narrates the “progress” of rhetoric in Rome, he explains how philosophers and orators energized and reformed the state. He clearly believes that the fruits of rhetorical study can be the same in his contemporaneous climate, in which the “Roman youth were so charmed with the eloquence of their harangues, that they could no longer be stopped from pursuing the study of oratory.”⁵⁰⁹ As Kathleen Massey explains, Ward’s lectures are an example of “education in action,”⁵¹⁰ designed for an audience unfamiliar with the protocols and formalities of academia and looking to integrate not only technical skill but also these principles of action.

Some more recent critics share the assessment of Goldsmith’s invective in the *Critical Review* by viewing Ward’s classical ardor as tedious and derivative, as well as inappropriate for the modern student who would hear him. Howell writes that Ward operates with the “defensive patience of an antiquarian” in his uncritical survey of the ancients.⁵¹¹ The critique of Ward fits with Howell’s depiction of the new rhetoricians as pursuing a necessary transformation of antiquarian tedium to modern innovation in their development of oral practices and pedagogy appropriate for the age. Thomas Miller sees Ward’s classical veneration as a repressive and inadequate response to a potential social mobility and civic engagement that rhetoric should provoke, as well as “a particularly stark example of how antiquarianism sets in when teachers fail to attend to the practical needs of their students.”⁵¹² For Miller, the adherence to classical models was part of a general move within English universities to “preserv[e] the boundaries of the learned culture by confining learning to . . . the ossified forms of Aristotelianism and

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 1:11.

⁵¹⁰ Massey, “John Ward,” 243.

⁵¹¹ Howell, *Eighteenth-Century British Logic and Rhetoric*, 91.

⁵¹² Thomas P. Miller, *The Formation of College English: Rhetoric and Belles Lettres in the British Cultural Provinces* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh UP, 1997), 82.

Ciceronianism.”⁵¹³ Echoing Goldsmith, these critics see Ward as pursuing rhetoric as the subject of a comprehensive historical survey, rather than its application for enlightened social and political discourse. From this perspective, Ward misses the enabling civic potential of rhetoric that is so evident in Roman and Greek rhetors because of his myopic attention to implementing their precepts as a program. In the hands of Ward, Miller argues, classical rhetoric became more about understanding the culture in which it originated than in applying it to the contemporaneous setting.

However, while Ward is certainly possessed by a veneration of the classics and a near-evangelical desire to reiterate their methods, his estimation of the orator’s practical judgment is more dynamic than his critical reputation. Rather than a stodgy antiquarian, Ward can also be seen as reacting to the empirical precision and non-artistic proofs (such as hard scientific evidence) that dominated discussions of language, as I have shown in my discussion of experimental philosophers and Anglican ideologues. Seeing the Ciceronian prescriptions as offering the orator generative prompts to aid in the creation and development of persuasive speeches, Ward offers a thorough theory of invention that both earlier and later theorists lack. For instance, he refutes the influential sixteenth-century reforms of Peter Ramus, who separated logic and rhetoric and consigned invention and arrangement to dialectic.⁵¹⁴ Ramus believed that logic should be the domain of developing subject matter and giving it an order. Arguing that rhetoric should focus only on style and delivery, Ramus challenged the Roman dicta that its study should be associated with the moral development of the orator. After Ramus, Bernard Lamy and

⁵¹³ Ibid., 74.

⁵¹⁴ On Ramus, see Conley, *Rhetoric in the European Tradition*, 124-143. Wilbur Samuel Howell, *Logic and Rhetoric in England, 1500-1700* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1961). Walter J. Ong, *Ramus, Method and the Decay of Dialogue, from the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason*, by Walter J. Ong (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1958).

the Port-Royalists also rejected the Ciceronian topics as generative prompts. In his third lecture, “*Of the Division of Oratory*,” Ward disagrees with this division, arguing instead that “rhetoric not only supplies us with more heads of *invention* than logic.”⁵¹⁵ Logic should be centered on “principles of knowledge,” and rhetoric on the broader and more practical concern of “motives to action.” Against the reforms of Ramus, Ward expands the office of rhetoric back to its roots as an art dedicated to the development of practical judgment. The return to classical heuristics is necessary to Ward because he wants to encourage his students both to invent and evaluate arguments, rather than rely on the standardized methods of logic and science.

John Lawson, Ward’s Irish contemporary, was not quite the disciple of classical rhetoric as Ward, yet he is even more passionate in his vision for the positive transformative powers of the orator. The son of an Irish clergyman, Lawson progressed from an impressive career as a student at Trinity College in Dublin to assume the Erasmus Smith lectureship at the same institution in 1753.⁵¹⁶ Lawson’s public lectures were collected two months before his death in 1758 in a volume titled *Lectures Concerning Oratory*. Lawson’s lectures reflect his deep veneration for classical rhetoric and, as Neil E. Claussen and Karl A. Wallace write in the introduction to their edition of his *Lectures*, his approach “bridged the rigid and attenuating Ramistic dichotomies and the innovative rhetorical concepts of Blair, Campbell, and Whatley.”⁵¹⁷ The exhaustive nature of Ward’s *System* contains very few asides or commentaries, intensely (and perhaps reductively) focusing on the synthesis of classical sources. Lawson’s lectures are

⁵¹⁵ Ward, *A System of Oratory*, 1:32.

⁵¹⁶ Michael G. Moran, “John Lawson,” in *Eighteenth Century British and American Rhetorics and Rhetoricians*, ed. Michael G. Moran (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994), 142.

⁵¹⁷ See the introduction to John Lawson, *Lectures Concerning Oratory*, ed. E. Neal Claussen and Karl R. Wallace (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1972).

more colorful and meandering, oscillating between extensive summaries of Aristotle and Cicero and poetic passages that commemorate his subject. At points he comes across as sermonistic in his celebration of the powers of rhetoric, especially in its potential to change the contemporary world in which his students lived as it had in the past he so frequently eulogizes. Among eighteenth-century theorists, he alone discusses Plato as a rhetorical theorist, going so far as to include an imaginative poetic dialogue titled “The Judgment of Plato” in which the *Athenian* chooses lady philosophy over lady poetry. Further, Lawson’s reception of classical theory was more critical than Ward’s, which is another way he serves as a transitional figure from the neoclassicism of the earlier era to the revisions of the later thinkers.

Lawson shares Ward’s unqualified optimism toward the revolutionary purpose of rhetoric. In his first lecture, his tone aspires almost to the evangelical in his fervor.

Describing Demosthenes and his incendiary *Phillipics*, Lawson explains:

In one place, you see a mighty people dissolved in luxury and indolence, effeminate, corrupted, terrible only to those who would reform them; the Orator layeth before these their true state; he shews them from without a powerful enemy deceiving, and ready to enslave them; traitors selling them within; their allies insulted, their territories mangled and alienated, their armies useless, their trade destroyed, their fleets baffled and idle; themselves in the meanwhile buried in sloth, devoted to shews and spectacles, the contempt of Greece: which affecting picture he contrasts with that of their Ancestors, Lovers of their country, patient of Labour, intrepid, victorious over the innumerable hosts of the Persian monarch, the defenders of liberty and Greece, patriots honoured with immortal fame. Lo! This degenerate people are roused, kindled, fired; the Orator’s Voice recalls the spirit of their ancestors; they rush with emulation to arms; they fight and fall, although unsuccessful, yet glorious, on the plains of Chaeronea.⁵¹⁸

The orator creates harmony and order and gives his audience a sense of their own history.

A revolutionary figure, he is also an educator whose words expose the injustices that may be buried beneath “shews and spectacles.” Through the revelatory power of the orator

⁵¹⁸ John Lawson, *Lectures Concerning Oratory* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1972), 7.

and his dynamic appeals, a nation realizes both what it can be and it is not, reminding them of the shared virtues and values to which they can aspire. Lawson tellingly contrasts the “shews and spectacles” of a culture founded on luxury with the genuine performance of Demosthenes’ oratory. Passages like this abound throughout Lawson’s lectures, as his stressing the radical power of rhetoric at times overwhelms his instructional precepts. Lawson clearly wanted his students to see the parallels between Demosthenes’ time and their own – in which the vigorous thought of noble ancestors had devolved into a culture marked by luxury and apathy that Pope mocks in *The Rape of the Lock*. The optimism toward rhetoric as a force of salvation that instills a fundamental civic order recalls the humanist possibilities for the office of orator. The orator at once levels distinctions and calls a nation out of its widespread stupor, opposing ostentation with virtue, moving them to action.

While experimental philosophers and homiletics writers bemoaned excesses of floridity and emphasized a speech bereft of ornate features, Lawson celebrates speech even in its imperfections. He sees the recent enthusiasm for clarity as an unacceptable pithiness that brings with it its own obscurity, and even uses classical precedents such as Pliny and Seneca as proof of this failure. The innovation that language allows should not be silenced through some kind of censoring method, as often this method leads to dull statements prized for their unaffected qualities and little else. He writes, “However intelligible I be, importeth not; for you will not understand unless you listen, and you will rarely listen if I be no more than intelligible. The Orator must therefore please and move . . . He must, to Perspicuity, add Ornament.”⁵¹⁹ Ornament does not obscure, nor does it embellish to the point of superficiality, but reflects the array of *inventional apparati* that

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., 191.

the speaker can potentially employ. In opposition to Locke, whom Lawson refutes directly, eloquence is the “handmaid of truth; those who pervert her craft with sophistry and specious argument are not her Sons, but Deserters from her.”⁵²⁰ Describing the value of ceremonial rhetoric in its most vivid terms, Lawson declares, “the Orator, who employeth his talent aright, is one of the most useful members of the community, infusing principles of religion, humanity, and virtuous industry in all who hear him, contributing to preserve peace, justice, and harmony among men.”⁵²¹ Lawson’s celebration of the powers of the orator might be called naïve; like Ward and the humanists, he is bound to a disciplinary conception of rhetoric as a virtuous art that produces virtuous individuals. Lawson rehearses the humanistic potential for rhetoric to be the ultimate component of civic virtue enacted through public speech.

Outside of Ward and Lawson, many were calling for improvements in delivery and pronunciation. I have already discussed the elocutionist movement in the form of the oft-mocked figure of Orator Henley. However, despite such criticisms, elocutionists played a significant role in reminding audiences that rhetoric existed as a discipline that could be taught and studied, even if they did so by emphasizing only one of the five canons. The elocutionists were not alone in calling for a more refined and passionate oral character. In a 1710 article in the *Tatler*, Isaac Bickerstaff challenges the “clergy of Great Britain” for their phlegmatic approaches to the pulpit. Advocating against the tone of dispassionate oratory that characterized establishment oratory, Bickerstaff instead explains that “the more you are moved yourself, the more you will move others.”⁵²² His advice for preachers is to make their presence felt more strongly. As an illustrative

⁵²⁰ Ibid., 126.

⁵²¹ Ibid., 9.

⁵²² Richard Steele and Joseph Addison, *The Tatler*, ed. Lewis Gibbs (London: Dent, 1953), 84.

example, he subtly implies that speakers should consider themselves as audience members for their own speeches. The dry, inexpressive quality of contemporary preachers would lead the deaf observer to “think they were reading the contents only of some discourse they intended to make, than actually in the body of an oration, even when they are upon matters of such a nature as one would believe it were impossible to think of without emotion.”⁵²³ Regarding the English, Adam Smith later notes, “Foreigners observe that there is no nation in the world which uses so little gesticulation in their conversation as the English. A Frenchman, in telling a story that was not of the least consequence to him or anyone else, will use a thousand gestures and contortions of his face, whereas a well-bred Englishman will tell you one in which his life and fortune are concerned, without altering a muscle in his face.”⁵²⁴ These statements attest to the placid nature of British expression and, in Bickerstaff’s appraisal, the need to adopt more affective techniques in settings where persuasion is desired. The elocutionists were merely one solution to this problem, and their popularity found censure in the same way that Goldsmith attempted to debunk the connection between prescription and production.

The elocutionists argued that, vocally and physically, the orator should dominate the scene; he should be unforgettable. In the influential anonymous early eighteenth-century elocutionary text, *Some Rules for Speaking and Action* (1716), the author writes, “Every Man indeed should *fill* the Places where he speaks” (22).⁵²⁵ This exhortation is not merely symbolic. Throughout the *Rules*, the author explains how one might “fill” the oratorical space: not only in the modulation and adjustment of voice, but in hand

⁵²³ Ibid., 85.

⁵²⁴ Adam Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, ed. J.C. Bryce (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985), 198.

⁵²⁵ *Some Rules for Speaking and Action: To Be Observed at the Bar, in the Pulpit, and the Senate, and by Every One That Speaks in Publick. In a Letter to a Friend* (London, 1716), 22.

gestures, eye raises, and careful motion. The manual trains the orator to become a dominant presence, who can control and overpower the audience. For instance, when referring to Heaven, “the eyes must turn up,” as the audience will attentively respond to such physical action and thus persuasively understand the passion of the point that accompanies the gesture.⁵²⁶ The education of the orator is based on a rapt audience who responds to such techniques because of the innate magnetism that the speaker can create through such dynamic posturing.

As I will argue in the following sections, new rhetoricians respond to and attempt to revise the physical centrality and presence of the orator. They also move away from the prioritization of delivery, making what they see as a progressive move from show to substance. In *The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, Paul Goring notes that the early eighteenth-century writings on public speaking and delivery contain “a preoccupation in British culture of this period with the human body as an eloquent object, whose eloquence arises from the performance of an inscribed system of gestures and expressions.”⁵²⁷ In acting manuals, elocutionary texts, and preaching manuals, the physical, pulsating body was central to the persuasive act, its “capacity for eloquence.”⁵²⁸ Further, “efforts to mould bodily eloquence are apparent, with varying degrees of explicitness, within an array of eighteenth-century social and cultural arenas.” In the rhetorical discourse of the early eighteenth century, the orator takes control over physical spaces through passionate gestures and a boisterous voice that only enhances his singular presence. The figure that the orator assumes, his use of physical gestures and the dramatic

⁵²⁶ Ibid., 27.

⁵²⁷ Paul Goring, *The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), 5.

⁵²⁸ Ibid., 7.

contortions of his face, is just as persuasive as the substance of the speech itself.

However, as Goring explains, for elocutionists the “body functions as both a sign and propagator of virtue” as the “orator should be a dignified and impressive figure with a body signifying an elevation *above* the crowd.”⁵²⁹

In the work of Ward, Lawson, and the elocutionists, orators are not only central, they are the virtuous and vigorous product of rhetorical training that all theories should be configured to produce. In Lawson’s lectures, the orator starts big and gets bigger – amplifying his presence until the audience is transfixed by the performance. If Sprat and the Anglican preachers advocated a seemingly artless naturalism, the neoclassicists and elocutionists sought to make the orator not only memorable but also an indispensable facet of the cultures in which they operated. Without much qualification or hesitation, they celebrate the civic potential of orators and integrate this appreciation into a program of rhetorical education that will continue to produce and invigorate persuasive speakers. This sense of optimism toward the orator is the backdrop to which the new rhetoricians respond.

Sympathy is Persuasion: Adam Smith’s Lectures

As Goldsmith’s response to Ward indicates, neoclassical approaches to rhetoric quickly became irrelevant in the wake of the new rhetoric. Ward and Lawson would be seen as obsolete classicists, teaching rhetoric as a subject of historical interest rather than practical application, in their veneration for a theory that did not seem to produce any noticeable improvements in eloquent speech. Whatever their immediate influence, they were soon forgotten in the wake of the emerging works of Scottish Enlightenment rhetors. If Ward and Lawson could be accused of failing to meet the needs of their

⁵²⁹ Goring, *The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture*.

students, then Adam Smith and Hugh Blair seem dedicated to nothing but giving their provincial students the polish and sophistication they would need to participate in the rapidly growing cultural and commercial discourses of Great Britain. As Thomas Conley writes, they “taught students who had serious cultural handicaps disabling them from pursuing professional careers or keeping ‘polite company.’”⁵³⁰ Lori Branch adds that Smith’s engagement with rhetoric shares the impetus of *The Wealth of Nations* because it views appropriate communication as an “English system of exchange,” with Smith “trying to analyze it, to navigate it, and to help his Scottish students navigate it.”⁵³¹ Clearly, Scots like Smith saw their students as needing the linguistic decorum and propriety necessary to be gentlemen, more than they required the ability to ignite the deliberative, judicial, and ceremonial settings where rhetoric typically occurred. In tempering and correcting the seemingly crude provincial tongue by giving students the critical tools they needed to participate in a sophisticated culture, Smith saw the purpose of rhetoric as self-improvement rather than mastery of public speaking.

Smith’s rhetorical lectures provide an intriguing look into his moral philosophy and the place of persuasion within it. They can be seen as an originary moment for concepts that Smith would more fully articulate in his published texts regarding the communicative systems of exchange at the heart of moral and economic interaction. For contemporary scholars, the lectures are difficult because they exist only in the form of student notes. Smith gave his lectures at Glasgow University in 1762 and 1763.⁵³² By this

⁵³⁰ Conley, *Rhetoric in the European Tradition*, 216.

⁵³¹ Lori Branch, “Plain Style, or the High Fashion of Empire: Colonialism, Resistance and Assimilation in Adam Smith’s Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres,” *Studies in Scottish Literature* 33, no. 1 (2004): 445.

⁵³² On Smith’s background and the lectures, see Ian Simpson Ross, *The Life of Adam Smith* (Oxford: Oxford UP 2010). Stephen McKenna, *Adam Smith: the Rhetoric of Propriety* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006).

point, he was an established professor at Glasgow, having taught first Logic and then Moral Philosophy from 1752 until 1763. In these subjects, Smith lectured to a “public” audience. His lectures on rhetoric were given to a private class who would have attended one of Smith’s public courses as a prerequisite. However, Smith had all his manuscripts burned before his death in 1790, among them the original text of his lectures that he never published nor wanted published. In 1958, a nearly complete set of notes from the lecture were discovered, which later scholars reconstructed. Nonetheless, Smith’s lectures were most formative for two of his brightest students: Robert Watson, who would take over for Smith after 1763, and Hugh Blair, whose work carried on the spirit of Smith to new audiences all over the world.

Critics have noted that Smith departs from classical tradition at nearly every turn. As Howell astutely notes, “If Adam Smith drew his rhetorical system from the past, he drew it from the past which is always seeking to prepare for the future rather than from the past which is always seeking to preserve itself against change.”⁵³³ Smith rejects the classical system of invention that Ward celebrates and articulates so thoroughly. He sees both ancient and modern writings that center on the categorization and description of tropes as “a very silly set of books and not at all instructive.”⁵³⁴ In order for persuasion to be most effective, Smith argues, the text must be designed with a focus on propriety and perspicuity. In his fifth lecture, he most explicitly articulates this as a response to the tradition of “*figurae sententiarum*” located in Cicero and Quintilian. These thinkers and their contemporary disciples see in figurative speech “all that is noble, grand and

For a recounting of the archival recovery of the lectures, see the introduction by J.G. Bryce to Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*.

⁵³³ Howell, *Eighteenth-Century British Logic and Rhetoric*, 548.

⁵³⁴ Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, 26. All subsequent citations are from this text (LRBL) and are noted parenthetically by page number.

sublime, all that is passionate tender and moving . . .” (25). In a passage that more or less summarizes his entire approach to rhetoric, Smith refutes the premium placed on tropaic language:

But the case is far otherwise. When the sentiment of the speaker is expressed in a neat, clear, plain, and clever manner, and the passion or affection he is possessed of and intends, *by sympathy*, to communicate to his hearer, is plainly and cleverly hit off, then and then only the expression has all the force and beauty that language can give it. It matters not the least whether figures of speech are introduced or not. (25-26)

What Smith describes here is an ideal persuasion, and he calls on a familiar term to describe what should actually take place: not conviction or approval but *sympathy*. The apparently ostentatious nature of tropes defies rather than encourages a sympathetic response. However, as Smith explains in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, sympathy arises not from an abstract passion but from the “situation which excites it.”⁵³⁵ In the *Lectures*, the “force and beauty of language” are best revealed through what Smith describes as a clever plainness. Far from rhetorical, Smith sees plainness as a rhetorical choice that will best actualize and provoke a sympathetic response, which is the most effective kind of persuasion. At this point, Smith follows Locke’s suggestion that figurative language is “nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment.”⁵³⁶ However, Smith puts this critique of the trope at the heart of his rhetorical theory, constantly restating its exclusion and impropriety. In his second lecture, he explains that the overemphasis on figuration that occupies so many approaches to rhetoric will “make ones stile dark and perplex’d” (8). Smith’s censure of figurative language captures a general feeling toward stylistic methods that teachers of rhetoric had traditionally advocated. For Smith, artifice discourages sympathy and,

⁵³⁵ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), 15 All subsequent references are to this text and will be noted parenthetically.

⁵³⁶ Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 508.

through it, persuasion. This curiously arhetorical sentiment is central to a pedagogy designed to teach linguistic correctness and affective eloquence. In this sense, Smith's attention to the means by which approbation happens outside of the discourse of classical and humanist rhetoric makes him an iconoclast against the backdrop of his neoclassical predecessors.

Sympathy is a crucial term not only in Smith's rhetoric, but also to both his conception of moral conscience and appropriate social behavior that he outlines in his moral philosophy. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith establishes sympathy as the emergence of morality, the process in which we become feeling actors through benevolent and compassionate response to social behavior. However, as the passage above from LRBL indicates, sympathy is also the most significant act of identification that leads to meaningful persuasion. In the opening section of TMS, Smith describes sympathy as "our fellow-feeling with any passion whatsoever" (13). There are many means through which sympathy can be achieved, perhaps the most effective of which is through a response to sorrow. However, sympathy primarily occurs not as a response to a premeditated action, such as a calculated speech, but through natural interaction. If we suspect that the move to provoke sympathy is artificial or premeditated, we are less likely to feel the identification that would otherwise occur. This is why, in speaking of rhetoric, Smith explains that the artificiality of tropes can obstruct sympathy.

Importantly for Smith, the sympathetic response is an interpretive act. While it "may seem to be transfused from one man to another, instantaneously," Smith insists that the observer participates in a complex imaginative act of discernment. In order to judge the moral value of any action, one must imagine herself as the actor. Critics have noted

the “essentially theatrical construction” of this scenario,⁵³⁷ and the construction of the observer as an audience member also is suggestive of a rhetorical performance. However, for sympathy to occur, the observer must break through the monological trappings of those settings, in which the speaker dominates or potentially attempts to control the listener. The observer only *begins* as an audience member, but then imaginatively assumes the privileged point of understanding the actor. The act of interpretation that leads to sympathy is only possible once the observer assumes this imaginative position. Smith does not provide much by way of illustration of how this interaction occurs, but one passage in particular is illuminating:

If we hear a person loudly lamenting his misfortunes, which however, upon bringing the case home to ourselves, we feel, can produce no such violent effect upon us, we are shocked at his grief; and, because we cannot enter into it, call it pusillanimity and weakness. It gives us the spleen, on the other hand, to see another too happy or too much elevated, as we call it, with any little piece of good fortune. We are disobliged even with this joy; and, because we cannot go along with it, call it levity and folly. We are even put out of humour if our companion laughs louder or longer at a joke than we think it deserves; that is, that we feel that we ourselves could laugh at it. (19-20)

Smith goes on to describe the overly affected response to a disproportionate degree of grief, joy, or humor. If one responds with too great intensity or with a level of unacceptable indifference, the observer will feel no sympathy. As Stephen McKenna explains, “highly idiosyncratic and personal sentiments cannot be expected to occasion sympathy directly.”⁵³⁸ The opportunity for sympathetic interaction hinges on the evaluation and approbation of these moments. Smith repeatedly categorizes these reactions in their accordance with “propriety,” a term that had more contemporary relevance in rhetorical theory than in moral philosophy. Its significance in the history of

⁵³⁷ Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: California UP, 1985), 244; see also David Marshall, “Adam Smith and the Theatricality of Moral Sentiments,” *Critical Inquiry* 10, no. 4 (June 1, 1984): 592–613.

⁵³⁸ McKenna, *Adam Smith*, 62.

rhetorical theory can be traced back to the Sophists. In *Against the Sophists*, Isocrates explains that “oratory is good only if it has the qualities of fitness for the occasion, propriety of style, and originality of treatment.”⁵³⁹ Isocrates’ definition of rhetoric emphasizes the conditions that the persuasive speaker accepts, rather than the radical activity of challenging normative behavior. McKenna insightfully notes that propriety bridges the communicative sentiments in TMS with the moral foundations of LRBL.⁵⁴⁰ In Smith’s description of sympathy, propriety proves absolutely central in judging actions based upon convention, prior observation, and cultural standards. Otherwise, spectators give into prejudices or biases that corrupt their assessment. We have certain expectations of how one should respond to fortune, misfortune, or wit – to use the examples of the above passage – and whether or not someone meets these.

Judging the propriety of moral activity is similar to auditing a rhetorical performance because both rely on social mores and models of appropriate and polite behavior that were becoming more and more central in the development of rhetorical theory in the eighteenth century. As Smith explains in TMS, “In the suitableness or unsuitableness, in the proportion or disproportion which the affection seems to bear to the cause or object which excites it, consists the propriety or impropriety, the decency or ungracefulness of the consequent action” (22). The sympathetic response is not merely an affective reaction, but one that is informed by pre-existing social factors that each observer views differently. Though one might find sympathy even through an evaluation that might typically be conceived as improper (i.e., both laugh heartily at a clearly offensive joke), Smith clearly sees the audience of TMS as having relatively consistent

⁵³⁹ Isocrates, “Against the Sophists,” 73.

⁵⁴⁰ McKenna, *Adam Smith*.

and acceptable notions of “propriety.” That he does not spend much space outlining what exactly comprises “suitableness or unsuitableness” is suggestive of his reliance on basic moral principles.

For Smith, the sympathetic response is more persuasive than any response to a calculated performance can ever be. At one point, he questions the efficacy and propriety of an “animated eloquence” already practiced in France and Italy that is “just beginning to be introduced into England” (243). To what Smith refers is unclear, yet he certainly could allude to the gyrating enthusiasm of the elocutionists and his inclusion of France and Italy insinuates certain excesses that should be avoided in polite culture. In Smith’s evaluation of the rhetorical tradition, “animated” speech is also the problematic product of rhetorical theory from Cicero to his disciples Ward and Lawson. The principles of plainness and sympathy should replace the overly tropaic models that Smith frames his lectures as reacting against. As he explains in LRBL, the “animated” speech should be rejected for the “neat, clear, plain, and clever manner” that encourages sympathy (26). In TMS, Smith repeatedly links ideas of sympathy with rhetorical goals such as “approval” and “approbation.” This is most clear in a crucial passage that explains why sympathy must precede persuasion:

To approve of another man's opinions is to adopt those opinions, and to adopt them is to approve of them. If the same arguments which convince you convince me likewise, I necessarily approve of your conviction; and if they do not, I necessarily disapprove of it: neither can I possibly conceive that I should do the one without the other. To approve or disapprove, therefore, of the opinions of others is acknowledged, by every body, to mean no more than to observe their agreement or disagreement with our own. But this is equally the case with regard to our approbation or disapprobation of the sentiments or passions of others (21).

On one hand, we are more likely to agree with those whose sympathy we already share.

On the other, it is extremely difficult to be persuaded by those with whom we do not

sympathize. The correspondence relates to Kenneth Burke's description of "identification" as the goal of rhetoric in the sense that "you can persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by . . . identifying your ways with his."⁵⁴¹ However, Smith also describes the success or failure of the argumentative process itself as occurring through sympathetic interaction. The opening tautology, in which approval and adoption are interchangeable, is suggestive of the larger point of the passage: to agree is to sympathize, and to sympathize is to agree.

However, though sympathy is largely an internal process, it still relies on social customs and normative behavior. The observer applies the standards of propriety to a spontaneous act. For instance, Smith explains that sympathy is most aroused by the perception of suffering and injustice. However, in the passage I quote above, he notes that a disproportionate response to a markedly insignificant affliction discourages sympathy and instead projects "pusillanimity and weakness." True sympathy responds to sincere emotion, and any attempt to simulate this sentiment will be deconstructed by the astute observer. We respond to emotional actors, who themselves respond artlessly and naturally to grief and joy based on shared values and understandings of social conduct. Smith describes the emotions that provoke and repel sympathy:

These must be plain, open, and direct; determined without positiveness, and elevated without insolence; not only free from petulance and low scurrility, but generous, candid, and full of all proper regards, even for the person who has offended us. It must appear, in short, from our whole manner, without our labouring affectedly to express it, that passion has not extinguished our humanity. (47)

The opposition is familiar because Smith's descriptions retain the confrontations that each of my chapters stage: between plainness and elevation, sincerity and ostentation, artifice and reality. The pivotal connotation of "appear" shows that ultimately we may be

⁵⁴¹ Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: California UP, 1969), 55.

deceived by an emotional response. However, passions that are affected through a noticeable “labour” are to be distrusted based on a “natural sense of propriety.” That “passion” might “extinguis[h] our humanity” is not just a suggestive turn of phrase for Smith. Rather, the sympathetic response is one of moderation and control, based on a sincerity that comes through rational inquiry and composure. Smith contrasts real, or “plain,” emotions, and those that are contrived merely to provoke a reaction.

In his discussion of the social basis of moral conscience, Smith’s theory of the impartial spectator evokes the detachment that I have described in my previous chapters, particularly in the figure of the “modest witness,” who defines the protocols of objectivity in early experimental discourse. While the spectator is moved, he does little to respond by way of action. The main activity of the spectator is the empathy that leads to identification. According to Smith, since we are driven by the perceptions of others, we should judge our actions as though we are being observed and evaluated. In discussing “the principle by which we naturally either approve or disapprove our own conduct,” Smith argues that such assessment can only occur through a disciplined detachment, claiming “[w]e can never survey our own sentiments and motives, we can never form any judgment concerning them; unless we remove ourselves, as it were, from our own natural station, and endeavour to view them as at a certain distance” (128). This distance requires imagining the perspective of other observers who would view and evaluate the action, but not just any observer: we must imagine the perspective of one who operates without passions or motives aggravated by social circumstance or individual desire. Instead, Smith writes, “[w]e endeavour to examine our own conduct as we imagine any other fair and impartial spectator would examine it” (129). As D.D. Raphael explains, “Conscience

is a social product, a mirror of social feeling.”⁵⁴² However, the ideal social observer understands the rules of social activity, but does not participate – who stands apart, rather than among. In Smith’s view, social approval drives the agent to appropriate action through the imaginative evaluation of a detached observer.

The basis of the evaluation of the impartial spectator is the sympathy that Smith has already described: by acting in such a way that would engender the sympathetic response, one engages in what Vivienne Brown calls a “dialogical scrutiny of oneself.”⁵⁴³ However, this scrutiny is founded on established social protocols that both the spectator and the actor share. Emotions have a social and rhetorical foundation: Smith judges them based on the response of the observer – whether or not someone overreacts to grief or humor, for instance. Sympathy emerges through shared values that occur through observation and approbation. In that sense, sympathy and persuasion have the similar goal of identification through those shared values. Sympathy is essential to the possibility of persuasion.

Of course, an even more famous spectator figure in the eighteenth century is Joseph Addison and Richard Steele’s Mr. Spectator, a self-fashioned icon of journalistic objectivity and social propriety. Compared with dynamic orator figures, Mr. Spectator offers a direct contrast. He is quiet where they are loud, restrained where they are animated. In his first essay, he introduces himself to his reader:

Thus I live in the World, rather as a Spectator of Mankind, than as one of the Species; by which means I have made my self a Speculative Statesman, Soldier, Merchant, and Artizan, without ever meddling with any Practical Part in Life. I am very well versed in the Theory of an Husband, or a Father, and can discern the

⁵⁴² D. D. Raphael, *The Impartial Spectator: Adam Smith’s Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 35.

⁵⁴³ Vivienne Brown, *Adam Smith’s Discourse: Canonicity, Commerce and Conscience* (Routledge, 1994), 57.

Errors in the Economy, Business, and Diversion of others, better than those who are engaged in them; as Standers-by discover Blots, which are apt to escape those who are in the Game. I never espoused any Party with Violence, and am resolved to observe an exact Neutrality between the Whigs and Tories, unless I shall be forc'd to declare myself by the Hostilities of either side. In short, I have acted in all the parts of my Life as a Looker-on, which is the Character I intend to preserve in this Paper.⁵⁴⁴

Mr. Spectator's authority lies in his relative absence, his non-participation, and his intellectual neutrality, despite the raging hostilities that surround him. Fashioning himself as an avatar of philosophical detachment, he anticipates the ideal impartiality that Smith describes as necessary to make a social judgment. Of course, though Mr. Spectator never partakes in the flawed cultural settings he observes, as a "looker-on" he is in a prime position to offer commentary. Detachment and pronounced neutrality allow Mr. Spectator a pristine ethos because he is uncorrupted by the excesses of the social scenes he only observes. Mr. Spectator's sanction comes through knowledge attained through impartial observation, not active participation.

Critiques and satires of the orator center on his presence, his bodily force, and the potentially dangerous gyrations of his voice. As I have noted, the elocutionists celebrated precisely this force and centrality, offering students the means to attain this enlarged presence. Alternately, Mr. Spectator defines himself by his absence, as what Erin Mackie calls the "impersonal arbiter of the 'higher,' more absolute standards of nature, law, civilization, and humanity itself."⁵⁴⁵ Orators are invasive and confrontational, intervening and speaking figures, as opposed to Mr. Spectator, who celebrates the archetypal category to which he belongs, "the Fraternity of Spectators who live in the

⁵⁴⁴ Addison and Steele, *The Spectator*, 1:4–5.

⁵⁴⁵ Erin Mackie, "Introduction: Cultural and Historical Background." *The Commerce of Everyday Life*, 30.

World without having a thing to do in it.”⁵⁴⁶ Critics present the orator as a force of unwelcome intervention whose rhetorical energy and premeditated tactics signal his inherent emptiness. The spectator offers the opposite – defined by a lack of presence and voice, his philosophical contemplation is presented not in the form of a call to action, but as a wry aside. Mr. Spectator gains authority through the sedate composure that his written style suggests. As Hugh Blair notes in one of the three chapters that he dedicates to exploring the virtues (and occasional faults) of Addison’s style in *The Spectator*, “to be highly pleased with his manner of writing, is the criterion of one’s having acquired a good taste in English stile.”⁵⁴⁷ The spectator provides a model for ethos in the authoritative disinterest that comes across as objectivity.

In these configurations, the impartial spectator is both an audience member and a rhetor. By observing and assessing action, the spectator convinces without speaking or writing. Smith establishes the conditions of neutrality that must occur in any observation by personifying moral judgment as a spectral figure that departs from the messiness and muddled nature of human passions and is elevated to a position of objective judgment. In this imaginative gesture, we learn to evaluate both others and ourselves. Charles Griswold writes that “to adopt the standpoint of the impartial spectator is implicitly to hold that one’s judgments ought to persuade others.”⁵⁴⁸

Smith’s lectures on rhetoric, then, can be read not so much as the means of achieving persuasion, as attaining and provoking sympathy through linguistic means, whether written or oral. This is not Smith’s sole focus throughout the lectures – to a

⁵⁴⁶ Addison and Steele, *The Spectator*, 1:9–10.

⁵⁴⁷ Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1965), 409.

⁵⁴⁸ Charles L. Griswold Jr., *Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 197.

modern reader, the emphases of the extant lectures reads as an immersive course on the subjects of the humanities with a focus on their style and organization. Throughout, Smith extols the philosophical and linguistic ideals of a simple style while locating figurative excess in the classical tradition. In his second lecture, he explains,

What are generally called ornaments or flowers in language, as allegoricall, metaphoricall and such like expressions are very apt to make ones stile dark and perplex'd. Studying much to vary the expression leads one also frequently into a dungeon of metaphorical obscurity. (8)

Smith does not merely advocate stylistic precision for the purpose of clear communication. By studying figurative language, his students risk not only confusing audiences but also themselves through an excessive layering of tropes. Ornamental language muddies the epistemological picture that projects like Smith's lectures aim to correct. The pomposity of affectation is here presented as dangerous. Smith has in mind his students' ability to delude themselves through attention to style more than subject, as meaning is lost in a haze of obscurity. The "dungeon of metaphorical obscurity" also deters the more important goal of sympathy.

Since Smith believes that the most compelling and meaningful acts of persuasion happen through sympathy, the only language appropriate to engender this effect is that uncalculated sentiment produced through what he calls "just and naturall forms." In the second lecture, Smith explains that "it is very improper for Orators" to adopt a "plain simple style" when "their design is to rouse the passions" through "strong and perhaps exaggerated passions" (7). With this gesture, he admits that the affective tactics of rhetoric are necessary within the monologic construction of the public speech. But this gesture is just that, a recognition that since he has been called on to lecture on rhetoric, he

must acknowledge that such animated gestures and florid stylistic moves still have their effects on audiences. Stephen McKenna explains,

only perspicuous language can communicate the often abstract complexities of contextuality with any precision, and only appropriate language . . . discloses sentiment not as mere psychological fact or raw affect, but as a particular kind of moral state itself emanating from the causal web of emotion, character, social context, and circumstance. Any kind of emotional display, whether linguistic or physical, can convey the mere fact that a person is simply having an emotion. But only appropriately made speech reliably discloses what otherwise might appear to be merely reflexive behavior as a kind of moral action.⁵⁴⁹

McKenna adds, “impropriety might be a sign of poorly formed moral character.” To

return to his censure of tropes, Smith fittingly offers his most critical censure of

hyperbole because it signals an artificial intensification of supposedly natural emotions.

Significantly, it “has no beauty itself” (31). Hyperbole takes the focus off of the object

being described and shifts it to the exaggerated language used to describe it. Elsewhere,

as he notes, figures will be found “in the lowest and most vulgar conversation” (34).

Since sympathy is actualized through the “just and naturall,” figurative language corrupts

Smith’s idealized view of communication through “pompous sounding expressions.”

In Smith, the efficacy of the sympathetic act to bring about persuasion makes it the proper domain of rhetoric. Students should not be schooled in affective devices, but in an understanding of sympathy. While the traditional rhetorical scene is characterized by a kind of affective violence, Smith eradicates this vehemence from rhetoric of through his endorsement of a plain style that resists figuration. Smith substitutes the ideal of the orator with that of a sympathetic speaker who finds an emotional language outside of rhetorical strategy.

Hugh Blair: Revising Rhetoric

⁵⁴⁹ McKenna, *Adam Smith*, 116.

In 1762, Hugh Blair became the first professor of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres at the University of Edinburgh, a position he held until his death in 1783.⁵⁵⁰ Blair was a renowned teacher, and his success in the classroom is most enhanced and memorialized by the continuing influence of the version of *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres* published in 1783. Blair apparently published his lectures because he was concerned about their unauthorized circulation and felt “threatened with surreptitious publications.”⁵⁵¹ There were twenty-six abridgements of the *Lectures* in Great Britain and thirty-seven in the United States.⁵⁵² It “became a staple of instruction for half the educated English speaking world.”⁵⁵³ In the *Critical Review*, an anonymous reviewer recommends the lectures as a “more comprehensive view of what relates to these subjects than is to be received from any one book in our language.”⁵⁵⁴

Blair’s work may have been so popular because its accessibility gave readers the opportunity to engage with and emulate the sophisticated world that the author describes. As Winifred Bryan Horner explains regarding the goals of students who would have attended Blair’s lectures, “‘good English’ became a rung on the ladder” for a “large and powerful merchant class and those aspiring to better themselves.”⁵⁵⁵ As Blair explains in his first and foundational lectures to his students,

according as society improves and flourishes, men acquire more influence over one another by means of reasoning and discourse; and in proportion as that

⁵⁵⁰ The only book-length biography of Blair is Robert Morell Schmitz, *Hugh Blair* (New York: King’s Crown Press, 1948); Howell, *Eighteenth-Century British Logic and Rhetoric*.

⁵⁵¹ Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, iii. All subsequent references are from this text and will be noted parenthetical in the text by volume and page number.

⁵⁵² James L. Golden, Goodwin F. Berquist, and William E. Coleman, *The Rhetoric of Western Thought*, 5th ed. (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt, 1992), 25.

⁵⁵³ Schmitz, *Hugh Blair*, 3.

⁵⁵⁴ “Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres. In Two Volumes. By Hugh Blair, D.D.,” *Critical Review, or Annals of Literature* 56 (1783): 45.

⁵⁵⁵ Winifred Bryan Horner, “Introduction,” in *Scottish Rhetoric and Its Influences*, ed. Lynée Lewis Gaillet (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1998), 1–17.

influence is felt to enlarge, it must follow, as a natural consequence, that they will bestow more care upon the methods of expressing their conceptions with propriety and eloquence. (I.2)

Blair sets up the lectures as a move from rudeness to refinement, preparing his audience to become more intelligent participants in the world around them. Rather than express values of civic eloquence as a vehicle for producing social change, Blair sees rhetoric as instilling a social order of which he was an eloquent sermonizer. Even as he seemingly provides his students access by allowing them to participate in civil discourse, his emphasis on what Thomas Miller calls the “introspective turn toward belletristic sentiment” works to encourage personal development more than active civic participation.⁵⁵⁶ Even though those two goals are not completely oppositional, Blair’s lectures prioritize an individual improvement that has a private rather than public end. That Blair specifically sees rhetoric as the primary forum for discussing decorum, taste, and propriety, rather than the production of speeches, reflects the fundamental shift that the discipline underwent in the period.

The accessibility of Blair’s *Lectures* was one of its most important selling points. The comprehensive and comprehensible qualities of the *Lectures* gave audiences a thorough yet critical survey of classicism. Linda Ferreira Buckley explains that there is little original theory in Blair and that he should be viewed as a “great synthesizer” who “expressed a safe middle ground.”⁵⁵⁷ The “safe” nature of the work is intentional, as Blair clearly sees the role of rhetoric as important for grooming polite speakers who are capable of auditing, rather than producing, persuasive speeches. Barbara Warnick has noted that Blair is part of a broad move to reorient the focus of rhetoric from the

⁵⁵⁶ Miller, *The Formation of College English*, 249.

⁵⁵⁷ Linda Ferreira-Buckley, “Hugh Blair,” in *Eighteenth Century British and American Rhetorics and Rhetoricians*, ed. Michael G. Moran (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994), 21–35.

production of persuasive texts to their reception.⁵⁵⁸ Thomas Miller writes that Blair “preach[es] the virtues of self-control, orderly subservience, and liberal tolerance in ways that maintained the political status quo.”⁵⁵⁹ Blair hoped that his students would speak better, but he has an equal if not greater desire to make them more adequately equipped for conversations about the literary and artistic world. The popularity of Blair’s lectures suggests that his particular take on rhetoric was influential in defining the discipline and its departure from classical methodology.

In his first lecture, Blair recognizes that rhetoric has a declining capital that must be redeemed through the sober and rational study that his lectures will attempt:

Indeed, when the arts of speech and writing are mentioned, I am sensible that prejudices against them are apt to rise in the minds of many. A sort of art is immediately thought of, that is ostentatious and deceitful; the minute and trifling study of words alone; the pomp of expression; the studied fallacies of rhetoric; ornament substituted in the room of use. We need not wonder, that under such imputations, all study of discourse as an art, should have suffered in the opinion of men of understanding: and I am far from denying, that rhetoric and criticism have been so managed as to tend to the corruption, rather than to the improvement, of good taste and true eloquence. But sure it is equally possible to apply the principles of reason and good sense to this art, as to any other that is cultivated among men. If the following Lectures have any merit, it will consist in an endeavour to substitute the application of these principles in the place of artificial and scholastic rhetoric; in an endeavour to explode false ornament, to direct attention more towards substance than show, to recommend good sense as the foundation of all good composition and simplicity as essential to all true ornament. (I.3)

Blair is clearly on the defensive here. The “prejudices” he finds are broad enough to include the philosophical complaints of Sprat, Hobbes, and Locke, and specific to suggest the more recent mockery of orators by Pope and Fielding. Blair views himself as rehabilitating the study of rhetoric from the both the “ostentatious and deceitful” and the “minute and trifling.” He frames his work as informed by the very critics who dismissed

⁵⁵⁸ Barbara Warnick, *The Sixth Canon: Belletristic Rhetorical Theory and Its French Antecedents* (Columbia: South Carolina UP, 1993).

⁵⁵⁹ Miller, *The Formation of College English*, 247.

rhetoric in the first place. It is crucial that Blair pins the contemporary problems on those who have pursued rhetoric with a focus on generative prompts or elocution. Similar to Smith in rejecting the “animated eloquence” that discouraged sympathy, Blair sees the study of rhetoric as having been mismanaged by those who pursue “artificial and scholastic” measures. In forecasting the ameliorative intention of the project, Blair addresses the “men of understanding,” who might view his attention to rhetoric with suspicion. Blair shrewdly does not point out the offenders who have either minimized or blown out of proportion the focus of discipline. Instead, he positions himself among the critics, rather than apart from them. This stance is operative throughout the lectures. In his effort to make “good sense” the foundation on which the new rhetoric is built, he accepts only part of the classical tradition. Blair must temper rhetoric of its misuses, whether that abuse is in the apparently ostentatious practices of the elocutionists or the bland classicism of the neoclassicists. In a later lecture, Blair characterizes the oral cultures as overly agonistic and ostentatious. He disdains those “those public and promiscuous societies” that have “an absurd rage for Public Speaking” (II.240-41). Noting that these “societies” are populated largely by “multitudes . . . of low stations and occupations,” Blair condemns these “seminaries of licentiousness, petulance, faction, and folly” (II.241). If mismanaged, the pursuit of rhetoric will encourage such brazen practices. Other approaches to rhetorical education (the “seminaries of licentiousness”) might spawn “multitudes” of orators, but not the method Blair advocates as a reaction to such unacceptable oral training. Largely because of these “multitudes” and their infectious speeches, Blair offers a thorough discussion of the ideal listener.

Since these oral “beauties” are crafted to engage and overwhelm the passions, the auditor who is “dazzled” by them gives in to the emotions of the moment while overlooking the substance. Blair’s conceives of taste as a process of consistent refinement and comparison, but it is also grows through heightened awareness of the object being considered. Trained by the enlightened methods of Blair, the audience member becomes a rhetorical critic. The student of Blair’s lectures will not be given over to the “superficial” rhetorical performances designed to gain assent through hypnotic style. The ideal student will be able to “distinguish what is beautiful and what is faulty in every performance” (I.36).

In his recognition that crude and florid speaking practices are endemic, Blair pits mass response against the tasteful reaction that a polite listener should first consider and then articulate. Blair notes that the “public” is tempted to respond overzealously to any newly released work because “[t]here are both a great vulgar and a small, apt to be caught and dazzled by very superficial beauties” (I.39). He later admits, “The public ear is now so much accustomed to a correct and ornamented style, that no writer can, with safety, neglect the study of it” (I.407). Blair’s lectures aspire to produce a polite culture that will carry on the future of rhetoric in the form that he establishes. In this respect, the pedagogical structure of Blair’s lectures is significant. Before broaching topics of reception and history, he establishes firm guidelines of taste and criticism that students should follow. Equipped with the disarming mechanisms of taste and criticism, the student will be fortified against the improprieties of false ornament. The rest of the *Lectures* follow suit: while Blair is attentive to methods of production, he has an

overwhelming concern for producing seasoned and discerning auditors, who will reject the ornate stylings that corrupt polite style.

In framing the study of rhetoric with a comprehensive discussion of how persuasive and literary texts should be analyzed, Blair shows that production and reception are closely related. By establishing more accurate methods of assessing spoken and written performances, a theory (so to speak) of hearing rather than speaking, he situates his work within a familiar system of empirical analysis, one that is “particularly concerned with examining the specific qualities of discourse and their effects.”⁵⁶⁰ Blair’s redirection might be seen as a shift from the production of affective speech to the analysis of how those effects are achieved. However, Blair is less concerned with describing and classifying the emotions as he is with considering their propriety. With Smith, Blair shares the belief that, while rhetoric has always been associated with emotional proofs, its future has to be linked to more rational practices, or to a more thorough theory of emotion that can be better described in Smith’s terms. What comes to matter are not orators, but the audiences who respond to them.

In keeping with the goals of his new rhetorical program, Blair reevaluates the origins of language as they are connected with a system of linguistic and rhetorical education. This is deeply connected to his idea that the refinement of the individual is a primary (if not *the* primary) goal of belletristic study. Blair locates the narrative of refinement within the genealogy of language itself. Departing from the Ciceronian origin story (as well as its later Christianized instantiations in works like Wilson’s *Arte of Rhetorique*) that civilization is the product of virtuous orators, Blair contends that the chaotic nature of early cultures was largely a product of its overly tropaic and symbolic

⁵⁶⁰ Warnick, *The Sixth Canon*, 4.

vernacular. In Blair's imaginative construction, tropes were crafted out of necessity by those who needed a symbolic system of communication before the invention of a codified alphabet. Therefore, figures of speech should be seen not as originating from sophisticated rhetoricians, but from passionate savages needing an organized language with which to express themselves. Because they lacked "precise expression," the "early Language of men" was highly passionate and colorful, but the flourishes were derived naturally instead of artistically. Blair writes,

In the infancy of all societies, men are much under the dominion of imagination and passion. They live scattered and dispersed ; they are unacquainted with the course of things ; they are, every day, meeting with new and strange objects. Fear and surprise, wonder and astonishment, are their most frequent passions. Their language will necessarily partake of this character of their minds. They will be prone to exaggeration and hyperbole. They will be given to describe every thing with the strongest colours, and most vehement expressions; infinitely more than men living in the advanced and cultivated periods of society, when their imaginations are more chastened, their passions are more tamed, and a wider experience has rendered the objects of life more familiar to them. Even the manner in which I before showed that the first tribes of men uttered their words, would have considerable influence on their style. Wherever strong exclamations, tones, and gestures, enter much into conversation, the imagination is always more exercised ; a greater effort of fancy and passion is excited. — Consequently, the fancy kept awake, and rendered more sprightly by this mode of utterance, operates upon style, and enlivens it more. These reasonings are confirmed by undoubted facts. The style of all the most early languages, among nations who are in the first and rude periods of society, is found, without exception, to be full of figures ; hyperbolic and picturesque in a high degree. We have a striking instance of this in the American languages, which are known, by the most authentic accounts, to be figurative to excess. The Iroquois and Illinois carry on their treaties and public transactions with bolder metaphors, and greater pomp and style, than we use in our poetical productions. (I.113)

Once again, we see rhetoric as a civilizing tool, providing linguistic order in a setting of primitivism. Blair builds on contemporary ethnographic accounts of the "Iroquois and Illinois" whose "pomp and style" reflect their lack of refinement. In such societies, like the mythical "men . . . scattered in the field" whom Cicero describes, the

imagination needs to be “chastened” through rational development that comes from living in “more cultivated periods of societys.” However, Blair is more vivid in emphasizing those cultures as ostentatious rather than merely rude, as they are depicted in Cicero and later Thomas Wilson. He imagines the speaking practices of “first and rude periods” as an idiom in which rampant symbolism and poetical excess ruled. The societies were – to use Blair’s language – fanciful rather than progressive, relying on animated gestures and vivid symbols. Fittingly, the next lecture is titled the “rise and progress of Language and of Writing,” suggesting that the move away from figuration is part of a general narrative of improvement that led to semantic precision. Further, through the development of writing technologies, language “was brought to its highest state of perfection” (I. VII.132). In linking figurative language to an uncivilized passion, Blair is even more emphatic than Smith in marking it as a signifier of excess. Of particular interest is Blair’s evaluation of primitive description, which is a potent departure from the empirical accuracy at which writers of the period aimed. The “strongest colors and most vehement expressions” overwhelm any inherent substance. Also, the savage body is animated in such a way that Blair links with a so-called crude society.

To some degree, Blair celebrates the lively imagination that leads to such invented language. Even if, as Neil Rhodes writes, Blair’s evaluation of the dynamic oral character of these invented societies is “essentially one of loss,”⁵⁶¹ he firmly links contemporary linguistic problems with the oral practices of an untutored world. For Blair,

⁵⁶¹ Neil Rhodes, “From Rhetoric to Criticism,” in *The Scottish Invention of English Literature*, ed. Robert Crawford (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 206. In *The Formation of College English*, Miller also notes that Blair expresses an “ambivalence about refinement” as the “progress of politeness left culture chaste but barren” (233).

this striking natural energy should never be emulated except through an aesthetic form, such as poetry. His nostalgia for the past does not extend into any practical or philosophical instantiation. The message is the same: in the move to “advanced and cultivated states of society,” a primarily oral character becomes less and less necessary. Blair’s accompanying valorization of the evolution to writing reflects what Walter Ong has described as a “technologizing of the word” as “print situates words in space more relentlessly than writing ever did.”⁵⁶² With that technology comes new assumptions about the problematic values of the oral and the enhanced virtues of the written. Marshall McLuhan has persuasively argued that the transition from oral to written discourse was part of a technological shift that had lingering effects on human cognition and consciousness.⁵⁶³ As the eighteenth century uneasily welcomed an increasingly more ubiquitous print culture and the proliferation of new genres that it could more easily produce, the emphasis on writing can be seen as linked to this opportunistic need to have both new authors *and* new critics. Yet Blair is quick to acknowledge the “sense of loss” that Neil Rhodes argues characterizes his discussion of the virtues and failings of writing and speech. As has been noted, in Blair and Smith, rhetorical study became consumed more with matters of writing than it ever had before. Part of this transition can be seen in the inclusion of “Belles-Lettres” to the title of Blair’s project, a move he shared with Smith.

The questionable status of the trope is a foundational assumption for Blair’s theory of appropriate linguistic and rhetorical practices. My project so far has seen many

⁵⁶² Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 2012), 121.

⁵⁶³ McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. Of the many rhetorical questions McLuhan asks, the one that is most appropriate to this chapter is “Does the interiorization of media such as *letters* alter the ratio among our senses and change mental processes?” (24)

attacks on rhetoric that center on the trope as the most problematic feature of practices that root their success in intentional ambiguity and enthusiasm. Yet with Blair's location of the trope in an imagined primitivism, he accounts for the progressive need for its eventual removal. He writes, "When men were furnished with proper and familiar names for every object, both sensible and moral, they were not obliged to use so many circumlocutions" (I.115). If rhetoric is the province of figurative language, Blair sees it as the necessary management of those figures. For new rhetoricians like Smith and Blair, the centrality of the trope mars the "artificial and scholastic rhetoric" that they are dedicated to replacing.

Blair's consistent association of the elevated energy of tropes with the excessiveness of primitive passion anticipates a more specific anxiety toward the affective speaker that he will express in later lectures.⁵⁶⁴ The early world was full of florid orators, each using figures and symbols in an attempt to outdo the other. Blair's call for the regulation of figurative language is a part of his rhetorical program of mannered civility that reflected the progress of the culture away from such extravagance and also the problems of signification. As I have noted, Blair joined Smith in departing from the Ciceronian approach that characterized earlier texts. However, while Smith sticks largely to theory and potential applications, Blair is much more interested in giving his students a discussion in the foundations of eloquence. Amongst Scottish thinkers, this makes him unique, yet it should not be seen as an unqualified endorsement of the

⁵⁶⁴ In *The Formation of College English*, Thomas Miller also explains that Blair was drawn to the spurious works of Ossian largely because he saw within them the values of "tenderness and sublimity" rather than the vivid passions that I have shown as unsettling Alexander Pope (242). Ossian "spoke the language of polite sentiment" in a falsified past that embodied the values of the contemporary ruling class rather than Gaelic and Highland ancestries. See also ch.5, "Eloquence and Manners in Macpherson's *Poems of Ossian*" in Potkay, *The Fate of Eloquence in the Age of Hume*.

classical writers whom he surveys. Throughout, he contends that the rhetorical methods of the Greeks and Romans were a contemporaneous response to the venues in which they would take place.

When Blair turns to the classical world, he finds many of the same faults as the imagined setting of “the infancy of all societies.” Ancient orators such as Cicero and Demosthenes may have been archetypes of dynamic eloquence, yet their methods do not hold up under the scrutiny of the modern critical observer. Blair warns against “an injudicious imitation of ancient Orators, who, both in their pronunciation and gesture, and in their figures of expression, used a bolder manner than what the greater coolness of modern taste will readily suffer” (II.57). His analysis of classical rhetoric is not limited to his revision of generative principles and the tendency to overemphasize figurative language. He also censures and evaluates the veneration for classical orators whom Ward and Lawson celebrated unequivocally. As Hume called for the revival of a Demosthenes figure who would rouse Britain out of its slumber, Blair critiques the methods such a figure would use, anticipating the even more explicit challenge from Joseph Priestley that I discuss in my last section. When Blair is forced to evaluate the speaking orator, he offers many critical remarks about the classical speakers established as archetypes as eloquence.

Blair connects the success of ancient orators to their settings, rather than their abilities. In Lectures 25 and 26, Blair turns to a “history of eloquence” that focuses primarily on those Roman and Greek figures. To attempt to emulate those orators would come across as ridiculous before the refined audience that Blair nurtures in his opening sections. Cicero, for instance, uses “high art” to great effect for his Roman audiences.

Blair admits that the mention of Cicero's name "suggests everything that is splendid in oratory" (II.26). Blair uses Cicero as a model of how one can be both proper *and* passionate, as his arguments are both "arranged with great propriety" and "always full and flowing." Nonetheless, immediately after Blair describes Cicero's renowned ability to engage the passions, he turns to his defects:

Ciceronian Eloquence is a pattern so dazzling by its beauties, that, if not examined with accuracy and judgment, it is apt to betray the unwary into a faulty imitation; and I am of opinion, that it has sometimes produced this effect. In most of his Orations, especially those composed in the earlier part of his life, there is too much art; even carried the length of ostentation. There is too visible a parade of Eloquence. He seems often to aim at obtaining admiration, rather than at operating conviction, by what he says. Hence, on some occasions, he is showy rather than solid; and diffuse, where he ought to have been pressing. His sentences are, at all times, round and sonorous; they cannot be accused of monotony, for they possess variety of cadence; but, from too great a study of magnificence, he is sometimes deficient in strength. On all occasions, where there is the least room for it, he is full of himself. His great actions, and the real services which he had performed to his country, apologize for this in part; ancient manners, too, imposed fewer restraints from the side of decorum; but, even after these allowances made, Cicero's ostentation of himself cannot be wholly palliated; and his Orations, indeed all his works, leave on our minds the impression of a good man, but withal, of a vain man. (II.27-28)

Blair has many issues with "Ciceronian Eloquence," but the consistent concern is that Cicero's unrestrained pomposity is too much of a performance. When Blair calls attention to the "visible . . . parade of Eloquence," he suggests that critical auditors would be suspicious of the artifice that Cicero makes no attempt to conceal. With suggestive phrasing, Blair writes that Cicero is "full of himself" – his language draws attention to the speaker (his "showy . . . admiration") rather than to the subject (the "solid" "strength" which would better secure "conviction"), as he leaves his audience with recalling the artificial aspects of the performance rather than the persuasive substance of the argument.

Cicero's success is due to the features of the pre-modern world in which he lived, of more historical than practical interest.

By contrast, Blair exhorts the decorum of Demosthenes because he is not, like Cicero, "full of himself." His endorsement of Demosthenes fits with the more appropriate species of eloquence that the *Lectures* conveys: a subject-centered rhetoric that resists artifice and emphasizes a perspicuous naturalism. Though Demosthenes acts with "all the art of an Orator," and through his *Phillipics* incites his audience to action, he does so because of the substance rather than the style of the argument (II.21). Compared to Cicero, who in Blair's castigation seems to take a special delight in the obscure trope, Demosthenes "depis[es] the affected and florid manner which the Rhetoricians of that age followed" (II.20). Blair argues that Demosthenes succeeds because, unlike Cicero, his presence gradually diminishes as the argument itself enraptures his hearers. The description can be read as direct contrast to the overpowering presence of Cicero.

He appears to attend much more to things than to words. We forget the orator, and think of the business. He warms the business. He warms the mind, and impels the action. He has no parade and ostentation . . . but is like a man full of his subject, who, after preparing his audience by a sentence or two for hearing plain truths, enters directly on business. (II.21)

In telling his students that the ideal rhetorical performance is one in which they "forget the orator," Blair stresses the stability of the subject over the problematic speaker who might potentially mislead them. In the suggestive phrasing, Blair calls for an orator whose presence diminishes as the argument takes effect. As he will explain later, the content of Demosthenes' orations is so thorough that the orator becomes the neutral medium through which it is conveyed.

To turn Blair's analysis of this ideal rhetor into an analysis of his own work, Blair's lectures can be seen as an extensive and polemical act of "forgetting" the orator

within the discourse of rhetorical theory. Blair's comments to his students reveal his deep investment in rehabilitating the rhetorical tradition from its mismanagement by precisely the figure who must be largely expunged. Even when Blair turns to the production and reception of rhetoric, he does so with a suspicion and an anxiety toward its effects. Especially compared to the speakers in the neoclassical and elocutionary traditions, who are defined by their physical presence, this evocative image of the orator whose defining quality is his disappearance reflects the move from the primacy of the affective speaker to his disposability.

Like Goldsmith, Blair admits that, despite the improprieties of ancient orators such as Cicero, modern eloquence still has no similar defining characters and is "undoubtedly inferior" (II.38). Modern eloquence is too "humble . . . in its efforts," though Blair does not necessarily see this as a dilemma that must be solved. The Greeks and Romans were occupied with a "vehement and passionate [eloquence] by which to inflame the minds of their hearers, and hurry their imaginations away: and, suitable to this vehemence of thought, was their vehemence of gesture and action" (II.41). Contemporaneous speakers "are obliged to be more reserved than the antients, in their attempts to elevate the imagination, and warm the passions; and by the influence of prevailing taste, their own genius is sobered and chastened." Though he admits that this restraint has happened "perhaps, in too great a degree" (II.42), he nonetheless sees that the contemporaneous move toward propriety rather than the "vehement" language of antiquity is a necessary one.

In Blair, the celebration of the more accurate and appropriate speech of his imaginary Demosthenes builds on a discussion of the empirical virtues of writing from

the earlier lectures. As with his celebration of the vibrancy of the distant past, Blair exhibits a slight admiration for oral force only to explain why it must be extinguished. He admits that the “spoken Language has a great superiority over written Language.” He reflects Smith when he contends that, through speech, “sympathy . . . is one of the most powerful instruments of persuasion. Our sympathy is always awakened more, by hearing the Speaker” (I: 136). He concludes a discussion of writing and speaking with the conclusion that “all the great and high efforts of eloquence” come through “spoken, not of written, language” (I: 136). However in his discussion of writing, Blair emphasizes the empirical privilege of writing that speech lacks:

The advantages of writing above speech are, that writing is both the more extensive, and a more permanent method of communication. More extensive, as it is not confined within the narrow circle of those who hear our words, but, by means of written characters, we can send our thoughts abroad, and propagate them through the world; we can lift our voice, so as to speak to the most distant regions of the earth. More permanent also; as it prolongs this voice to the most distant ages; it gives us the means of recording our sentiments to futurity, and of perpetuating the instructive memory of past transactions. It likewise affords this advantage to such as read, above such as hear, that, having the written characters before their eyes, they can arrest the sense of the writer. They can pause, and revolve, and compare, at their leisure, one passage with another: whereas, the voice is fugitive and passing; you must catch the words the moment they are uttered, or you lose them for ever. (I: 135)

Despite the advantages of speech, the written word offers both a “broader” influence and a privileged clarity. Blair’s description of the “permanent method” reflects what critics in the tradition of Walter Ong and Marshall McLuhan would later claim regarding the written word, that it implies a finality and a legitimacy that the oral cannot. As Ong notes, writing presents “utterance and thought as uninvolved with all else, somehow self-contained, complete.”⁵⁶⁵ However, when Blair uses the oral metaphor “of

⁵⁶⁵ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 132.

lift[ing] our voice,” he applies the affective language of oratory to the seemingly more placid domain of writing. Even if the spoken word is primarily the domain of “eloquence,” Blair considers the enhanced persuasive possibilities of writing to be the primary focus of a disciplinary future. In the lectures, this shift can be seen in his comprehensive analyses of *The Spectator*, which (along with an analysis of Swift’s writing) take up five lectures. By contrast, Blair examines only two speeches: Cicero’s Oration for Cluentius and a sermon by Francis Atterbury. Of Cicero’s speech, Blair is predictably critical, even as he explains that he includes it because he feels it is Cicero at his most concise. He explains that Atterbury is an appropriate model for pulpit style because “he is most distinguished for elegance and purity of expression” (II.127). That “purity” is most evident in writing, so Atterbury’s inclusion (the only prolonged example of pulpit eloquence) is representative of the ideal of transparency better exemplified in the written text that should equally inform the oral performance. If oral performance had a place in the emerging rhetorical theories, it had to submit to the more rigid requirements that were being imposed on writing. As outlined by Blair, the place that speech would have within rhetorical pedagogy was one that centered more on audition and criticism than production. Blair presents the examples of Atterbury and Cicero not so much as practical models but, as he does with the written pieces he evaluates, as an opportunity to show how criticism can be performed on oral scenes.

In Blair’s discussion of the relative virtues of speech and writing, he is consistently conscious of the uncapturable essence of the spoken word that must be contained as well as the unequivocal security of writing that must be pursued even in speech. Clearly, however, the neutrality of speech is an ideal that appeals to Blair, as he

bridges the problems of language in science and philosophy with revised versions of rhetorical canons. In creating an audience suspicious of attempts to manipulate language, Blair encourages the ideal speaker who wants to please that critical audience. Also, mirroring the rhetorical ideal of Demosthenes, Blair detaches the persuasive identity from the persuasive text. Blair admires writing for virtues that Roland Barthes critiques in *The Death of the Author*: “Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing.”⁵⁶⁶ While Barthes discusses writing as both a creative and a technical act, he elsewhere notes that the “irreversible” quality of speech is what makes it at once “ephemeral” and “indelible.”⁵⁶⁷ Nonetheless, the description of the subject “slip[ping] away” reflects the division that Blair makes in privileging the content of the speech over the speaker him or herself, idealizing the sense of finality and accuracy that opposes and improves on the slipperiness of the spoken word. The oral, characterized by its uncontrollable instability, escapes that finality with every utterance.

Blair’s project can be seen as bringing to the oral word the control that the student will have over the written, to give more permanence and stability to the inconsistent and unmanageable force of the speech. This is not an unfamiliar move even within classical rhetorical theory. Paul Ricoeur notes that, in the transition from the apparent lawlessness and verbal trickery practiced by the sophists, the work of Aristotle serves as a philosophical bridge as it represents “a domesticated discipline, solidly bound to philosophy by the theory of argumentation.”⁵⁶⁸ By making rhetoric submit to the rules of

⁵⁶⁶ Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 142.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 190–91.

⁵⁶⁸ Ricoeur, “Between Rhetoric and Poetics,” 325.

philosophy, Aristotle “draw[s] the line between use and abuse.”⁵⁶⁹ Similarly, Blair domesticates what Ricouer calls the “fugitive” oral culture that had become so predominant in the earlier part of the century.⁵⁷⁰ Against the specter of disrupting orators, Blair’s rhetoric attempts to stabilize the tensions that rhetoric had traditionally animated. In addition to his emphasis on rational analysis and critical reflection over persuasive skill, he advocates a language that can be characterized with the same empirical accuracy as the written word, which pushes for agreed-upon polite sentiments rather than radical disagreements. Amidst the other transitions from an “old” to a new rhetoric, we can find an anxiety toward the force of the orator. In a definitive statement, Blair claims that “[t]rue Eloquence is the art of placing truth in the most advantageous light for conviction and persuasion” (I:317). Eloquence becomes, for Blair, a matter of arrangement, organization, and presentation.

David Hartley, Joseph Priestley, and the Emotions

For Blair and Smith, rhetorical theory negotiates the power of the orator through a combination of analysis and more appropriate conceptions of the oral. The “new” oral protocol “forgets” the powerful voice of the classical orator by privileging (in Smith) the rhetoric of sympathy and (in Blair) the precise and plain speech that will illuminate the subject rather than the speaker. Inherent in these attempts is a critical view of the judgment of the auditor and his or her susceptibility to the power of persuasive speech. The critical models provided by Blair reflect, in a sophisticated way, the anti-Methodists’ stringent and self-serving belief in training and preparing audiences to see rhetorical tactics as a sign of deceptive intention; in the terms of Chaim Perelman and Lucie

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid., 326.

⁵⁷⁰ For a more critical look at Aristotle’s “domestication” agenda, see Michael Leff, “The Uses of Aristotle’s Rhetoric in Contemporary American Scholarship,” *Argumentation* 7, no. 3 (1993): 313–327.

Olbrechts-Tyteca, to recognize “discourse as a device.”⁵⁷¹ Even if oral performance would continue to affect hearers, at least those audiences could engage in a program of refinement through rhetorical education. This approach reflects the immense continuing concern for training or controlling audience reaction through theories of persuasion and oral affect. Blair conceives an audience needing an array of critical models in order to give a sophisticated assessment. However, not all eighteenth-century rhetorical theorists were as committed to this vision of the limited power of the audience. In his *Lectures on Oratory and Criticism*, Joseph Priestley invokes David Hartley’s emerging and iconoclastic psychology of association to allow for a more enhanced natural faculty within the listener that might be found outside of the training that Blair and Smith envision as necessary.

Priestley’s lectures did not have the influence that Blair and George Campbell would have in the nineteenth century, but his theory reflects similar engagements and interests. Compared with the classical orthodoxy of Lawson and Ward and the revisionism of Smith and Blair, Priestley’s work offers, if not a middle path, an alternative direction. This is most striking when examined through the perspective of a psychology of audience, or what might more simply be called a theory of listening and reacting. The implications of Priestley’s theory suggest a reevaluation of the primary anxiety that motivates my project. Throughout the last chapters, I have examined writers concerned with animated orators who have a hypnotic sway over increasingly malleable audiences. Priestley alternates between a vision of the audience that can be more of a problem for the orator because of a collective interpretive grasp, and an ability to judge between the sincerity of emotions and its manipulative misuse.

⁵⁷¹ Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 453.

Priestley's intervention in rhetoric is a part of his larger investigation of human nature that brought him into contact with emerging innovations in education, science, and psychology. While we have seen other philosophers and rhetoricians take an interest in science, Priestley is often described as the father of modern chemistry. From 1761 to 1767, Priestley lectured at Warrington Academy, a dissenting academy often referred to as the "Athens of the North."⁵⁷² In *An Essay on a Course of Liberal Education for Civic and Active Life*, Priestley argues that students must be trained more in methodology than philology.⁵⁷³ He argues that this progressive spirit comes from an inductive understanding of England's own path to power and stability. By connecting the nationalistic drive to "wealth, power, and happiness" with similar pedagogical aims, educators and students alike can share a vision of the skills necessary for producing civic virtue and a rich intellectual life.⁵⁷⁴ Priestley's involvement in multiple realms of intellectual, academic, scientific, and public life led him to approach subjects more concerned with their application than in their rote memorization. In the opening pages of his *Essay . . . on Liberal Education*, Priestley laments that the "defect of our present system" is that it lacks "a proper course of studies . . . for Gentlemen who are designed to fill the principal stations of active life."⁵⁷⁵ Throughout the *Essay*, Priestley pushes back against an extreme classicism and a selective and reductive focus on an education that resembles an apprenticeship in a trade or subject. Thomas Miller contends that Priestley and his Warrington associates pushed for "a progressive individualism that challenged

⁵⁷² On Priestley's rhetoric, see Michael G. Moran, "Joseph Priestley" in *Eighteenth Century British and American Rhetorics and Rhetoricians*. For a recent evaluation of Priestley's broader career, see Alan Tapper, "Priestley on Politics, Progress, and Moral Theology," in *Enlightenment and Religion*, ed. Knud Haakonssen, Cambridge (Cambridge UP, 1996), 272–286.

⁵⁷³ Joseph Priestley, *Essay on a Course of Liberal Education for Civil and Active Life* (London, 1765).

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

traditional authorities” and “a utilitarianism that valued practical applications over abstract speculations.”⁵⁷⁶ Yet Priestley does argue that such intellectual training enhances even those who do not plan to pursue scholarship. He notes the objection “that a turn for speculation unfits men for business,”⁵⁷⁷ yet argues that this intellectual development makes practical application that much more effective. Without the turn to “speculation” that comes from training in subjects like belles-lettres, natural philosophy, or metaphysics, the singled-minded tradesman will “find himself miserably bewildered, if he have acquired no more knowledge than was sufficient for him while he followed the direction of others.”⁵⁷⁸ Priestley bridges a utilitarian idea of education with his belief that intellectual endeavors would advance both a “progressive individualism” and a practicality that together prepare students for public life.

Consistent with other new rhetoricians, Priestley does not advocate for classical theory, even if he often turns to its history to make relevant points about persuasion and belief. Also, Priestley creates a new argumentative structure that revises the classical six-part structure. Sharing a suspicion toward classical models of invention, preferring instead a Baconian idea of “recollection,” Priestley is consistent with his predecessors in his criticism of an elaborate style that he connects to Ciceronianism.⁵⁷⁹ In terms of organization, he describes “analytic” methods that draw on Locke and Hutcheson, and “synthetic” models based on Hume and Hartley (55-71). Priestley even more explicitly

⁵⁷⁶ Miller, *The Formation of College English*, 106.

⁵⁷⁷ Priestley, *Essay on a Course of Liberal Education for Civil and Active Life*, 19.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵⁷⁹ Joseph Priestley, *A Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent M. Bevilacqua and Richard Murphy (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1965), 5. All subsequent citations are noted parenthetically by page number.

than any of his contemporaries challenges the style that he believes Ciceronianism encourages:

It is, likewise, proper that all Englishmen in particular should be informed, that a person of liberal education in this country can hardly ever be in such a situation, as will not render the imitation of some of the boldest, the most successful, and admired stroke of Roman, not to say Grecian eloquence, extremely improper and ridiculous. The English pulpit, the English bar, and the English senate, require an eloquence more addressed to the reason, and less directly to the passions, than the harangues of a Roman pleader, or the speech of a Roman senator. Our hearers have generally more good sense and just discernment, at least they are naturally more cool and phlegmatic; both which qualities check a propensity to strong emotions: and marks of great vehemence must appear absurd in a speaker when the audience is unmoved, and sees nothing to occasion such emotion. (113-114)

Contrasting the values of the “improper and ridiculous” appearance of classical eloquence with a more reasoned rhetoric, Priestley emphasizes the evolved and refined audience, who will be unmoved by the “great vehemence” of such performances. The standards of classical oratorical performance might be valuable for those studying the Roman and Grecian world, for instance, but they should never be applied to modern settings. Imagining classical speakers, Blair and Smith mainly think about propriety and the incompatibility of ancient eloquence with polite protocols. However, in this case, Priestley argues in terms of efficacy. Why must the vehemence of the “Roman pleader” be rejected? Not so much because his rhetorical tactics are so antiquated, but because the rational faculties of contemporaneous listeners are so elevated. “Our hearers,” given more to “just discernment,” will be suspicious of the performance itself. The emotion of the orator will not be duplicated in the audience.

However, despite his rejection of classical vehemence, Priestley is deeply interested in the fate of emotional appeals, and particularly the role the imagination and the emotions of the listener or reader play in the judgment of arguments. Again, as with

the Scottish new rhetoricians, Priestley participates in the paradigmatic shift from production to reception. However, consistent with his interest in David Hartley's association psychology, Priestley also sees the audience member as more than a passive receptacle for the intentions of the rhetor. Priestley recognizes the audience as arbiters who must be taken seriously, who have receptive capacities equal to the orator's persuasive powers.

In the preface to his published lectures, Priestley explains that that his primary reason for making the "lectures public" is to provide an "illustration of the doctrine of the association of ideas, to which there is a constant reference through the whole work" (i-ii).

In a later lecture, he explains specifically what is so valuable about Hartley's work:

Dr. Hartley, proposing a new hypothesis of the principles of the human mind, examines very particularly every thing relating to, or dependent upon the mind of man, viz. sensations, ideas, muscular motion, the external senses, affections, memory, imagination, reasoning, dreams, &c. and endeavours to show that none of the phenomena of any of them contradict his hypothesis; that many of them admit a peculiarly easy and complete illustration by it; and that the most difficult cases are not rendered more difficult, but rather easier by the help of it. And lest this hypothesis concerning the principles of the human mind should be suspected to bear an unfavourable aspect affect upon a plan of human duty, and human expectations, he considers the whole of both systematically; showing, whenever he hath opportunity, that the evidences of religion, natural and revealed, with the rule of life drawn from it, receive additional light and evidence from it; and, lastly, that it hath a happy influence both upon our conduct in this life, and upon our expectations after death (61).

Hartley's emphasis on the mind's ability to piece together and order information leads

Priestley to an innovative discussion of the role of emotions in processing speech.

Priestley advocates Hartley's hypothesis as a system that can illuminate epistemological issues such as knowledge formation and retention. He also sees Hartley's work (unlike,

he explains, Hume's) as consistent with natural revelation and biblical truth. Priestley

first read Hartley's *Observations* while a student at Daventry Academy in the 1750s. The

fact that he sees his contribution to rhetorical theory in large part as an advertisement for Hartley's psychological principles shows how much he considered the work as essential to a discussion of persuasion. Priestley uses the underpinnings of Hartley's neurological speculations to show how the auditor is empowered as a decision maker and an interpreter of concepts. In several lectures, Priestley shows a specific interest in the role the emotions play in this act of interpretation. He is less interested in the speaker's development of *pathos* than in how the audience responds to it. He frequently contends that the "sensible" auditor is able to decipher true from false emotion, which implies a theory of production similar to the ideas of Cicero and Quintilian that eloquence can only be achieved by a speaking subject who speaks on a combination of moral and intellectual conviction. Yet Priestley argues that the orator who speaks with false emotion will be found out by sensible listeners.

Hartley's complex theory is an early empirical attempt to define neurological processes, and thus appeals to Priestley's attempt to think in a more elaborate way about audiences. Hartley's psychology "reduces the principles of human nature to their basic element – the association of simple ideas."⁵⁸⁰ As Ann George explains, Hartley believed that "sensations produce vibrations transmitted through nerves; different kinds of sensations produce different vibrations . . . in different areas of the brain."⁵⁸¹ When a series of sensations happens, they produce a train of thought that stimulates moral and emotional development. Explicit in Hartley is the material essence of thought, rather than its intellectual, ephemeral nature. Unlike Locke, for instance, who believed that ideas are

⁵⁸⁰ Vincent M. Bevilacqua and Richard Murphy. "Editor's Introduction," *A Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism*, xxiv.

⁵⁸¹ Ann L. George, "Grounds of Assent in Joseph Priestley's *A Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism*," *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 16, no. 1 (February 1998): 81–109.

formed through a combination of external sensation and internal reflection, Hartley's epistemology limits the development of complex ideas to sensation alone.⁵⁸² Assent comes not through a passive act of reflection, but through the dynamic process of association.

Hartley's theories have significant implications for rhetoric. By making the process of association central, Hartley emphasizes the need for rhetors to have a grounding of audience psychology and rhetorical technique. Once the audience member receives the sensations, he or she undertakes intricate activities of association and connection. Hartley recognizes that the most "visible idea, being more glaring and distinct than the rest, performs the office of a symbol to all the rest, suggests them, and connects them together."⁵⁸³ The most "violent" vibrations are most likely to "recur in the imagination," and these govern the remaining process of association. Whatever appears most powerful to the imagination will control its development, acting as the central force around which all other ideas orbit and are arranged. In other words, passionate response results in a kind a rational arrangement.

Hartley's associative principle depends first and foremost on the power of the most remarkable impression. All the lesser impressions, vibrations, and ideas are organized into a coherent or (in a terminology Hartley shares with Locke) "complex" train of thought. This happens through all kinds of sensual interaction, but Hartley employs rhetorical terminology when describing aural excitement and its neurological and epistemological implications. He writes,

⁵⁸² Barbara Bowen Oberg, "David Hartley and the Association of Ideas," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37, no. 3 (July 1, 1976): 445.

⁵⁸³ David Hartley, *Observations on Man*, 2 vols. (New York: Garland, 1971), 1:78.

Rational assent then to any Proposition may be defined a Readiness to affirm it to be true, proceeding from a close association of the ideas suggested by the proposition, with the idea, or internal feeling, belonging to the word truth; or of the terms of the proposition with the word truth.⁵⁸⁴

In describing association and assent, he argues that each person has a different “idea,” “feeling,” or “proposition” connected to “truth.” In that case, “truth” is the ordering principle, itself built on vibrations, education, and experience. If an argument conforms to the listener’s view of truth, assent will follow, and vice versa. However there is also the possibility that the vivid impression of an argument will overwhelm that same innate belief to the point where it creates assent. In short, the passion overwhelms whatever rational stronghold the individual has created.

In the terms of eighteenth-century rhetoricians, the associative response is the difference between “conviction” and mere “persuasion.” Hartley’s method describes rhetoric at its most powerful – when the sensation of the argument, whether through rational or emotional proofs, is enough to change entrenched moral and empirical judgments. Through the potential sensual overload of the rhetorical performance, the orator has a pivotal power. Most explicitly, Hartley discusses the work of figurative language, in his terms anything from a single metaphor to the depth of a fable or allegory, as follows:

And they have this in common to them all, that the Properties, Beauties, Perfections, Desires, or Defects and Aversions, which adhere by Association to the Simile, Parable, or Emblem of any Kind, are insensibly, as it were, transferred upon the Thing represented. Hence the Passions are moved to Good or to Evil, Speculation is turned into Practice, and either some important Truth felt and realized, or some Error and Vice gilded over and recommended.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid., 1:324.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid., 1:297.

Figurative language has an unusual power in Hartley's epistemological paradigm because of the way sensation, rather than the Lockean process of recollection, stimulates ideas through association. When the "properties" of the metaphor overwhelm the imagination, the violent compulsion of association results in the nearly hypnotic force that he describes in the above passage.

Priestley's work is informed by this theory of reception that emphasizes the "connective formation through chains of sensory association."⁵⁸⁶ Because of the Hartleian focus of the lectures, Priestley dedicates the bulk of them to the role of the audience. He defines oratory as "the natural faculty of speech improved by art; whereby the use of it is perfected, facilitated, and extended; and consequently its value and influence greatly increased" (1). Priestley does not expend much space talking about how speech is "improved" through artificial methods. Instead, he examines the psychological motivations behind both the speaker and the audience. Throughout the lectures, Priestley mostly focuses on rational appeals, claiming that the "ultimate end of oratory" is "the informing of the judgment, and influencing the practice" (68). Based on that definition, Priestley seems primarily focused on rational modes of persuasion, on *logos* rather than *pathos*. Ann George claims that the *Lectures* contend that "argument is most noble when it stands apart from pathetic appeal" (95). Indeed, Priestley claims that "the appearance of candour and impartiality" offers the orator the most persuasive advantage (123). Even as Priestley describes the manipulation of "appearance" as advantageous to an orator's aims, he offers his listener tips to evaluate appearance and discern *logos* even when the pathetic is the primary appeal.

⁵⁸⁶ Debra Hawhee and Cory Holding, "Case Studies in Material Rhetoric: Joseph Priestley and Gilbert Austin," *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 28, no. 3 (August 2010): 265.

For Priestley, the orator is a performer, a fact that he alternately celebrates and critiques. In the passage when he contrasts the composed English rhetor and the “absurd” classical rhetor, he pits an ideal rhetoric against dramatic grandiloquence, ultimately implying that the latter belongs only on the stage. His description of “candour and impartiality” as “appearance” rather than substance is not merely a suggestive choice of words, but rather further evidence of his contention that ultimately even sincerity itself is performative. Even if all oratory is essentially a kind of acting, Priestley exhorts that a guiding moderation is necessary to make this performance work.

As he calls into question the power of the orator, Priestley describes an empowered audience who will work collectively to decipher meaning and expose rhetorical conceits. In an early section, Priestley describes the difference between a “narration” and a “description.” He writes, “The former is sufficient, where it answers a writer’s purpose barely to inform his reader of the *reality* of the event; the latter is necessary, if he be desirous that the reader be *interested* in it, and *affected* by it” (28). The description, he will later state, relies on the figurative language that Hartley found so affective. However,

literary impropriety of figurative expressions is excused only on account their being considered as indications of those feelings and sentiments which no words, literally interpreted, could describe, they should never be used but when the situation of the person who uses them is such as will render those feelings and sentiments natural. (78)

In this theorization, the rhetorically enhanced expression does not have the coercive power that some of the prior thinkers give it. It also does not suggest, as in Smith, an artificiality that reveals an inherent emptiness. Instead, Priestley puts the audience in a position to decipher and authenticate the rhetors feeling. This is, obviously, a

phenomenon that primarily happens when confronted by a spoken performance. In this interaction, the body is crucial, as it can betray the feelings the orator is trying to counterfeit. The listener will be able to discern the passionate spectacle, described here in the form of the “figurative expression,” from the true feeling the speaker experiences. If not, the rhetor will come off as artificial in that use. In other words, tropes can appropriately match sentiment with language. Priestley extends beyond spoken performance into written discourse as well. Without that corresponding sentiment to match the vehemence of the figure, Priestley writes,

there will be nothing left to excuse and cover the impropriety of the figure [as] the words present nothing but the *naked absurdity*, and the writer is detected, either in pretending to feelings that could have no existence, or in asserting what is apparently false and contradictory. (78)

Priestley is unclear as to how exactly the audience will expose this “naked absurdity,” yet is clarified when considering his lecture format. Like Blair, he wants to give his students critical tools to audit persuasive performances – both spoken and written – with a more critical eye and ear toward the tactics being used. Priestley does not dismiss rhetorical figures as having a natural “impropriety,” but notes that they detract from substance and draw the attention to the “writer,” who “is detected” and exposed.

To Smith, artifice in general discourages adherence to an argument, yet to Priestley, judging the rhetorical style can be a way for an audience to authenticate or invalidate the intentions of the speaker. The natural instinct of the auditor is to discern true and false emotions. When a speaker uses emotional tactics that he or she does not feel, Priestley explains, the speaker exploits the disjunction between artifice and reality: “When these things, which have so strong a connection in nature, are not united, the whole must appear extremely unnatural, the imperfect artifice will be easily seen through,

and the impostor be deservedly exposed” (114). Priestley specifically addresses the use of the extemporaneous as a means to enforce assent. In connection with the Methodists whom I discussed previously, Priestley’s contends that the audience will be able to “expose” a counterfeit passionate performance by seeing “the imperfect artifice” that the speaker uses. If it is merely a “form of address which [is] adapted to gain belief” (115), the listener should be able to judge the authenticity of the emotions that the speaker conveys. Priestley later adds, “no form of expression can appear natural, unless it correspond to the feelings of the person who uses it.” The orator who uses emotional proofs but not does feel them will be easy prey for the critical audience.

Though not focused on the production of persuasive discourse, Priestley does explain the proper way in which a writer or speaker should use emotion to move the listeners. As I note above, artifice that does not correspond to the rhetor’s emotional state will be viewed as “imperfect” and inappropriate. He explains,

In order to raise a very lively and tender sentiment, it is of advantage to describe the circumstances which raise it, in as few words as possible. The less time is lost in transition, the nearer is any sentiment brought in contrast with the preceding state of mind, and consequently the more sensibly it is perceived. Besides, when few words are sufficient to present a moving scene to the mind, it approaches nearly to giving a view of the *scene itself*, without description. The writer disappears, and the scene itself is before us: and to apply a general maxim to this particular case, if the principal and leading circumstances in any scene be expressed, the more negligent a writer seems to be to unfold all the particulars connected with them, the more will the reader imagine; and instead of his perceiving the effect of every circumstance of the scene separately, they will all crowd upon his mind in one *complex sensation*, and affect him with all their powers united. (101)

Similar to Blair’s describing the ideal act of listening to the speech as “forget[ting] the orator,” Priestley sees the writer disappearing as the scene unfolds. Instead of forcing a sentiment by stimulating and enhancing figurative language, the artifice should be

managed to the point where it neither augments nor detracts from the orator's presence. This corresponds to Blair's admonition to avoid a "too visible parade of Eloquence" (II.27-28). Yet where Blair sees that parade as evidence of vanity, Priestley speaks more to its inefficacy. Here, in dealing with written discourse, he describes the associative faculties of the audience creating a more powerful and "complex sensation" than the orator ever can.

For Blair, the scene that Priestley describes, in which the speaker disappears as the affective vision grows, is pivotal for persuasion. Priestley argues an even more extreme reaction through which the imaginative reader or listener "enters into, adopts, and is actuated by, the sentiments that are presented to his mind" (127). To explain further, Priestley makes a series of symbolic comparisons to describe the effects on the listener who becomes captive to such sentiments. The affective reaction is so powerful that he references the out-of-control body in athletic spectacle to describe the persuasive moment.

This takes place so instantaneously and mechanically, that no person whatever hath reflection, and presence of mind enough, to be upon his guard against some of the most useless and ridiculous effects of it. What person, if he saw another upon a precipice and in danger of falling, could help starting back, and throwing himself into the same posture as he would do if he himself were going to fall? At least he would have a strong propensity to do it. And what is more common than to see people playing at bowls, lean their own bodies, and writhe them into every possible attitude, according to the course they would have their bowl to take? It is true, that all men are not equally affected by this remarkable propensity. The more vivid are a man's ideas, and the greater is his general sensibility, the more entirely, and with the greater facility, doth he adapt himself to the situations he is viewing. (127)

Priestley's language grows gradually intense, moving from the abstract to the curiously specific. Even if one can be "upon his guard" against the power of rhetoric, Priestley calls attention to the power of spectacle over imagination, of vividness over sensibility. Again,

Priestley returns to associative principles in terms of the sophistication of the receptive faculties – the degree to which one “adapt[s]” to the scene instead of being overwhelmed by it. In this passage involving the person on a “precipice” and the gyrating, writhing bodies of those “playing at bowls,” Priestley contrasts contortion and chaos with the control that the sensible viewer gives a scene in the last sentence. Upon seeing athletic spectacle or impending danger, the watcher can give the scene an order that it does not have by continuing refining or “adapt[ing]” oneself to the vivid imagery and pursuing a critical detachment by understanding its effects.

Priestley contrasts such complex and imaginative receptive activity with what he calls “mechanical” processes. The refined listener or reader should be able to analyze critically a persuasive discourse, making appropriate associations built on a sophisticated understanding. However, for listeners who lack this cultivation, the mind acts like a mechanism that can be activated by using the rhetorical techniques that Priestley describes the refined auditor processing with more scrutiny. When he refers to the inappropriateness of Cicero’s emotive approaches for contemporary audiences, Priestley adds,

An audience indeed, that is wholly illiterate, may have all their passions actuated by means of admiration, or astonishment, and mechanical communication; but then there are few English audiences composed wholly of persons of so little reading and reflection as makes that practicable. And it is hardly possible that a person whose reading has lain among English books, or has conversed with persons of a liberal education, should not have acquired more delicacy of taste, than to be taken with that gross and direct address to the passions, which Cicero adopted with applause. The refinement of modern times requires that we speak, upon all occasions, with more temper, and use more address in raising the passions. (114)

He views classical oratory such as Cicero “adopted” as a kind of fad, given to ostentation more than substance, and views modern advances in psychology (such as Hartley’s) as

reducing the techniques advocated by Cicero as aiming at “mechanical” response. Modern audiences, refined by English literature and the protocols of polite conversation, will not be so easily swayed. In Priestley’s view, the rustics who respond to emotional appeals without inspection are curiously similar to those ancient listeners who responded to Cicero with “applause.” However, emotional appeals may be able to bring about this mechanical reaction even in the most refined listeners. He writes, “age, experience, and reflection may . . . have corrected this mechanical propensity; but it will ever retain a sensible influence over the generality of mankind; and these are almost the only people we have to do with in the business of the passions and imagination.” (128-29). Priestley sees audiences as becoming increasingly capable of critiquing and correctly processing emotional appeals. Despite the polite sensibilities that have been developed through “experience,” however, even “these” listeners are susceptible to the propensity for the affective power of rhetoric has to overrule the reason and consume the passions. There will always be the possibility that our enjoyment of affective speech counters the need for rational analysis that all eighteenth-century rhetors make so significant a part of their ideal rhetorical education.

Conclusion

This chapter opened with Oliver Goldsmith lamenting the death of eloquence and challenging the state of rhetorical education. Goldsmith died in 1774, before the publication of Blair’s lectures. Even as Blair would distance himself from the neoclassicists, Goldsmith might still extend his critique that even these “new” rhetoric teachers “reduce what is properly a *talent* to an *art*,” while England’s speakers remain

phlegmatic and ineffective.⁵⁸⁷ He might also, as Thomas Miller has more recently done, challenge the increasingly private nature of the new rhetoric, its emphasis on critical reception rather than affective performance, and its apparent removal from the scenes of civic action. Priestley's *Lectures* are the logical conclusion to the set of concerns that Smith sets in motion, in which reception is more essential than production. Rhetoricians are, of course, always interested in audiences, but the intense concentration on the psychology of the listener characterizes eighteenth-century texts more than in any earlier period in the history of rhetorical theory. As any history of the years following the 1783 publication of Blair's *Lectures* would note, the subsequent years would be marked by violent responses, sometimes good and sometimes bad, to vehement rhetoric. In the immortal words of Charles Dickens from *The Tale of Two Cities*, "it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity."⁵⁸⁸ As Dickens' famous opposition implies, revolutions were about listening and responding, and not with the interpretive repose that Blair, Smith, and Priestley imagined.

As Blair's work would enjoy an even greater popularity in the nineteenth century, Thomas Conley notes that rhetorical education became "curiously irrelevant," in the emerging contrast between "the world of polite conversation and learning – the world of Blair, in fact – and on the other, the disturbances and repression . . . in the aftermath of the French revolution."⁵⁸⁹ Perhaps because of these upheavals, the polite language of

⁵⁸⁷ Goldsmith, *Collected Works*.

⁵⁸⁸ Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (London: Penguin, 2008), 5.

⁵⁸⁹ Conley, *Rhetoric in the European Tradition*, 236. Conley is obviously dismissive of the role of rhetorical education in the nineteenth century, seeing its "irrelevance" in terms of its disconnection from civic activity. However, other critics' work challenges this reading of the nineteenth century by showing the way rhetoric serves to encourage political discussion and foster inclusion. See Lois Agnew, "The Civic Function of Taste: A Re-Assessment of Hugh Blair's Rhetorical Theory," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1998): 25–36. Sharon Crowley, *Toward a Civil Discourse: Rhetoric and Fundamentalism* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh UP, 2006). Jessica Enoch, *Refiguring Rhetorical Education: Women Teaching*

sympathy that Blair inherits from Smith became nostalgic. As the incendiary clamors in America and France in the eighteenth century grew louder and louder, these texts represent language at its most refined and least threatening. Wilbur Samuel Howell calls this a “replacement,” but it might better be described as a rehabilitation. Perhaps it was the rhetoric an intellectual culture wanted, more than the rhetoric that students needed. The next step, beyond the purview of this project, is to see the way eloquence and persuasion evolved along with and apart from the production and reception of rhetorical theory, both classical and modern. In the long eighteenth century, it is deeply connected to the presence of orators and multitudinous efforts to consign them.

Coda

This project began by showing that critics of rhetoric were actually rhetorical theorists. In my final chapter, I argued that rhetorical theorists were also critics. Through representations of orators, writers negotiate the relationship between rhetoric and reality, seeing the former as a corruptive force on the latter. That connection is not unfamiliar to any watcher of the contemporary news media that so often employs the term “rhetoric” as shorthand for empty discourse or “to reveal the way in which they are used to hide or rationalize exercises of power.”⁵⁹⁰ During the 1992 Republican Convention, Ronald Reagan told his audience, “we see all that rhetorical smoke, billowing out from the Democrats, well, ladies and gentlemen, I’d follow the example of their nominee. Don’t inhale.”⁵⁹¹ With his typical wit, Reagan connects Bill Clinton’s much-mocked statement that he had smoked but never inhaled marijuana with the deluding potential of rhetoric. Reagan draws on a vision of affective power that drives eighteenth-century critics as well, along with the new rhetoricians’ view of critical auditors, who can resist such “rhetorical smoke.” Most recently, an advertisement from a group called “Bankrupting America” used the slogan, “Stop the Rhetoric, It’s Time to Act.”⁵⁹² Though the object of their criticism is government spending, they also attack rhetoric itself. Even Barack Obama, when attacked by a Tea Party activist in a 2011 town hall meeting, used rhetoric as a metonym: “Now, in fairness, since I’ve been called a socialist who wasn’t born in this country, who is destroying America and taking away its freedoms because I passed a

⁵⁹⁰ Garsten, *Saving Persuasion*, 20.

⁵⁹¹“1992 Republican Convention,” n.d., accessed March 4, 2013.

http://reagan2020.us/speeches/RNC_Convention.asp

⁵⁹²“Stop the Rhetoric, It’s Time to Act,” January 20, 2012, video clip, accessed March 3, 2012, Youtube. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f88BqR45cDM>

health care bill, I'm all for lowering the rhetoric."⁵⁹³ Here, Obama uses the language that is so often used not only against him but also as a way of characterizing the discourse of the executive branch throughout history. His suggestion that rhetoric is something that can be modulated leaves hope for the rehabilitation of the term from the pejorative, yet he clearly speaks to a tradition of that negative usage. In the period I have surveyed, we see a similar move. Being called an orator was clearly an insult. By cauterizing and containing competing voices, by characterizing them as "orators" and then making an effort to show everything that is dangerous about that identity, by neutering orators, these writers accuse rhetoric of the most devious of motives and the most calamitous of events. It is a reduction, but for the thinkers I have described, it is an urgent one.

Kenneth Burke has written that "Rhetoric is concerned with the state of Babel after the fall."⁵⁹⁴ Following the English civil war, writers linked the cacophonous noise of rhetoric with the languages of violent dissent. Yet Burke offers the opposite possibility: that rhetoric restores rather than destroys. In Burke's *Rhetoric of Motives*, symbolic uses of language lead to an identification that overcomes even the most primary oppositions. In Burke, rhetoric bridges the hope of productive conversation through the language of consubstantiality.⁵⁹⁵ This vision seems Ciceronian in its optimism, yet it also relies on a realism that takes into account the fallibility of language. In that Babel narrative, in which voices become dispersed in a cacophony of indecipherable vocabularies, language may have led to the fall. But in Burke's optimistic vision, rhetoric can restore it.

⁵⁹³ "Barack Obama Spars with Tea Party Activist," *The Telegraph*, August 16, 2001, accessed March 4, 2013. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/barackobama/8703773/Barack-Obama-spars-with-Tea-Party-activist.html>.

⁵⁹⁴ Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 23.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 20–21.

Along the lines of Burke, I see my work as participating in Bryan Garsten's inspiring project outlined in *Saving Persuasion: A Defense of Rhetoric and Judgment*. For Garsten, "saving the possibility of persuasion in democratic politics is an argument for protecting the practice of judgment."⁵⁹⁶ Outside of politics, we can also look to the classroom. Rather than unifying and homogenizing voices into a coherent and authorized style, we can celebrate their diversity and appreciate the directions that dialogic interaction can go when unrestrained. In Mikhail Bakhtin's inspiring words, "One's own discourse and one's own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other's discourse."⁵⁹⁷ The Blairian imperatives such as perspicuity and clarity instead can be used to push these voices (and the students who use them) centrifugally toward a more polished center because of what they might do if they are not contained. The last thirty years of innovations through composition programs are built on a delight, rather than a fear, of what happens when those voices are allowed to thrive.⁵⁹⁸

The civic and social function of oratory that is sublimated through the eighteenth-century discourse of rhetorical theory can be restored. The vexed conceptions of orators led to the declining cultural capital of rhetoric and the ensuing representations of the specious and the ridiculous honey-tongued speakers. This conception was a key impulse to the shift from the ennobling power of rhetorical education in classical texts to the utilitarian and empirical logic of the new rhetoric. In the matrix that dialectic creates – between precision and creativity, between centrifugal and centripetal imperatives,

⁵⁹⁶ Garsten, *Saving Persuasion*, 9.

⁵⁹⁷ Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," 348.

⁵⁹⁸ For a captivating narrative of this development, see Robert Connors, *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh UP, 1997).

between authority and the individual, between speaker and audience – we find the tensions that spark animosity toward the orator. Yet there are also the possibilities that Cicero conveyed when he celebrated controversy and argument for the dynamic work that they can bring about, that rhetoric is and can be a force that unifies, that identifies conflicts and resolves them through productive conversation.

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