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Viva Voce: Speech and Orality in Eighteenth-Century Literature

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in English

by

Taylor Fontaine Walle

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Viva Voce: Speech and Orality in Eighteenth-Century Literature

by

Taylor Fontaine Walle

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Los Angeles, 2016

Professor Felicity A. Nussbaum, Chair

This dissertation traces an alternative history of an understudied and often-maligned eighteenth-century genre: speech. Conventional narratives of the eighteenth century have tended to emphasize the increasing dominance of print, but my project recovers an active interest and confidence in spoken language.

Despite a perception in the period that speech was transient, mutable, and vulnerable to corruption, I show that, paradoxically, eighteenth-century authors consistently turn to speech—both as a formal device and a conceptual trope—in order to legitimize their writing. Biographer and compulsive journal-writer James Boswell pursues self-knowledge through transcribed conversation; letter-writing lovers (Swift and Stella, Sterne and Eliza, Thrale Piozzi and Conway) establish intimacy through the trope of the "talking" letter; and female grammarians and lexicographers assert linguistic authority through their mastery of spoken language. These examples demonstrate that questions about the value of speech were at the crux of many pivotal

eighteenth-century debates, including where to locate the authentic self, how best to standardize the English language, and what kinds of knowledge should matter or "count." Moreover, these examples point to the role of speech in shaping four quintessential genres of the Enlightenment: the journal, the biography, the letter, and the dictionary or grammar. In looking at how spoken language influences writing, my work makes clear that the eighteenth-century debate about speech sets up a false dichotomy between these two categories; in fact, speech and writing are far more intimately connected than modern critics have allowed.

The dissertation of Taylor Fontaine Walle is approved.

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2016

To Matthew Loar, with love.

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I am especially grateful to the members of the Stanford University Classics Department's "Literate Orality and Oral Literacy Workshop," who invited me to present a paper that became the basis of my fourth chapter, "All a Dream." Many thanks, too, to Joseph Nagy, who has provided invaluable guidance on all things Ossian. In February and March 2016, I was able to expand and complete Chapter Four thanks to a fellowship at the Huntington Library, where I consulted the library's holdings in Hester Lynch Piozzi's work.

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Introduction

A Taste for Speech: The Prominence of Orality in Eighteenth-Century Britian

In *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775) Samuel Johnson writes that "diction, merely vocal, is always in its childhood."[1] Reflecting on the status of oral tradition in the Highlands, Johnson derides speech as imprecise, inchoate, and easily corruptible. This hierarchy of language—with writing reflecting the pinnacle of civilization and speech our savage origins—is evident not only in Johnson's work but also throughout much eighteenth-century writing. Anxious to appear civilized, eighteenth-century authors tend to emphasize the sophistication of Britain's literature at the expense of its oral cultures, and until recently scholars have taken them at their word. This dissertation, however, traces an alternative—and yet, I argue, equally prominent—narrative of the period: looking at a wide variety of texts, I recover an active confidence in the importance of the human voice and suggest that this faith in speech exerted considerable influence on the emerging genres of the eighteenth century.

Although the intellectual debate about speech versus writing dates back to Socrates, rapidly expanding printed material and rising literacy rates made this question newly relevant in eighteenth-century England.[2] In her landmark work, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*

[1] Samuel Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*, ed. Mary Lascelles, vol. 9 of *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 115, hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

[2] J. Paul Hunter argues that literacy was "far from universal" in eighteenth-century England, but significantly increased form the century before. He acknowledges that although assessing literacy rates in the eighteenth century is tricky, "we can now say with confidence that . . . literacy in the English-speaking world grew rapidly between 1600 and 1800 so that by the latter date a vast majority of adult males could read and write, whereas two centuries earlier only a select minority could do so." *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-*

(1979), Elizabeth Eisenstein argued that the proliferation of print in the eighteenth century made knowledge stable and history objective. Eisenstein's book ushered in a new era of criticism that focused on book history, the materiality of the book, and the circulation of printed materials. In recent years, however, scholars have begun to push back against the hegemony of print in our study of the eighteenth century, and this dissertation participates in that effort. Although I agree with the key insights of Eisenstein's work, I aim to show that other epistemologies were active in the eighteenth century as well, and especially that speech and orality were key to eighteenth-century notions of knowledge and understanding.

The shape of the debate in eighteenth-century England

Anxiety would later coalesce around the dangers of orality, but early eighteenth-century writers (especially the Scriblerians) initially fretted about the explosion of print and the possibility that it would degrade the quality of British writing and thought. The beginning of the eighteenth century witnessed a swift expansion of printing houses in England: the lapse of the Licensing Act in 1695 led to a relaxation in government oversight of the presses, and the number of printing houses in London grew from twenty-four to at least sixty-five. In *The Dunciad* (1728) Pope lampoons the Grub Street press as a rapidly accumulating pile of meaningless drivel, over which the Goddess "Dulness" presides.[3] Swift similarly satirizes the new glut of printed material

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Century English Fiction (New York: Norton, 1990), 65. Paula McDowell examines how this increase in print and rise in literacy affected women in particular, as well as women's contributions to this new print culture, in *The Women of Grub Street: Press, Politics, and Gender in the London Literary Marketplace, 1678–1730* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

[3] "Here she beholds the Chaos dark and deep, / Where nameless somethings in their causes sleep, / 'Till genial Jacob, or a warm Third-day / Call forth each mass, a poem or a play. / How Hints, like spawn, scarce quick in embryo lie, / How new-born Nonsense first is taught to cry, / Maggots half-form'd, in rhyme exactly meet, / And learn to crawl upon poetic feet. Here ductile dulness new meanders takes; / There motley Images her fancy strike, / Figures ill-pair'd, and Similes unlike." Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad*, ed. James Sutherland, vol. V of *The Poems of Alexander Pope* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), 66–67.

in *The Battle of the Books* (1697) and *The Tale of a Tub* (1704), worrying that this "new species" of books will corrupt, pollute, and "poison" the public discourse.[4] Paula McDowell has considered the anxiety about Grub Street as a response to the emerging category of "ephemera" in the eighteenth century and what she sees as a desire to designate some kinds of writing as less permanent and, thus, less valuable than others.[5] This concern about ephemera also extends to speech, as I will discuss in my chapter on the Ossian controversy. Like the Grub Street press, Macpherson's oral tradition is considered unreliable precisely because of its impermanence, and the century witnesses an increasing bias in favor of writing as the best way of knowing. My chapter on Ossian, however, recovers an active and ongoing attention to oral tradition that I argue has gotten short shrift in narratives of the period.

In the last decade, McDowell and others have begun to consider how orality inflected this burgeoning print culture, and its influence on the Grub Street press and women authors in particular. Catherine Ingrassia, for instance, examines the way that "oral vernacular culture" not only shapes Eliza Haywood as an author but is explicitly thematized in her work.[6] Patricia Howell Michaelson pushes back against the association of print culture with "silent, solitary reading," looking instead at how oral reading practices—especially among women—influenced

[4] "When these books were first admitted into the public libraries, I remember to have said upon occasion to several persons concerned, how I was sure they would create boils wherever they came, unless a world of care were taken; and therefore I advised that the champions of each side should be coupled together or otherwise mixed, that, like the blending of contrary poisons, their malignity might be employed among themselves," Jonathan Swift, "The Battle of the Books," in *Jonathan Swift: Major Works*, ed. Angus Ross and David Woolley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5.

[5] Paula McDowell, "Of Grubs and Other Insects: Constructing the Categories of 'Ephemera' and 'Literature' in Eighteenth-Century British Writing," *Book History* 15 (2012): 48–70.

[6] Catherine Ingrassia, "Eliza Haywood, Periodicals, and the Function of Orality," *Fair Philosopher: Eliza Haywood and* The Female Spectator, ed. Lynn Marie Wright and Donald J. Newman (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2006).

eighteenth-century engagement with the book.[7] Similarly, McDowell urges us to revise our assumptions about the value of literacy in the early eighteenth century, arguing that an explosion of printed material did not necessarily correspond to a similar spike in the cultural capital of literacy.[8] Each in their own way, Ingrassia, McDowell, and Michaelson all participate in the growing effort to add nuance to our understanding of print culture in the eighteenth century: resisting the notion that the book was all, these critics expose the complex intersections of orality and literacy in eighteenth-century Britain and the sometimes messy ways that an older, primarily oral culture collided with the increased availability of print. My work contributes to this critical vein, but shifts the focus to the second half of the eighteenth century, where I argue that speech exerted notable influence over the evolution of key eighteenth-century genres, including the dictionary and grammar, biography, autobiography, and the letter.

In addition to the growing prominence of print, eighteenth-century attitudes toward language were also strongly influenced by England's 1707 union with Scotland. These expanded national boundaries—coupled with a desire to compete with France's *Académie française*—inaugurated an effort to standardize Britain's language and prompted a discussion of *which* English should serve as the model for "standard" English. This debate is played out in the pages of the many dictionaries and grammars that were published during this time; and, as many critics have shown, the effort to designate a standard English becomes a battle over who occupies the center of British life and who the margins.[9] John Barrell has argued that in the attempt to unify

[7] Patricia Howell Michaelson, *Speaking Volumes: Women, Reading, and Speech in the Age of Austen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.

[8] Paula McDowell, "Why Fanny Can't Read: *Joseph Andrews* and the (Ir)relevance of Literacy," *A Companion to the Eighteenth-Century English Novel and Culture*, ed. Paula Backscheider and Catherine Ingrassia (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

[9] See Tony Crowley, *The Politics of Discourse: The Standard Language Question in British Cultural Debates* (London: Macmillan, 1989); Saree Makdisi, *Making England Western: Occidentalism, Race, and Imperial*

the nation, eighteenth-century dictionaries often glossed over or even erased subcultures and dialects: "We could see it as a democratic and genuinely egalitarian aspiration . . . or we can see it as an attempt to reduce, to subjugate, varieties of provincial English, and the modes of expression of different social classes, to the norms of that elite."[10] The significant work on the standardization of English in the eighteenth century identifies spoken language as one of the primary targets of linguistic regulation: lexicographers like Johnson, for instance, tended to view common speech as a site of barbarity, in need of reform. My project, however, revisits the debate that rages in the prefaces of these lexical works, and, looking particularly at the way that gender inflects the contest between speech and writing, I argue that existing scholarship on the standardization of English fails to account for a rival tradition that locates its authority in spoken English rather than written.

Speech, as my project attempts to show, was everywhere in the eighteenth-century cultural imagination, and the vogue for standardization gave rise to yet another iteration of orality in the period: the elocution movement. Led by Anglo-Irishman Thomas Sheridan, the elocution movement should be seen as the companion of the eighteenth century's many dictionaries: much as dictionaries attempted to regulate the language by designating a national lexicon, Sheridan sought to tame the linguistic wilds by establishing a "standard" English pronunciation. Sheridan's project has much in common with Johnson's *Dictionary*; Sheridan not only relies on Johnson's *Dictionary* for spellings and definitions, he also shares a desire to "civilize" the English language:

Culture (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Lynda Mugglestone, *'Talking Proper': The Rise of Accent as Social Symbol* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Olivia Smith, *The Politics of Language, 1791–1819* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); Janet Sorensen, *The Grammar of Empire in Eighteenth-Century British Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[10] John Barrell, *English Literature in History, 1730–80: An Equal, Wide Survey* (London: Hutchinson, 1983), 112.

> Whilst the ingenious natives of other countries in Europe, particularly the Italians, French, and Spaniards, in proportion to their progress in civilization and politeness, have for more than a century been employed, with the utmost industry, in cultivating and regulating their speech; we still remain in the state of all barbarous countries in that respect, having left our's wholly to chance.[11]

In Sheridan's view, much as in Johnson's, the standardization of pronunciation is closely aligned with "civilization and politeness," while unregulated speech is associated with the "barbarous."[12] Putting the question of standardization aside, however, Sheridan's interest in elocution—continued by John Thelwall in the Romantic period—brings speech to the fore of British national discourse in the second half of the eighteenth century.[13]

The prominence of orality in the period is also visible in the evangelical sermon, which capitalized on the association of speech with the natural and the authentic. The eighteenth century witnessed a shift in the way that sermons were both imagined and delivered: James Downey has written that "the carefully prepared manuscript (the Tillotsonian ideal) and statuesque delivery gave way to a mode of address more extemporaneous and gesticulatory. Sermons were frequently preached first and written out later."[14] Preachers like Whitefield and Wesley, then, participate in the inversion of written authority: although working within the highly text-based Protestant tradition, many evangelical preachers preferred to locate the basis of

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[11] Thomas Sheridan, *A General Dictionary of the English Language* (London, 1780), 3.

[12] For more on the similarity between Sheridan and Johnson, see Adam R. Beach, "The Creation of a Classical Language in the Eighteenth Century: Standardizing English, Cultural Imperialism, and the Future of the Literary Canon," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 43 (Summer 2001): 117–41.

[13] John Thelwall, *Selected Political Writings of John Thelwall, Volume 4: Late Journalism and Writing on Elocution and Oratory, 1810–1832*, ed. Robert Lamb and Corinna Wagner (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009).

[14] James Downey, *The Eighteenth Century Pulpit: A study of the Sermons of Butler, Berkeley, Secker, Sterne, Whitefield and Wesley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 20.

the published words in speech. Wesley produced a pamphlet entitled *Directions Concerning Pronunciation and Gesture* (1749) in which he identifies "common conversation" as the standard for effective oratory:

> To avoid all Kind of unnatural Tones, the only Rule is this, Endeavour to speak in Publick just as you do in Common Conversation. Attend to your Subject, and deliver it in the same Manner, as if you were talking of it to a Friend. This, if carefully observ'd, will correct both this and almost all the other Faults of a bad Pronunciation.[15]

Moreover, unlike the lexicographers and elocutionists who identified the speech (or writing) of learned gentlemen as the model for standard English, Wesley believed in using the language of the common people:

> We [clergymen] think with the wise, yet must speak with the vulgar. We should constantly use the most common, little, easy words (so they are pure and proper) which our language affords. When I had been a member of the University about ten years, I wrote and talked much as you do now. But when I talked to plain people in the Castle or the town, I observed they gaped and stared. This quickly obliged me to alter my style and adopt the language of those I spoke to. And yet there is a dignity in this simplicity, which is not disagreeable to those of the highest rank.[16]

Here Wesley juxtaposes the "common" words of the vulgar with the language of the "University," privileging the "simplicity" of the "plain people" and thereby aligning himself with figures like Francis Grose—author of the *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (1785)—

[15] John Wesley, *Directions Concerning Pronunciation and Gesture* (London, 1749), 4. *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley* notes that "this [pamphlet] was an abridgment of a work by Michel Le Faucher [1585–1657]," (105).

[16] From a letter to Samuel Furly, July 15, 1764. *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, vol. 4*, ed. John Telford (London: The Epworth Press, 1931).

who reject the idea that language is authorized only by the learned. As such, Wesley's tradition of oratory challenges and in some ways opposes Johnsonian standardization of the English language.

Oratory was even more influential in the nascent United States, where—as Jay Fliegelman, Sandra Gustafson, Chris Looby, and others have shown—public speech was closely connected to an emerging concept of American national character.[17] Drawing on the work of elocutionists like Sheridan—whose ideas, Fliegelman has argued, were especially important for Thomas Jefferson—early Americans engaged in a oratorical paradox: much like the evangelical preachers of Britain, public speakers in America performed authenticity in order to gain credibility and authority. Indeed, the similarities between British evangelicals like Wesley and Whitefield and American orators may not be coincidental: Whitefield embarked on an American preaching tour in 1744 that would last until 1748, and Wesley paid close attention to the American bid for independence, sending a flock of preachers to the colonies and working to secure the place of Methodism in America.

In its current form, my project affirms this connection between speech and authenticity, but a discussion of elocution and rhetoric would call those assumptions into question. On the surface, oratory would seem to uphold a binary between "authentic" and "inauthentic": unrehearsed, extemporaneous oratory seems natural, whereas scripted speeches do not. As Sandra Gustafson has pointed out, however, this binary breaks down around what she calls the

[17] Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language & the Culture of Performance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); Sandra Gustafson, *Eloquence is Power: Oratory & Performance in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Christopher Looby, *Voicing America: Language, Literary Form, and the Origins of the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). See also Jane Kamensky, *Governing the Tongue: The Politics of Speech in Early New England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

"spectacle of sincerity": speeches that are rehearsed in order to appear extemporaneous.[18] This phenomenon—practiced naturalness—reflects shifting notions of authority in the period: whereas reading would have previously engendered trust, the eighteenth century witnesses a rising faith in the authority of the extemporaneous. As it stands, my dissertation hews to the affiliation between speech and the natural, the intimate, and the authentic; an expanded version of this project, however, would allow me to consider the role of performance in eighteenth-century notions of speech.

The association between orality and the natural is especially prominent in discussions of the origin and evolution of civilization. Stadial theory posited that society became more sophisticated with the introduction of writing—a notion that twentieth-century theorists like Walter Ong have since vindicated—and thinkers as diverse as Samuel Johnson, Lord Monboddo, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau subscribe to the idea that oral societies are simpler and more "primitive." Yet the century also witnessed new ways of thinking about oral cultures that troubled the easy dichotomy between civilized and savage, most notably the suggestion (radical at the time) that Homer—the idol of English neoclassicism—was an illiterate bard. This idea was tentatively introduced by Thomas Blackwell in 1735 and was taken up more forcefully by Robert Wood in 1775; both Blackwell and Wood turned the notion of primitive speech on its head by proposing that oral cultures could, despite their lack of writing, produce sophisticated and aesthetically pleasing poetry. This question about the value of oral tradition came sharply into focus in the 1760s with the publication of James Macpherson's Ossian poems. Among the many objections to the poetry, critics argued that an illiterate culture simply could not produce literature of such complexity, while champions of Ossian (most notably, Hugh Blair) attempted to reimagine the poetic possibilities of a "rude" and "barbarous" society.

[18] Gustafson, xxi.

The renewed interest in oral tradition goes hand-in-hand with another prominent strain in eighteenth-century literature: antiquarianism. The antiquarian movement is not exclusively focused on speech and orality—indeed, some of the most influential antiquarian works, such as Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765), are explicitly text-based, derived from found manuscripts. Nonetheless, the antiquarian interest in the old and the forgotten shifts the focus away from the civilized center of Enlightenment Britain and toward the often less-literate margins. In other words, the documentation of oral tradition and oral cultures is often a (welcome) consequence of antiquarianism, and spoken language surfaces in many and various antiquarian projects. Francis Grose's *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (1785) collects the vernacular of the criminal underworld and the laboring classes; James Boswell's recently rediscovered Scottish dictionary (written 1764–1765) records everyday Scots and colloquial phrases; and the much-studied eighteenth-century ballad collections memorialize popular song in what Maureen McLane has called "a multiply mediated feedback loop."[19]

The shape of the debate in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries

By far the most influential theorist of orality is Walter Ong, who argues that the introduction of writing fundamentally restructures human engagement with language.[20] In the twentieth century, this school of thought originated with Milman Parry and Albert Lord, classicists who argued that Homeric poetry was a product of the unique qualities of oral

[19] Maureen McLane, *Balladeering, Minstrelsy, and the Making of British Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 77. See also Patricia Fumerton, Anita Guerrini, Kris McAbee, eds., *Ballads and Broadsides in Britain, 1500–1800* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); Nick Groom, "'The Purest English': Ballads and the English Literary Dialect," *The Eighteenth Century* 47 (Summer/Fall 2006): 179–202; McDowell, "'The Manufacture and Lingua-facture of Ballad-Making': Broadside Ballads in Long Eighteenth-Century Ballad Discourse," *The Eighteenth Century* 47 (Summer/Fall 2006): 151–78.

[20] Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982); "Reading, Technology, and the Nature of Man," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 10 (1980): 132–49.

composition.[21] In this tradition, "orality" is a preliterate linguistic structure, relying heavily on formulae and rhetoric, and composed of mnemonic devices that allow speakers to retain large quantities of information without needing to write it down. By contrast, writing transfers the repository of knowledge from the mind to the page, "free[ing] the mind for more original, more abstract thought."[22] Parry and Lord, followed by Eric Havelock and Walter Ong,[23] establish a sharp dichotomy between preliterate and literate societies and argue that the oral mode, once lost, is lost forever.

Critics have recently begun pushing back against this dichotomy, and the eighteenth century offers a particularly interesting study in the coexistence of orality and literacy. Ong himself admits that the eighteenth century is the last moment of flux between these competing structures, since a culture of literacy and writing had consolidated by the beginning of the nineteenth century.[24] Paula McDowell's work has been especially important for the way it challenges an Ong-ian view of orality and literacy; rather that taking this distinction for granted, McDowell investigates the origins of Ong's binary, arguing that the "antagonism" between orality and literacy is a construct that emerges from the eighteenth century itself.[25] Her work pays particular attention to texts in which this antagonism is explicitly thematized—Swift's

[21] Albert Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960); Milman Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

[22] Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 24.

[23] Eric A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963).

[24] Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 26.

[25] An important precursor for McDowell is Nicholas Hudson, who has written an intellectual history of orality and oral tradition in the eighteenth century. Nicholas Hudson, "Constructing Oral Tradition: The Origins of the Concept in Enlightenment Intellectual Culture," *The Spoken Word: Oral Culture in Britain, 1500–1850*, eds. Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002); "'Oral Tradition': The Evolution of an Eighteenth-Century Concept," *Tradition in Transition: Women Writers, Marginal Texts, and the Eighteenth-Century Canon*, ed. Alvaro Ribeiro and James G. Basker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); *Writers and European Thought, 1600–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

Battle of the Books, for instance—which she mobilizes in the service of an argument about the "dialectical" relationship between orality and print.[26]

Although hugely influential, McDowell's work is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to studies of eighteenth-century orality. In the last five years alone this topic has garnered increasing interest from many and various scholars. One of the most important works published on this topic is Jon Mee's *Conversable Worlds* (2011), which compels us to rethink the commonplace association of writing and civility, persuasively arguing that speech becomes an equally important marker of civilization toward the beginning of the nineteenth century.[27] More recently, Julie Henigan published *Literacy and Orality in Eighteenth-Century Irish Song* (2012)[28]; Emily Anderson is working on the popularity of Sarah Siddons' public readings (not performances)[29]; Jared Richman is looking at the notion of "compulsory fluency" and the problems that vocal disorders pose for inclusion in eighteenth-century society[30]; and Janet Sorensen is publishing a book on the marginal vernacular cultures of eighteenth-century England.[31]

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[26] McDowell, "Defoe and the Contagion of the Oral: Modeling Media Shift in *A Journal of the Plague Year,*" *PMLA* 121 (January 2006): 87–106; *The Invention of the Oral: Print Commerce and Fugitive Voices in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming); "Mediating Media Past and Present: Toward a Genealogy of 'Print Culture' and 'Oral Tradition,'" *This is Enlightenment*, ed. Clifford Siskin and William Warner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 229–46.

[27] Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community, 1762 to 1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[28] Julie Henigan, *Literacy and Orality in Eighteenth-Century Irish Song* (London: Routledge, 2012).

[29] Emily Anderson, "The 'Medium' of Staged Readings: Sarah Siddons Offstage" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association, 2016).

[30] Jared Richman, "The Other King's Speech: Elocution and the Politics of Disability in Georgian Britain" (paper presented at the Southern California Eighteenth-Century Group, March 2016).

[31] Janet Sorensen, *Strange Vernaculars: Cant, Slang, Dialect, and Mariners' Argot in Eighteenth-Century Writing* (under contract at Princeton University Press); see also Daniel Dewispelare, *Textual Shibboleths: Anglophony, Authority, Authenticity, 1753–1832* (manuscript); Dewispelare, *Criminal Sounds: Form, Genre, and Romantic Era Dialect Dialogues* (manuscript).

Many of these works also fall within the emerging interest in "mediation" (the way that knowledge is conveyed): Anderson's paper was presented as part of an MLA panel entitled "The Intermedial Eighteenth Century: Stage to Page, Print to Manuscript, Writing to Speech, and Back," and one of McDowell's articles appeared in Clifford Siskin and William Warner's collection, *This is Enlightenment* (2010), which considers the history of mediation. The study of mediation allows scholars to see the eighteenth-century debate about print culture and twenty-first century debates about digital devices as part of a continuum: all of these debates ask the questions, "what is the best way to receive and communicate information?" and "what is at stake in a shift in the way that we communicate?" Recently, these questions have been asked with some urgency by psychologists like Sherry Turkle and Maryanne Wolf, who both suggest—with Swiftian concern—that our twenty-first-century reliance on digital devices is fundamentally changing the way that we learn, communicate, and relate to one another.[32]

Chapter summaries

Building of on the work of McDowell and others, my project participates in the recovery of the oral in eighteenth-century Britain. Despite a perception in the period that speech was transient, mutable, and vulnerable to corruption, I show that, paradoxically, eighteenth-century authors consistently turn to speech—both as a formal device and a conceptual trope—in order to legitimize their writing. Biographer and compulsive journal-writer James Boswell pursues self-knowledge through transcribed conversation; letter-writing lovers (Swift and Stella, Sterne and Eliza, Thrale Piozzi and Conway) establish intimacy through the trope of the "talking" letter; and

[32] Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011); *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin, 2015); Maryanne Wolf, *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain* (New York: Harper, 2007); *What It Means to Read: A Literary Agenda for the Digital Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

female grammarians and lexicographers assert linguistic authority through their mastery of spoken language. These examples demonstrate that questions about the value of speech were at the crux of many pivotal eighteenth-century debates, including where to locate the authentic self, how best to standardize the English language, and what kinds of knowledge should matter or "count." Moreover, these examples point to the role of speech in shaping four quintessential genres of the Enlightenment: the journal, the biography, the letter, and the dictionary or grammar. McDowell's work has done much to show that orality was still a vibrant and important influence in the eighteenth century; but while McDowell focuses largely on the first half of the eighteenth century, I work primarily in the second half. Similarly, Mee has shown that conversation was absolutely central to late eighteenth-century society; but while Mee argues that conversation announces a new pinnacle of civilization, I am more interested in the way that the *uncivilized* aspects of speech—its impermanence, its mutability, and its affiliation with the lower classes—are mined as sources of authority by writers in the period.

My first chapter examines the role that dictionaries and grammars played in establishing this hierarchy of language. Eighteenth-century Britain had an unrivaled enthusiasm for lexicography, and the merits of speech are often vigorously debated in the prefaces to these works. Looking back to select sixteenth- and seventeenth-century dictionaries, I provide a brief history of English lexicography, highlighting the problems that speech presents as the basis for a standard language. Many eighteenth-century dictionaries opt to consult writing because of its relative permanence (in comparison to speech's transience), but I trace a counter tradition of dictionaries that privilege speech and familiar conversation in their codification of English. I am especially interested in the leading role of women in this counter tradition: continually (and dismissively) aligned with spoken language, female linguists and educators turn this

subordination on its head and claim their affiliation with speech as a source of authority. The final section of the chapter is devoted to these female-authored texts, looking at the role of the vernacular, conversation, and conversational pedagogy in the work of Hester Thrale Piozzi, Mary Wollstonecraft, and several influential female grammarians.

While my first chapter is suggestive of how speech informed British national identity, my second chapter considers how speech shaped individual identity, especially for biographer and journal-writer James Boswell. For Boswell, I argue, in-person conversation was a key feature of self-knowledge. In his youthful journals in particular, he tends to seek such knowledge through conversations that closely resemble Catholic auricular confession. Beginning with Boswell's arrival in London in 1762 and ending with his marriage to Margaret Montgomerie in 1769, this chapter considers the importance of conversation to Boswell's autobiographical practice, looking at the recurrence of confessional language in several key relationships including Rousseau, Voltaire, Johnson, Belle de Zuylen, and Margaret Montgomerie. Noting the persistent outward turn of Boswell's journals and letters, this chapter posits that Boswell's autobiographical writing constitutes an alternative to the heavily introspective tradition of Protestant life writing. Drawing on the language of Catholic confession, Boswell's journals make visible the importance of conversation and collaboration in the discovery and production of the self.

My third chapter continues this investigation of conversational exchange, but instead of self-knowledge, I focus on the importance of conversation in establishing intimacy between two people. Shifting genres, this chapter looks at love letters—the most intimate form of a intimate genre—and, in particular, the recurrent trope of the "talking" letter. Eighteenth-century letter writers not only seek recourse in the metaphor of letter-as-speech, but often attempt a style that replicates in-person conversation. In an effort to examine epistolary constructions of intimacy, I

look at three sets of eighteenth-century "love letters": Jonathan Swift's *Journal to Stella* (1784), Laurence Sterne's *Journal to Eliza* (written 1767), and Hester Thrale Piozzi's letters to William Augustus Conway (written 1819–21). These letters have much in common: they are all strongly one-sided, with one correspondent writing far more frequently than the other; they all feature one older (and fonder) writer and one younger (and more aloof); and they are all difficult to categorize, since none of these correspondents were ever romantically involved (at least not publicly). As a result, these letters allow us to consider the strategies that far-flung friends use in order to approximate in-person discourse: Swift's letters are especially notable for both their reliance on speech as a trope and their attempts to imitate spoken language, while Piozzi's letters demonstrate an increased comfort with the letter as a physical token of intimacy, privileging touch and proximity to the body over voice.

Finally, my fourth chapter examines the precarious status of oral history in the eighteenth century, using the controversy over James Macpherson's Ossian poems as a focal point. In the 1760s, Macpherson published three books of poetry that he claimed were transcriptions of an ancient Highland oral tradition. These poems were and are the subject of much dispute, with both eighteenth-century and modern critics expressing skepticism about their credibility. Boswell and Johnson famously dismissed Macpherson's poetry on the basis of its origin in oral tradition rather than manuscript. Featuring conversations transcribed largely from memory, however, Boswell's *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (1785) instantiates the very same epistemological problem that he and Johnson debate within the pages of that journal: namely, can memory be trusted to preserve speech with accuracy? In this chapter I argue that Boswell's writing should itself be seen as a kind of oral tradition, and that his journals have more in common with Macpherson's poetry than he was willing to admit. Moreover, I suggest that despite the

vociferous resistance of Macpherson's critics, oral history remained a legitimate epistemological mode throughout the eighteenth century, as evidenced not only by the Ossian debate but also by the work of Boswell and his fellow journalizers.

Taken together, these chapters suggest that spoken language—whether colloquial speech, conversational exchange, "talking" letters, or oral history—exerted a powerful influence on the formation of several key eighteenth-century genres. Moreover, speech was at the center of a wide variety of eighteenth-century debates, including how best to standardize the English language, what constitutes "history," and where to locate the authentic or intimate self. Perhaps most importantly, even as Britain's literacy was widely touted, the wildness and immediacy of spoken language continued to capture the eighteenth-century imagination.

Chapter One

Unlicensed Authority: A Rival Tradition of English Grammar and Lexicography

In 1794 Hester Lynch Piozzi (1741–1821) published an unusual—and in English, unprecedented—book entitled *British Synonymy*.[1] This two-volume lexicon aims to "Regulate the Choice of Words in Familiar Conversation," grouping words of similar meaning and distinguishing between them according to context or situation.[2] For example, under "Abasement, Depression, Dereliction, Being Brought Low, &c." Piozzi writes, "I once knew a man incapable of depression though his abasement was notorious."[3] Piozzi designed her book for non-native English speakers—particularly her Italian husband, Gabriel Piozzi—who wished to learn the art of "common conversation." One among many dictionaries, grammars, and lexicons published after 1750, *British Synonymy* participates in the linguistic prescriptivism that gained traction in Britain during the second half of the eighteenth century,[4] but it stands out in this prescriptive tradition for its rejection of the largely text-based ethos espoused by Samuel Johnson and others.

[1] Synonymies are "dictionaries of synonym discriminations," and although their history dates back to the ancients, and they became quite popular in the nineteenth century, there are only two synonymies published in England during the eighteenth century: Piozzi's *British Synonymy* and John Trusler's *Difference between Words Esteemed Synonymous in the English Language* (1766). Trusler's book is little more than a translation of Abbé Girard's *La Justesse de la Langue Françoise* (1718); thus, Piozzi's synonymy is the first original work of its kind published in England.

[2] This chapter emerged from my time at the Chawton House Library in November 2014, and I would like to thank Chawton for the opportunity to consult their collection.

[3] Hester Lynch Piozzi, *British Synonymy*, vol. 1 (London, 1794), facsimile edition, ed. R. C. Alston (Menston, UK: Scolar Press, 1968), 4.

[4] Joan C. Beal, *English in Modern Times, 1700–1945* (London: Arnold, 2004); Lawrence Klein, "'Politeness' as linguistic ideology in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century England," in *Towards a Standard English, 1600–1800*, ed. Dieter Stein and Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994); Carol Percy, "How eighteenth-century book reviewers became language guardians," in *Social Roles and Language Practices in Late Modern English*, ed. Päivi Pahta, Minna Nevala, Arja Nurmi, and Minna Palader-Collin (Amsterdam: John Benjamin Publishing Company, 2010).

Indeed, rather than citing literary writing as the standard for speech, Piozzi points to conversation as the most accurate and expedient source of meaning: "Conversing," she writes, "does certainly better shew the peculiar appropriation, than books, however learned; for whilst through them by study all due information may certainly be obtained, familiar talk tells us in half an hour."[5]

Piozzi's preference for domestic spoken language, "familiar conversation," will undoubtedly remind some readers of the conversational paradigm that informs William Wordsworth's and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's early work, and specifically of their commitment, as expressed in the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* (1802), to reject "poetic diction" in favor of the "language really used by men."[6] As a result of this famous philosophical embrace of the vernacular, as well as their formal experiments with the "conversation poem," Wordsworth and Coleridge are often credited with popularizing the use of familiar conversation in a literary context, and thus the shift toward the vernacular has long been aligned with the Romantic period. Recent studies in the history of conversation have added much-needed context to these assumptions, tracing the origins of the conversation poem to eighteenth-century poet William Cowper (1731–1800) and presenting the Romantic interest in conversation as a product of eighteenth-century sociability.[7] Like Wordsworth and Coleridge, late eighteenth-century writers and thinkers display a marked preference for the "familiar": although skilled conversation was lauded as the hallmark of Britain's progress and sophistication, highly structured, ornate

[5] Piozzi, *British Synonymy*, 1–2.

[6] William Wordsworth, *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, vol. 1, ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 123.

[7] Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community 1762–1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). For more on eighteenth-century sociability, see Lawrence Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral discourse and cultural politics in early eighteenth-century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

language (often termed "rhetoric") was increasingly reviled as the century progressed.[8] Even this expanded history of familiar conversation, however, omits the significant contributions of eighteenth-century grammarians and pedagogues—especially *female* grammarians and pedagogues—to both the rise of the vernacular and the preference for familiar, conversational speech.

In an attempt to account for the popularity of familiar conversation at the beginning of the nineteenth century, this chapter takes stock of the way that speech informs the standardization of English, especially in eighteenth-century dictionaries and grammars. Looking back to select sixteenth- and seventeenth-century dictionaries, I provide a brief history of English lexicography, highlighting the problems that speech (in its "boundless variety"[9]) presents as the basis for a standard language. Despite recognizing speech's importance, many of these dictionaries opt to consult writing because of its relative permanence (in comparison to speech's mutability); certain linguistic subgenres, however, diverge from this written precedent, looking to speech rather than text. In the second section of the chapter I consider three of these subgenres—pronouncing dictionaries, cant dictionaries, and American dictionaries—and the claims that each makes for the greater inclusivity of speech as a benchmark for standard language. This chapter is especially attentive to the ways that speech is aligned with women throughout the history of lexicography, first in a way that underscores their marginality, and

[8] See, for instance, Hazlitt's tirade against orators in "On the Difference Between Writing and Speaking," *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, vol. 8, ed. Duncan Wu (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), 245–60. He writes: "The most dashing orator I ever heard is the flattest writer I ever read. In speaking, he was like a volcano vomiting out lava, in writing, he is like a volcano burnt out. Nothing but the dry cinders, the hard shell remains. The tongues of flame, with which, in haranguing a mixed assembly, he used to illuminate his subject, and almost scorched up the panting air, do not appear painted on the margin of his works. He was the model of a flashy, powerful demagogue— a madman blest with a fit audience," 247.

[9] Samuel Johnson, Preface to *A Dictionary of the English Language*, in *Johnson on the English Language*, ed. Gwin J. Kolb and Robert DeMaria, Jr., vol. 18 of *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 74, hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

then, in female-authored texts, in a manner that secures linguistic authority. The final section of the chapter is devoted to these female-authored texts, looking at the role of the vernacular, conversation, and conversational pedagogy in the work of three influential female grammarians.

Samuel Johnson's legacy

The debate about whose language—the English, the Scottish, Londoners, the common citizen, or literary greats—should define standard English raged throughout the eighteenth century, beginning with Daniel Defoe's and Jonathan Swift's petitions for an English equivalent of the French *Académie française* and continuing through the publication of the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*.[10] Defoe, Swift, and, later, Johnson, framed their appeals for standardization in strongly nationalistic terms, arguing that Britain's reputation depended on bringing English out of the wilds of linguistic diversity.[11] No English academy of language was ever created, but lexicographers began grappling with Britain's linguistic problem, and dictionaries proliferated during the eighteenth century.[12] These lexicographers experimented with different standards on which to found the language, some looking to the "best kind of speech,"[13] some to "Writers of a clear Judgment and good Style,"[14] and still others to "the general tendency of the language."[15]

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[10] Jonathan Swift, *Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue* (1712).

[11] John Barrell, "The language properly so-called: the authority of common usage," in *English Literature in History, 1730–80: An Equal, Wide Survey* (London: Hutchinson, 1983); Beal, *English in Modern Times*.

[12] Lynda Mugglestone, "Dictionaries," *Samuel Johnson in Context*, ed. Jack Lynch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[13] *The First English Dictionary, 1604: Robert Cawdrey's A Table Alphabetical*, introduction by John Simpson (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2007), 42.

[14] John Kersey, *A New English Dictionary* (London, 1702), facsimile edition, ed. R. C. Alston (Menston, UK: Scolar Press, 1969), no page.

[15] John Walker, *A Critical Pronouncing Dictionary* (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1791), vii, *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=uclosangeles&tabID=T001&docId=CW3313066584&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE.

For his part, Britain's leading lexicographer, Samuel Johnson, responded to concerns about regional differences in pronunciation and vocabulary by asserting the authority of literary writing, which he called "the wells of English undefiled" (Preface to the *Dictionary*, 95).[16] Indeed, in his *Plan of a Dictionary* (1747), he contests the idea that "men should write as they speak," arguing that "it may be asked with equal propriety, why men do not rather speak as they write."[17]

This preference for the written over the oral informs most of Johnson's writings about language.[18] In his Preface to the *Dictionary*, Johnson declares the need for an "established principle of selection" that would allow lexicographers and laymen alike to navigate the as-yet-unregulated English language:

> When I took the first survey of my undertaking, I found our speech copious without order, and energetick without rules: wherever I turned my view, there was perplexity to be disentangled, and confusion to be regulated; choice was to be made out of boundless variety, without any established principle of selection; adulterations were to be detected, without a settled test of purity; and modes of expression to be rejected or received, without the suffrages of any writers of classical reputation or acknowledged authority. (Preface to the *Dictionary*, 74)

Attempting to rectify this oversight, Johnson delineates his own principles of selection, and in so doing he situates himself within the emerging debate about the authority of speech. In an effort to regulate the "boundless variety" of speech, the Preface favors written precedents, announcing

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[16] Johnson borrows this language from Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. See Kolb and DeMaria, *Johnson on the English Language*, 95n1.

[17] Kolb and DeMaria, *Johnson on the English Language*, 35. See also Nicholas Hudson, *Writing and European Thought, 1600–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 99.

[18] Johnsonian scholars agree: Kolb and DeMaria write, "throughout his philological work, Johnson displays a belief in the superiority of the written to the spoken word," *Johnson on the English Language*, xli.

Johnson's intention to found his *Dictionary* on "writers of classical reputation or acknowledged authority."[19] In his own conversation, however, Johnson occasionally makes remarks that valorize speech, contradicting his views in the Preface. Discussing Sheridan's pronouncing dictionary, for instance, Johnson remarks: "Consider how much easier it is to learn a language by ear, than by any marks. Sheridan's Dictionary may do very well; but you cannot always carry it with you: and, when you want the word, you have not the Dictionary" (*Life*, II, 161). Similarly, although the Preface advocates standardization, Johnson also made arguments in favor of linguistic variety: "A small intermixture of provincial peculiarities may, perhaps, have an agreeable effect, as the notes of different birds concur in the harmony of the grove, and please more than if they were all exactly alike" (*Life*, II, 160). Even still, the Preface's emphasis on written language has largely defined Johnson's linguistic legacy, especially in the way that subsequent lexicographers and grammarians respond to him (as we will see).

In addition to specifying the kind of language he prefers, Johnson also identifies the types of language he will exclude. For example,

> Of the laborious and mercantile part of the people, the diction is in a great measure casual and mutable; many of their terms are formed for some temporary or local convenience, and though current at certain times and places, are in others utterly unknown. This fugitive cant, which is always in a state of increase or decay, cannot be regarded as any part of the durable material of a language, and therefore must be suffered to perish with other things unworthy of preservation. (Preface to the *Dictionary*, 103)

[19] For more on the composition of the *Dictionary*, see James L. Clifford, *Dictionary Johnson: Samuel Johnson's Middle Years* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979); Jack Lynch and Anne McDermott, eds., *Anniversary Essays on Johnson's Dictionary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and Allen Reddick, *The Making of Johnson's Dictionary, 1746–1773* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Here, Johnson addresses mercantile speech, calling it "a fugitive cant" that is "unworthy of preservation" and unfit for inclusion in his dictionary. Even though Johnson defers to common usage in his account of the language—diverging from previous lexicographers by attempting to merely "register" rather than reform—he still draws a clear distinction between legitimate and illegitimate versions of English. This quotation exemplifies Johnson's concern about the impermanence of speech: "always in a state of increase of decay," spoken language is both too numerous in its variety and too "mutable" to serve as reliable standard.

Perhaps because Johnson's goals for the *Dictionary* so closely align with modern views of the purpose of lexicography, Johnson is sometimes misidentified as Britain's first lexicographer. This could not, however, be further from the truth; indeed, in the composition of his *Dictionary*, Johnson drew on a rich tradition of English lexicography dating back to the sixteenth century.[20] What is more, Johnson is sometimes erroneously credited with pioneering the use of literary quotations in dictionary entries[21]; and although Johnson's *Dictionary* is easily the most literary of the dictionaries that come before him, many of Johnson's predecessors turned to literature as a source of linguistic authority.[22] In an effort to trace the written tradition from which Johnson emerges, the next section will present a short history of English dictionaries before and contemporary with Johnson.

[20] For more on the sources that influenced Johnson, see Kolb and DeMaria, *Johnson on the English Language*.

[21] Reddick, for instance, writes "it has not been sufficiently recognized that Johnson's *Dictionary* was the first to attempt, to a considerable degree, to determine its meaning according to word usage as it was encountered in the works of authors in the language," *The Making of Johnson's Dictionary*, 15.

[22] In Johnson's *Plan*, for instance, he refers to a list of literary authorities that Alexander Pope composed as part of his own plan for a dictionary, Kolb and DeMaria, *Johnson on the English Language*, 55–56.

A short history of English dictionaries

Like Johnson's *Dictionary*, the majority of English dictionaries before 1750 struggle to define the place of speech in linguistic standardization, often opting to cite literary examples rather than conversational usage. To some extent this results from early lexicographers' reliance on Classical tradition: the earliest English dictionaries (before 1600) are Latin-English translations or "glossaries,"[23] and thus they are necessarily text-based, since Latin was not the *lingua franca* of Britain. The author of one such work, John Withals, explains that he has "resorted to the most famous and ancient Authors" in the composition of his book, thereby initiating a longstanding tradition in British lexicography of citing authors rather than speakers.[24]

The first English-only dictionaries—so-called "hard word" dictionaries—are, in fact, close relatives of these Latin glossaries, since the "hard words" they define are what Kolb and DeMaria call "barely Anglicized Latin words."[25] Robert Cawdrey's *Table Alphabeticall* (1604)—the first all-English dictionary—announces its purpose thus:

> Containing and teaching the true writing and understanding of hard usuall English wordes, borrowed from the Hebrew, Greeke, Latine, or French, &c. With the interpretation thereof by plaine English words, gathered for the benefits & helpe of Ladies, Gentlewomen, or any other unskillfull persons.[26]

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[23] See, for instance, Sir Thomas Elyot's *Dictionary* (1538). For more on the history of dictionaries in England, see Beal, *English in Modern Times*; Mugglestone, "Dictionaries"; T. De Witt Starnes and Gertrude E. Noyes, *The English Dictionary from Cawdrey to Johnson, 1604–1755* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1991).

[24] John Withals, *Shorte Dictionarie for Yong Begynners* (1553).

[25] Kolb and DeMaria, *Johnson on the English Language*, xxxi. This usage of "hard," meaning "difficult to penetrate with the understanding; not easy to understand or explain," is first seen circa 1450 according to the *OED*. "hard, adj. and n.," *OED Online* (December 2013, Oxford University Press), http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/84122?rskey=g1pae6&result=1&isAdvanced=false.

[26] Cawdrey, *Table Alphabetical,* 37.

Designating "Ladies, Gentlewomen, or any other unskillfull persons" as its audience, Cawdrey's dictionary specifically targets uneducated readers, or at least readers who have not had the benefit of a Classical education. Thus, although Cawdrey addresses himself to native speakers, his dictionary aims to inculcate a knowledge of English that could not be obtained through conversation. And yet, despite the dictionary's scholarly purview—"hard usuall English wordes, borrowed from the Hebrew, Greeke, Latine, or French, &c"—Cawdrey's preface challenges the distinction between "learned" and unlearned speech:

> Do we not speak, because we would have others to understand us? or is not the tongue given for this end, that one might know what another meaneth? Therefore, either we must make a difference of English, and say, some is learned English, and othersome is rude English, or the one is Court talke, the other is Country-speech, or else we must of necessity banish all affected Rhetorique, and use altogether one manner of language. Those therefore that will avoyde this follie, and acquaint themselves with the plainest and best kind of speech, must seeke fro time to time such words as are comonlie received, and such as properly may expresse in plaine manner, the whole conceit of their mind.[27]

Here Cawdrey expresses a preference for "the plainest and best kind of speech," a desire that will be echoed by lexicographers and grammarians throughout the eighteenth century. This apparently simple solution, however, masks one of the primary stumbling blocks in the effort to regulate English: although speech seems like a natural place to turn when documenting a language, the sheer diversity of speech (as tabulated by Cawdrey) thwarts the lexicographer's attempt to impose uniformity. Thus Cawdrey seeks recourse in the somewhat nebulous "plainest and best kind of speech," while later lexicographers like Johnson ultimately conclude that writing alone can provide the stability necessary for a standard English.

[27] Cawdrey, *Table Alphabetical*, 41–42.

Cawdrey's specified audience, however, belies his emphasis on "plaine" language and betrays the text's lettered origins. In targeting "Ladies, Gentlewomen, or any other *unskillfull* persons" (my italics), Cawdrey addresses his work to those without the benefit of an education; in other words, the *Table Alphabeticall* does not contain words that mere speakers would necessarily know. Moreover, Cawdrey genders this distinction between speakers and readers: by designating women as "unskillful," Cawdrey not only identifies men as the source of linguistic authority, but also implicitly aligns women with speech and men with literacy. In this way Cawdrey's text is typical of English hard word dictionaries, which routinely target the unlettered and maintain this association between men and linguistic authority, a trend that continues well into the eighteenth century. Writing in 1721, Jonathan Swift suggests that "hard words" is a term particular to women, observing in "A Letter to a Young Gentleman" that "obscure Terms" are "by the Women called *Hard Words*."[28] The hard word tradition, then, excludes women's speech—and, indeed, speech in general—from standard English and, by identifying women as those most in need of correction, discredits women as linguistic authorities.

After Cawdrey's *Table Alphabeticall*, John Bullokar's somewhat larger *English Expositor* (1616) appears, and then Henry Cockeram's *English Dictionarie or, An Interpreter of hard English Words* (1623), a dictionary notable for its inclusion of "vulgar" language. Initially, Cockeram's dictionary addresses itself to a similar, if somewhat broader, audience as Cawdrey's, stating as its mission,

> Enabling Ladies and Gentlewomen, young schollers, clarkes, merchants, [and] strangers of any nation, to the understanding of the more difficult Authors already printed in our

[28] Jonathan Swift, "A Letter to a Young Gentleman," in *The Essential Writings of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Claude Rawson and Ian Higgins (New York: Norton, 2010), 252.

> Language, and the more speedy attaining of an elegant perfection of the English tongue, both in reading, speaking and writing.[29]

In keeping with the literate tradition of British lexicography, Cockeram points to writers as the standard-bearers of the English language: "the more difficult Authors already printed in our Language." In a departure from Cawdrey and Bullokar, however, Cockeram appends a second book with "vulgar" words translated into "more refined and elegant speech." For instance, "agreable" is defined as "congruent, correspondent, consonant."[30] This second book betrays an interest in spoken language that Cawdrey and Bullokar lack; nonetheless, it seems clear that the intention of the second volume is to correct rather than validate this vulgar speech, thereby further reinforcing the authority of the literate, the written, and (implicitly) the male.

Three other dictionaries before Johnson deserve a mention here. Thomas Blount's *Glossographia* (1656), yet another installment in the "hard word" tradition, shows a similar attentiveness to written language, advertising itself as "very useful for all such as desire to understand *what they read"* (my italics). By contrast, John Kersey's *A New English Dictionary* (1702) marks a departure from its "hard word" predecessors, privileging instead the "common English word":

> We shall not here take upon us to censure some other Performances of the like nature, which are defective in several respects, and yet stuffed with a monstrous heap of difficult and abstruse Terms, obsolete and forced words, taken from Foreign Languages, Poetical Fictions, the Names of Towns, Forts, Rivers, &c. besides others that are peculiar to the counties of Great Britain and Ireland, and never us'd or understood any where else: so

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[29] Henry Cockeram, *The English Dictionarie: or, An Interpreter of Hard English Words* (London, 1623), title page, *Early English Books Online*, http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:image:19316.

[30] Cockeram, *English Dictionarie*, under "The Second Part of the English Dictionary."

> that a downright Country-Man in looking for a common English Word, in so vast a Wood of such as are above the reach of his capacity, must needs lose the sight of it, and be extremely discouraged, if not constrained to give over the Search.[31]

Kersey condemns his fellow lexicographers for their overreliance on "abstruse terms," "forced words," and "Poetical fictions," arguing that such language excludes the "downright Country-Man" (by whom Kersey measures the utility of his own work). Nonetheless, despite his insistence on the "common English Word," Kersey still defends the words included in his dictionary on the basis of their use "among *Writers* of a clear Judgment and good Style" (my italics), not speakers. Nathan Bailey's *Universal Etymological English Dictionary* (1721) also ventures beyond the scope of "hard word" texts, containing "the Derivations of the Generality of Words in the English Tongue, either Ancient or Modern."[32] The most popular of any dictionary before Johnson's,[33] Bailey's book markets itself to a wide swath of readers: "as well for the Entertainment of the Curious, as the Information of the Ignorant, and for the Benefit of young Students, Artificers, Tradesmen and Foreigners, who are desirous thorowly to understand what they *Speak, Read, or Write*" (my italics). Indeed, though Bailey's dictionary includes literary words, it also includes cant and dialect terms, as well as vulgar and taboo words derived from Anglo-Saxon like, for instance, "shite" and "fuck." Thus, in the transformation from glossaries to hard word dictionaries to "universal" dictionaries, we begin to see a tension in the way that the dictionary is envisioned throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: although it

[31] Kersey, *New English Dictionary*, v.

[32] Nathan Bailey, *Universal Etymological English Dictionary* (London, 1721).

[33] Bailey's dictionary saw twenty-eight editions by 1800. See R. C. Alston, *The English Dictionary*, vol. 5 of *A Bibliography of the English Language from the Invention of Printing to the Year 1800* (Leeds: E. J. Arnold & Son, 1966), 16–22.

originates as a compendium of written, *learned* language, it evolves into a record of the language as a whole.

As this brief history demonstrates, British lexicographers before Johnson struggle to identify a single, consistent standard for the English language. Due to the Classical origins of British dictionaries, as well as the effort to educate women or the "unskilled," many of these dictionaries reflect the values of a written tradition, especially as they aim to expose their reader to a learned language that could not be obtained through speech alone.[34] Nonetheless, speech occupies a position of prominence in Cawdrey, Bullokar, and Kersey, regardless of the problems that its multifariousness may pose. While Cawdrey recommends the "best" speech, Bullokar "elegant perfection," and Kersey the "common English word," Johnson (as we have seen) attempts to conquer the "boundless variety" of speech by turning to writers of "acknowledged authority." Rather than looking at Johnson's well-documented influence on English dictionaries, however, the remainder of this chapter will trace a rival tradition of eighteenth-century lexicography, one that locates its authority in spoken English rather than written. This same trend is visible in eighteenth-century grammars, a genre closely connected to the dictionary (sometimes grammars and dictionaries were even contained within a single volume) and equally influential in establishing a linguistic standard. What is more, grammars provide a greater opportunity to explore the role that women played in the standardization of English, as more women wrote grammars than dictionaries.

[34] As for dictionaries that coexist with and follow Johnson, there are not too many to choose from. Benjamin Martin's *Lingua Britannica Reformata* was published in 1749, two years after Johnson's *Plan of a Dictionary of the English Language* appeared. Bailey's dictionary was revised and reissued as *A New Universal Etymological English Dictionary* (1755), a cheaper version of Johnson's dictionary that aimed to appeal to the common man. For more information, see Sidney Landau, *Dictionaries: The Art and Craft of Lexicography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Before turning to the prevalence of speech in grammars by women, the next three sections will consider dissenting strains within English lexicography: first, pronouncing dictionaries; second, cant dictionaries; and finally, American dictionaries. These dictionaries deserve to be treated separately not only because of their generic differences but also because they engage with the category of speech in distinct ways. Some, like pronouncing dictionaries, simply insist that sound must be part of what is codified by lexicographers. Some, like cant dictionaries, shift the source of authority, challenging the extent to which lexicography relies on the lettered and, instead, consulting the *unlettered*. Finally, some, like American dictionaries, refer to speech out of necessity: since eighteenth-century America had no longstanding literary tradition of its own, language (and, thus, lexicography) was largely the province of speech.

Pronouncing dictionaries

I begin with pronouncing dictionaries in part because their divergence from Johnson is the most ambiguous: even though, by their very nature, they emphasize the *sound* of language, they also participate in and adhere to the same linguistic boundaries established by Johnson himself. Take, for instance, Thomas Sheridan's *General Dictionary of the English Language* (1780). Like Johnson, Sheridan is also eager to codify and standardize the language, but while Johnson focuses largely on meaning and usage, Sheridan is most interested in pronunciation and sound. What is more, the impetus for both Johnson's and Sheridan's projects emerges out of a shared desire to "civilize" the English language and distinguish it as unique:

> Whilst the ingenious natives of other countries in Europe, particularly the Italians, French, and Spaniards, in proportion to their progress in civilization and politeness, have for more than a century been employed, with the utmost industry, in cultivating and

> regulating their speech; we still remain in the state of all barbarous countries in that respect, having left our's wholly to chance.[35]

In Sheridan's view, much as in Johnson's, standardized pronunciation is closely aligned with the "civilization and politeness," while unregulated speech is associated with the "barbarous."[36]

Yet for all Sheridan's similarity to Johnson, he recognizes advantages to speech that Johnson does not. For instance, Sheridan is acutely aware of writing's shortcomings when it comes to the potential to represent sound:

> That the great difficulty of reading with propriety, and in suitably varied tones and cadences, arises from the want of sufficient signs and marks, in the art of writing, to point them out; and were there but a sufficient number of those marks, reading justly at sight, might be rendered almost as easy and as certain, as singing at sight, is a matter which might be unquestionably proved, were it to be attended by any advantage.[37]

Writing, Sheridan points out, cannot adequately represent the modulations of tone (and of meaning) that can be achieved in speech. Thus, although Sheridan's theories of elocution are specifically concerned with *reading*, they still privilege speech in that they seek to recapture some of the nuance that exists in spoken language but not in writing.

Despite his contention that "there is little likelihood that any change will be made in the art of writing," Sheridan authors a dictionary of his own that is designed to do precisely that.

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[35] Thomas Sheridan, *A General Dictionary of the English Language*, vol. 1 (London, 1780), 3, *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=uclosangeles&tabID=T001&docId=CW3311305913&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE.

[36] For more on the similarity between Sheridan and Johnson, see Adam R. Beach, "The Creation of a Classical Language in the Eighteenth Century: Standardizing English, Cultural Imperialism, and the Future of the Literary Canon," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 43 (Summer 2001): 117–41.

[37] Sheridan, "Lecture I," *A Course of Lectures on Elocution* (London, 1762), 14.

Though not the first of its kind,[38] Sheridan's *A General Dictionary of the English Language. One main Object of which, is, to establish a plain and permanent Standard of Pronunciation* (1780) enjoyed enormous popularity and influence, in both England and America.[39] Sheridan announces that his dictionary abides by the spellings and definitions set forth by Johnson, "only sometimes making use of plainer words, more adapted to the capacity of English readers,"[40] but to this he adds pronunciation guidelines for each word that he includes. Compare, for instance, Sheridan's and Johnson's respective entries for the word "dictionary":

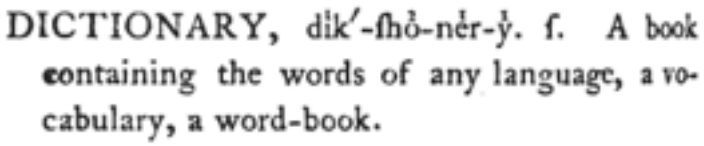
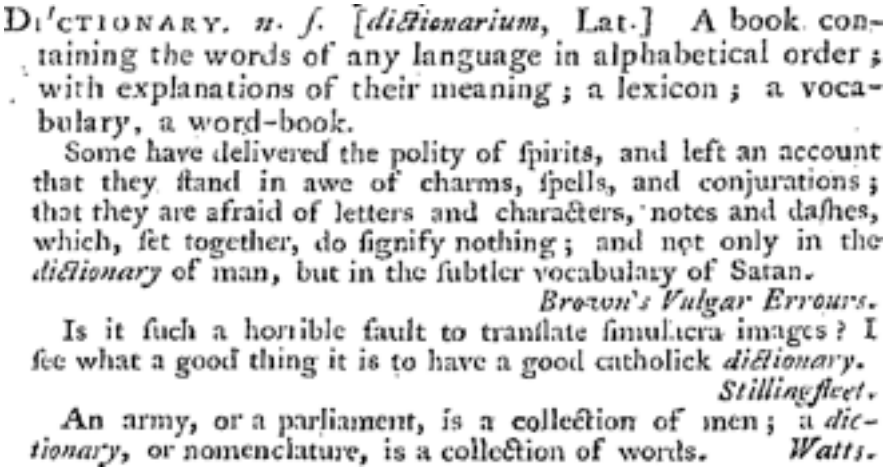

DICTIONARY, dik′-shŏ-nĕr-y̆. ſ. A book containing the words of any language, a vocabulary, a word-book.

Figure 1. An entry from Sheridan's *General Dictionary* (1780).


DI′CTIONARY. *n. ſ.* [*dictionarium*, Lat.] A book containing the words of any language in alphabetical order; with explanations of their meaning; a lexicon; a vocabulary, a word-book.

Some have delivered the polity of ſpirits, and left an account that they ſtand in awe of charms, ſpells, and conjurations; that they are afraid of letters and characters, notes and daſhes, which, ſet together, do ſignify nothing; and not only in the *dictionary* of man, but in the ſubtler vocabulary of Satan. *Brown's Vulgar Errours.*

Is it ſuch a horrible fault to tranſlate ſimulacra images? I ſee what a good thing it is to have a good catholick *dictionary*. *Stillingfleet.*

An army, or a parliament, is a collection of men; a *dictionary*, or nomenclature, is a collection of words. *Watts.*

Figure 2. An entry from Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755).

[38] Beal points out that Sheridan's pronouncing dictionary was preceded by Thomas Spence's *Grand Repository of the English Language* (1775), which she identifies as the first phonetic English pronouncing dictionary, despite the fact that Sheridan is often credited as "the first to articulate the 'phonetic' principle with regard to a pronouncing dictionary," *English Pronunciation in the Eighteenth Century: Thomas Spence's* Grand Repository of the English Language (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 78.

[39] Sheridan's obituary in the *Public Advertiser* states, "There are few men, perhaps, if any, to whom the English Language owes more than to the late Mr. Sheridan. His Dictionary has formed an invaluable standard for the just pronunciation of our language—a criterion which has been established by the Academical Dictionary in France—and the want of which in England, was heretofore so much lamented by Dean Swift, in his representation to Lord Oxford." "Character of Mr. Sheridan," *Public Advertiser*, 22 August 1788.

[40] Sheridan, *General Dictionary*, 4.

As you can see, Johnson's entry contains no information about pronunciation beyond syllabic emphasis, although he was in fact interested in the subject: Johnson's *Plan of a Dictionary of the English Language* (1747) identifies pronunciation as part and parcel of his larger effort to standardize the language.[41] Nonetheless, Sheridan diverges sharply from Johnson on the question of what kind of language, whether written or spoken, should provide the basis for that standard.[42] While Johnson believed that pronunciation should be reformed to resemble writing, Sheridan thought that *speech* should be consulted above all:

> When we see such a palpable and gross mistake as this, in our compilers of dictionaries, we should be at a loss to account for it, if we did not reflect, that they, as well as our grammarians, have never examined the state of the living tongue, but wholly confined their labours to the dead written language.[43]

In his attentiveness to "the state of the living tongue," and his criticism of those who consult only "the dead written language," Sheridan distinguishes himself from Johnson, joining the ranks of those eighteenth-century authors who privilege the authority of the spoken over the written.

In so far as these pronunciation dictionaries tend to emphasize a *standard* pronunciation, however, they deliberately efface the variety that naturally arises from speech: namely, dialect and accent. William Kenrick, for instance, describes his *New Dictionary of the English Language* (1773) thus: "Containing, Not only the Explanation of Words...But Likewise, Their Orthopeia or Pronunciation in Speech, *according to the present Practice of polished Speakers in the Metropolis*" (my italics). Moreover, Kenrick remarks, "there seems indeed a most ridiculous absurdity in the pretensions of a native of Aberdeen or Tipperary, to teach the natives of London

[41] Kolb and DeMaria, *Johnson on the English Language*, 37–40.

[42] For more on this divergence, see Hudson, *Writing and European Thought*, 100–10.

[43] Sheridan, *Lectures on Elocution*, 43.

to speak and read,"[44] and also, "A philosopher should consider [speech] as an *art*, which has been gradually improved, from the rudest efforts of simple nature, to its present degree of *artificial perfection*" (my italics).[45] Kenrick's comments indicate his preference for educated, urbane speakers: the "polished" and "artificial" rather than the natural or authentic. Renowned elocutionist John Walker echoes many of these same themes in his extremely popular *Critical Pronouncing Dictionary* (1791):

> A Dictionary of this kind will immediately remove this uncertainty [of pronunciation]; and in this view of the variety we shall discover a fitness in *one mode of speaking*, which will give a firmness and security to our pronunciation, from a confidence that it is founded on reason, and the general tendency of the language.[46] (my italics)

Walker also locates the authority for this standard pronunciation in the learned; but unlike Kenrick, Walker acknowledges the competing authority of the common usage: "Those sounds, therefore, which are the most generally received among the learned and polite, as well as the bulk of speakers, are the most legitimate, we may conclude that a majority of two of these states ought always to concur, in order to constitute what is called good usage."[47] "Good usage," for Walker, is not only what is "learned and polite" but also what is validated by "the bulk of speakers." Despite this seeming regard for common usage, however, Walker's dictionary also includes sections that are specifically designed to correct the speech of the Irish, Scottish, Welsh,

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[44] William Kenrick, *A New Dictionary of the English Language* (London, 1773), i, *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=uclosangeles&tabID=T001&docId=CW3311633658&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE.

[45] Kenrick, *New Dictionary*, 1.

[46] Walker, *Critical Pronouncing Dictionary*, vii.

[47] Walker, *Critical Pronouncing Dictionary*, viii.

and Londoners (by which Walker means "Cockney"). These sections have titles like, "Rules to be observed by the Natives of Ireland for attaining a just pronunciation of English," and refer to the peculiarities of these various English dialects as "mistakes" and "faults." In light of these corrective chapters, I think we must conclude that Walker's dictionary betrays an extremely normative view of pronunciation, and continues to draw strict boundaries around "legitimate" speech.

Cant dictionaries

Cant lexicography has a long history in England, dating back to the 16th century, and the very term itself—"cant"—evokes the drawing of boundaries between "legitimate" and "illegitimate" language. Denoting "a whining manner of speaking, especially of beggars" and "the peculiar language or jargon of a class," the word "cant" designates a certain kind of language as non-normative; what is more, its early association with beggars upholds the identification of "standard" language with learned language, pushing those who merely *speak* to the margins.[48] Critic Gertrude Noyes draws a distinction between "Glossaries of Cant" and "Dictionaries of Cant," noting the appearance of the first cant glossary (Thomas Harman's *Caveat*) in 1566 and the first dictionary to contain any significant body of cant (Elisha Coles's *English Dictionary*) in 1676.[49] Noyes provides an overview of cant lexicography up to Francis Grose's *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (1785), which she hails as a "new period" in cant lexicography, due to Grose's "higher standards of accuracy."[50] Noyes regards Grose's

[48] "cant, n.3," *OED Online*, December 2014, Oxford University Press, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/27198.

[49] Gertrude E. Noyes, "The Development of Cant Lexicography," *Studies in Philology* 38 (July 1941): 462–64.

[50] Noyes, "Cant Lexicography," 479.

dictionary as the finest of its kind because of the way that Grose extends the rigorous standards of eighteenth-century lexicography to the canting tongue. Grose was an antiquarian who marshaled his extensive fieldwork in the service of his *Classical Dictionary*, which includes approximately 9000 words not found in Johnson's *Dictionary*.[51] Emerging out of an oral culture rather than a literary one, Grose's dictionary allows for a consideration of the status of lower-class speech within Britain's transition from a preliterate to literate society and thus forms a compelling rival tradition to Johnson's *Dictionary*.

John Barrell has written about the codification of language as a means of affirming and enforcing Britain's unity, arguing that the consolidation of a single language promoted the consolidation of a single national identity.[52] One of the effects of this consolidation is, according to Barrell, "to reduce, to subjugate, varieties of provincial English, and the modes of expression of different social classes, to the norms of the elite, and so conceal beneath a veneer of universally adopted 'correct' English the different local cultures."[53] Moreover, in locating "correct" English in the speech of the "metropolitan polite"—as Kenrick does, for instance—linguistic authorities suggest that "what the vulgar speak is no language at all."[54] From this perspective, Grose's dictionary can be interpreted as a site of resistance: locating its authority in female speech, mercantile speech, lower-class speech, and criminal speech, Grose's dictionary evades the hegemony of Johnson's authorized Britishness. For example, Grose writes,

The many vulgar allusions and cant expressions that so frequently occur in our common

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[51] John H. Farrant, "Grose, Francis (bap. 1731, d. 1791)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2009 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/11660].

[52] This is also true of American English. See George Krapp on how the systematization of American English allowed for a consolidation of national feeling after the Revolutionary War, *The English Language in America* (New York: The Century Co., for the Modern Language Association of America, 1925), 3–67.

[53] Barrell, "The language properly so-called," 112.

[54] Barrell, "The language properly so-called," 138.

> conversation and periodical publications, make a work of this kind extremely useful, if not absolutely necessary, not only to foreigners, but even to natives resident at a distance from the Metropolis, or who do not mix in the busy world: without some such help, they might hunt through all the ordinary Dictionaries, from Alpha to Omega, in search of the words, "black legs, lame duck, a plumb, malingeror [*sic*], nip cheese, darbies, and the new drop," although these are all terms of well-known import at Newmarket, Exchange-alley, the City, the Parade, Wapping, and Newgate.[55]

Grose's argument for the inclusion of this language rests on utility rather than aesthetics: canting language may not be the "best" (Cawdrey) or most "polished" (Kenrick), but it is, nonetheless, used by a large number of English speakers. Whereas Kersey—in his image of a "downright Country-Man" who is "looking for a common English Word, in so vast a Wood"—seeks to make language more accessible by eliminating certain vocabulary, Grose aims to make that same "vast" vocabulary intelligible.

Grose's assertion of the import of this language could be seen as a direct response to Johnson's deliberate omission of such words from his *Dictionary*. Moreover, this debate about *whose* language to include mirrors the debate over whether to locate linguistic authority in the oral or the written. The comparison to Johnson is made even more interesting by the fact that both Johnson and Grose defend their respective dictionaries in patriotic terms. Johnson writes that he "has devoted this book to the honour of my country, that we may no longer yield the palm of philology to the nations of the continent" (Preface to the *Dictionary*, 109). Grose, for his part, explicitly links English liberty and "common" language:

> The freedom of thought and speech, arising from, and privileged by our constitution, gives a force and poignancy to the expressions of our common people, not to be found

[55] Francis Grose, *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (London, 1785), 7.

> under arbitrary governments, where the ebullitions of vulgar wit are checked by the fear of the bastinado or of a lodging during pleasure in some gaol or castle.[56]

While Johnson locates quintessential Englishness in "writers of classical reputation or acknowledged authority," Grose finds the very soul of British freedom in the commoners whose language is generally excluded from "standard" English. As Janet Sorensen has written, "Grose's startling reclamation of cant and vulgar expressions reconfigures the languages of putative outsiders as signs of British national culture, incorporating the people into the rhetorical space of the nation via those linguistic practices."[57] What is more, Grose replaces the normative center of linguistic authority with the margin, thereby inverting the hierarchy of authority established by Johnson and others.

Despite this inversion, however, Grose's treatment of non-normative speech can be somewhat reductive, as Sorensen has also observed.[58] For example, although his antiquarian background might lead us to expect precise and scholarly distinctions, Grose groups many different kinds of speech together:

> The Vulgar Tongue consists of two parts: the first is the Cant Language, called sometimes the Pedlar's French, or St. Giles's Greek; the second, those Burlesque Phrases, Quaint Allusions, and Nick-names for person, things and places which from long uninterrupted usage are made classical by prescription . . . The second part or burlesque terms, have been drawn from the most classical authorities; such as soldiers on the long

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[56] Grose, i.

[57] Janet Sorensen, "Vulgar Tongues: Canting Dictionaries and the Language of the People in Eighteenth-Century Britain," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 37 (Spring 2004), 435.

[58] "The first stage, taking place largely in the canting dictionaries of the early-to-mid eighteenth century, sees a rather simplistic unification of a variety of overlapping 'substandard' languages into one single cant language designated as inherently criminal. In this process, the linguistic expressions of thieves, prostitutes, con artists, and sometimes other speakers of substandard English appear as a singular (and mixed-gender) subculture," Sorensen, 437.

> march, seamen at the cap-stern, ladies disposing of their fish, and the colloquies of a Gravesend-boat.[59]

Here we see a fairly general distinction between the two parts the "Vulgar Tongue," but even this cursory differentiation is jettisoned in the body of the dictionary, where every category of speech is simply combined under a single heading. Thus, rather than attending to the many varieties and subcategories of spoken language, it is almost as if Grose divides speech into large categories: standard English and non-standard English. In this way, Grose paradoxically affirms the hegemony of Johnson's English; instead of representing so-called standard English as one among many, Grose seems to define all English in relation to this norm.

American dictionaries

The final dissenting strain is American dictionaries, which I argue emerge out of a much more spoken culture than their British counterparts. The first American dictionary was written, oddly enough, by Samuel Johnson Jr. (1757–1836)—no relation to the British Johnson of *Dictionary* fame—and was called *A School Dictionary* (1798). Johnson Jr. articulates his motivation for writing a dictionary thus:

> The author from long experience as an instructor, having found the want of a sizeable, School Dictionary, has been stimulated to compile, and now offers to the public the following performance. It is not calculated or intended to afford either entertainment or instruction to persons of Education. The design of it is to furnish Schools with a dictionary which will enable youth more easily to acquire a knowledge of the English

[59] Grose, ii–v.

Language.[60]

Though Johnson tailored his dictionary for students, the entries themselves are not original: most are taken from *The Royal Standard Dictionary* (1775) by William Perry, which had been issued in an American edition in 1788.[61] I mention Johnson Jr. not only because he is the first American lexicographer, but also because he initiates what I see as a pattern of American lexicographers responding to the specific needs of their communities. In other words, American lexicographers quickly recognize that British dictionaries will not suffice because of the increasing divergence between British and American English. This differentiation of the American English and its Mother Tongue is, to some extent, politically motivated, but it also reflects the way that language changes according to context.

One thing that does not change, however, is the close alignment of language and patriotism (as we saw in both Johnson and Grose). In his *American Spelling Book* (1783), Noah Webster writes,

> The author wishes to promote the honour and prosperity of the confederated republics of America; and chearfully throws his mite into the common treasure of patriotic exertions. This country must in some future time, be as distinguished by the superiority of her literary improvements, as she is already by the liberality of her civil and ecclesiastical constitutions . . . For America in her infancy to adopt the present maxims of the old world, would be to stamp the wrinkles of decrepid age upon the bloom of youth and plant

[60] Samuel Johnson Jr., *A School Dictionary* (New Haven, 1798).

[61] For more on Johnson's *School Dictionary* see Martha Jane Gibson, "America's First Lexicographer, Samuel Johnson Jr., 1757–1836," *American Speech* 11 (December 1936): 283–92; and "America's First Lexicographer: Part II. Pronunciation," *American Speech* 12 (February 1937): 19–30.

the seeds of decay in a vigorous constitution.[62]

As suggested by his emphasis on the literary, Webster owes much to Johnson's *Dictionary*; yet, Webster goes to great lengths to differentiate himself (and his language) from his British forebears. Indeed, despite his clear reliance on Johnson's *Dictionary*, Webster condemns Johnson's work on numerous occasions, thereby breaking with a British past in the service of a new American English.

There are also strong practical reasons for dictionaries that treat American English as separate from British. This distinction is at least partly a product of America being a new country and, thus, a new society with very different needs and challenges from England. For instance, critic George Krapp writes that,

> The common school, with English as the basis of its training, is a necessary part of the life of every American community, not only in those regions which were settled by New Englanders, but even in regions remote from such direct influence. It would be almost impossible to exaggerate the effect which these schools have had in the gradual process of realizing that ideal of a national speech which the country holds as its standard.[63]

And indeed, both Johnson Jr. and Webster emerge out of this "common school" context. As such, in their efforts to represent American English, American lexicographers are responding not to a long history of writing, but rather to the *speech* of their communities.

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[62] Noah Webster, *American Spelling Book*. John Hurt Fisher writes that Webster's "first foray into the regulation of language had no nationalistic agenda. It argued that the adoption of a single textbook would help to achieve uniformity, and its first part, called *A New and Accurate Standard of Pronunciation*, followed closely the spelling in Johnson's dictionary. By 1787, however, Webster had been drawn into the nationalistic movement. His *American Spelling Book* (a revision of part 1 of *The Grammatical Institute*) promoted several forms that today distinguish American from British spelling: preference for -or rather than -our in unstressed syllables and preference for final -er rather than -re," "British and American, Continuity and Divergence," in *The Cambridge History of the English Language, Volume 6: English in North America*, ed. John Algeo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 62.

[63] Krapp, *English Language in America*, 29.

The trend toward dictionaries designed for schools becomes especially pronounced in the work of Noah Webster (1758–1843). Like Johnson Jr., Webster was a schoolteacher, and he was also a vocal advocate for public education. Webster's first book (the first in a series of three books that comprise *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language*) was the *American Spelling Book*, which, like Johnson Jr.'s *School Dictionary*, was designed for use in the classroom and became "one of the most popular textbooks ever published."[64] For the purposes of this project, Webster's spelling book is important for two reasons. First, Webster aimed to reform spelling in accordance with pronunciation; in other words, he thought words should be spelled just as they are pronounced.[65] In this way, Webster believed that speech should dictate writing and not the other way around. Second, and perhaps more importantly, Webster based his pronunciations on the "general custom"—that is, the common usage—rather than other sources of correctness. As Krapp writes,

> The American people, as [Webster] viewed them, were a race of simple folk . . . It was the speech of this folk that Webster would make the basis for his new American English, especially the speech of the New England colonies as the region in which education and literary culture were most highly developed.[66]

In certain ways, this is reminiscent of Grose, who also looks to the speech of the unlearned (the working classes) for his dictionary. Grose, however, is writing a *cant* dictionary, whereas Webster aims to compile a standard dictionary of American English; thus, it is even more striking that Webster chooses to consult the common man:

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[64] M. M. Mathews, *The Beginnings of American English* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931), 45.

[65] Krapp writes, "Many of the spellings which he adopted in his 1806 dictionary were simplifications arrived at by omitting silent letters," *English Language in America*, 38.

[66] Krapp, *English Language in America*, 10.

> When a plain unlettered man asks why words are so irregularly written, that the *letters are no guide to the pronunciation*, and the noblest invention of man loses half its value; we may silence, tho not convince him, by saying, that such is the old practice, and we must not deviate from the practice of our grand fathers even when they have erred![67]

In fact, and perhaps unsurprisingly, Webster encountered widespread criticism for his decision to use spoken language as the basis of his dictionary. *The Monthly Anthology*, for instance, published an article in 1807 that criticized Webster's *Grammar* for its "notion of an American tongue, or gaining our idiom from the mouths of the illiterate, rather than from the pages of Milton, Dryden, Swift, Addison."[68] Opposing "mouths" to "pages," this quotation speaks to the ongoing association between standard English and writing, even if some lexicographers favored the spoken word.

Both his plan to reform spelling and his attentiveness to the common usage exemplify Webster's general rejection of previous linguistic authorities, especially (and explicitly) Johnson. Indeed, David Simpson has called Webster "a radical in the realm of language" and "the first major challenger of the linguistic hegemony of the British in general and of Johnson in particular."[69] Webster questions the authority of several influential figures, writing,

> The *ipse dixit* of a Johnson, a Garrick, or a Sheridan, has the force of law; and to contradict it, is rebellion . . . It is often supposed that certain great men are infallible, or that their practice constitutes custom and the rule of propriety. But on the contrary, any man, however learned, is liable to mistake.[70]

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[67] Webster to Thomas Dawes, August 5, 1809.

[68] Cited in J. Fisher, "British and American," 67.

[69] David Simpson, *The Politics of American English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 24.

[70] Noah Webster, *Dissertations on the English Language* (Boston, 1789), 168.

This somewhat facile grouping of Johnson, Garrick, and Sheridan—three figures who, as we have seen, espouse very different views on language—suggests that Webster's criticisms are sometimes more self-serving than well-reasoned; nonetheless, Webster insisted on his difference from his predecessors. For example, Mathews writes, "That dictionary makers and grammarians are great corrupters of language was a conviction which Webster reached early in his career."[71] Indeed, far from elevating the language, Webster blames Johnson (and others) for degrading it: "Few improvements have been made [since the time of Queen Anne], but innumerable corruptions in pronunciation have been introduced by Garrick, and in stile, by Johnson, Gibbon and their imitators."[72] Similarly, he writes that Johnson's "pedantry has corrupted the purity of our language" and that his "principles would in time destroy all agreement between the spelling and pronunciation of words."[73] And yet, in Webster's explanation of the need for the standardization of American English, he sounds very like Johnson:

> The principal part of instructors are illiterate people, and require some easy guide to the *standard* of pronunciation, which is nothing else but the customary pronunciation of the most accurate scholars and literary Gentlemen. Such a standard, universally used in schools, would in time, demolish those odious distinctions of provincial dialects, which are the objects of reciprocal ridicule in the United States.[74]

Moreover, even if he did locate the authority for his dictionary in spoken language, Webster shared Kenrick's, Sheridan's, and Walker's impulse to standardize pronunciation. As Krapp notes:

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[71] Mathews, "Beginnings of American English," 15.

[72] Webster, *Dissertations*, 30.

[73] Webster, *Dissertations*, xi.

[74] Noah Webster, *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language, Part I* (Hartford, 1783), 6.

> Like all educated persons, Webster did not really conceive the possibility of resting contentedly on the practices of popular speech as it existed among his own townsmen and neighbors. Before his eyes there always shone the ideal of a remote literary language, which was to be modified and perhaps enriched by incorporation within it of certain local practices in speech, but which was not to be replaced by a new idiom.[75]

I maintain that Webster's reliance on speech marks a significant departure from lexicographers like Johnson; however, I think it is worth bearing in mind that, in his regard for speech, Webster did not go so far as to celebrate or encourage the maintenance of regional dialects (on the contrary, he hoped to eliminate them). Thus, even Webster's speech-based account of the language ultimately upholds distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate forms of English.

A short introduction to female grammarians

Having considered the strong reliance on written authority in British lexicography, as well as three dissenting strains within eighteenth-century dictionaries, I will now turn to the female grammarians of the eighteenth century, whose work provides further evidence of the rival tradition that this chapter attempts to delineate. Elstob, Fisher, and Fenn—like Piozzi—all turn to the vernacular as a source of linguistic authority, generally favoring the language of ordinary people over the language of text. In their arguments promoting the vernacular, these women contribute to the debate about language that raged throughout the eighteenth century, beginning with Daniel Defoe's and Jonathan Swift's petitions for an English equivalent of the French *Académie francaise* and continuing through the publication of the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*.[76] Despite vast differences in their work—Elstob's scholarly Anglo-Saxon grammar and Fenn's

[75] Krapp, *English Language in America*, 42.

[76] Jonathan Swift, *Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue* (1712).

grammar for the nursery, for instance—these women should all be seen as participating in a linguistic tradition in which women derive power from their affiliation with the vernacular.[77] Within this tradition, I argue, the bold claim that Elstob stakes to the vernacular in 1715 provides a crucial foundation for the pedagogy of familiar conversation that Fenn and others adopt at the end of the century.

In the past two decades, Elstob, Fisher, and Fenn (as well as eight other eighteenth-century female grammarians) have been brought out of the shadows, thanks to the assiduous efforts of a small group of scholars who have reasserted the prominence and influence of these women in their time.[78] Before Carol Percy, Karen Cajka, Maria Rodríguez-Gil, Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade, and others began writing about them, eighteenth-century female grammarians had been pushed to the margins by (male) critics who dismissed them as dull, unimaginative, and overly prescriptive, without acknowledging the significance of their contributions to grammar, education, and early feminism. This scholarly trend can be neatly summarized by the common epithet that Percy Muir applies to these women: "a monstrous regiment."[79] With an eye toward discrediting Muir's account, Carol Percy and others have persuasively demonstrated that, far from marginal, grammars and dictionaries by women circulated widely and enjoyed enormous

[77] This project is not the first to group Elstob, Fisher, and Fenn. See Robin Smith, "Language for Everyone. Eighteenth-Century Female Grammarians: Elstob, Fisher and Beyond," *History of Linguistics 1996*, vol. 2, ed. David Cram, Andrew Linn, and Elke Nowak (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999).

[78] According to Karen Cajka, the eighteenth-century female grammarians of the English language include Ellin Devis, Dorothea DuBois, Mrs. M.C. Edwards, Mrs. Eves, Ellenor Fenn, Anne Fisher, Jane Gardiner, Blanche Mercy, and Mrs. Taylor. I would add a tenth woman, Ann Murry, to this list: Murry's *Mentoria; or the young ladies instructor, in familiar conversation* (1778) contains a section on grammar. For more on Murry, see Ian Michael, *The Teaching of English, from the sixteenth century to 1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 524. Compare with Karen Cajka, "The Forgotten Women Grammarians of Eighteenth-Century England" (PhD diss., University of Connecticut, 2003).

[79] Percy Muir, *English Children's Books 1600 to 1900* (London: Batsford, 1985), 82. Muir borrows this epithet from religious reformer John Knox's 1558 tract, "The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women."

popularity in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain.[80] Of the ten female grammarians who published before 1800, Fisher and Fenn were the most popular and the most prolific, publishing thirty-four educational books between them.[81] Despite this popularity, however, Tieken-Boon van Ostade points out that Fisher "barely made it" into the *Lexicon Grammaticorum* (1996), a "Who's Who in the History of World Linguistics" that gave Fisher only half a column and excluded Fenn entirely.[82] Recent scholarship on these women, then, has brought their posthumous reputations more closely in line with their importance during their own lifetimes. By looking at the status of spoken language in the work of three prominent female grammarians, I hope to address a gap in this scholarship: Carol Percy and Michèle Cohen have both discussed the reliance on familiar conversation in lexical texts by women, but there is more work to be done on the significance of this trend.[83] By calling our attention to the persistent association of the vernacular with the female, this chapter not only recovers an early instance of Wordsworth and Coleridge's philosophical investment in the vernacular, but also demonstrates that for the women grammarians of the eighteenth century the language of everyday speech was an increasingly powerful source of authority.

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[80] Cajka, "The Forgotten Women Grammarians of Eighteenth-Century England"; Carol Percy, "Women's Grammars," in *Eighteenth-Century English: Ideology and Change*, ed. Raymond Hickey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Maria E. Rodríguez-Gil, "Deconstructing Female Conventions: Ann Fisher (1719–1778)," *Historiographia Linguistica* XXXIII:1/2 (2006): 11–38.

[81] For more on the popularity of female grammarians see Cajka, "The Forgotten Women Grammarians of Eighteenth-Century England," 1–2; and Michael, *The Teaching of English*.

[82] Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade, "Female grammarians of the eighteenth century," *Historical Sociolinguistics and Sociohistorical Linguistics* (August 2000).

[83] For scholars who mention the prevalence of familiar conversation among female grammarians, see Percy, "Learning and Virtue: English Grammar and the Eighteenth-Century Girls' School," in Mary Hilton and Jill Shefrin, eds., *Educating the Child in Enlightenment Britain: Beliefs, Cultures, Practices* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 93; and Tieken-Boon van Ostade, "Female grammarians." Michèle Cohen discusses this phenomenon at greater length in "'Familiar Conversation': The Role of the 'Familiar Format' in Education in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century England," in *Educating the Child in Enlightenment Britain*.

Elizabeth Elstob, 1683–1756

In addition to being the first female author of an Anglo-Saxon grammar, Elizabeth Elstob was also one of the earliest British grammarians to advocate a shift toward the vernacular. Born in 1683 to a Newcastle merchant, Elstob's interest in language began early in life, and through private tutelage (starting with her mother) she was able to study several ancient and modern languages. After her parents' death, Elstob lived with her uncle, an Anglican clergyman who opposed the education of women but eventually allowed Elstob to continue her studies. As a young woman, Elstob was introduced by her brother to scholarly circles at Oxford, where she met the Old English scholar who would become her mentor, George Hickes. Although she never married and had little money of her own, Elstob published several scholarly works, including the famous *Rudiments of Grammar for the English-Saxon Tongue* (1715).[84]

Elstob's *Rudiments* was the first vernacular grammar of Old English,[85] and at the time of its appearance the preference for vernacular instruction had not yet become dominant among British grammarians. By 1715, fewer than twenty English grammars written in English had been published,[86] only four of which used a vernacular system,[87] and Shaun F. D. Hughes points out

[84] Mechthild Gretsch, "Elstob, Elizabeth (1683–1756)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2007 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8761, accessed 4 Feb 2015]. For more on Elstob, see Margaret Ashdown, "Elizabeth Elstob, the Learned Saxonist," *Modern Language Review* 20 (1925): 125–46; Richard Morton, "Elizabeth Elstob's Rudiments of Grammar (1715): Germanic Philology for Women," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 20 (1991): 267–87; Ada Wallas, *Before the Bluestockings* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930).

[85] Shaun F. D. Hughes, "Elizabeth Elstob (1683–1756) and the Limits of Women's Agency in Early-Eighteenth-Century England," in *Women Medievalists and the Academy*, ed. Jane Chance (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 3.

[86] See R. C. Alston, *English Grammars Written in English and English Grammars Written in Latin by Native Speakers,* vol. 1 of *A Bibliography of the English Language from the Invention of Printing to the Year 1800* (Leeds: E. J. Arnold & Son, 1965), 2–16.

that at least three grammatical methods were vying for primacy during this time.[88] John Wallis's 1653 grammar, *Grammatica Linguae Anglicanae*, is credited with galvanizing the eventual shift toward the vernacular; although he writes in Latin and maintains Latin nomenclature, Wallis is the first to suggest that "the classical languages cannot necessarily be taken as a pattern for English."[89] In 1711, Charles Gildon and John Brightland respond to Wallis with their *Grammar of the English Tongue*, one of the earliest English grammars to break with the classical tradition and use a vernacular system.[90] Gildon and Brightland defend their grammar on the basis of expanding literacy: a vernacular grammar, they argue, will allow women and children to "learn to Read and Write *English*."[91] In *Rudiments*, Elstob takes Gildon and Brightland's call for expanded literacy one step further, as she not only argues for female education, but also—and more importantly—casts the vernacular as a distinctly female area of knowledge. Even though Elstob's grammar is of Anglo-Saxon rather than English, the claim she stakes to her mother tongue—for herself and for women in general—inaugurates the connection between the vernacular and female authority that echoes throughout the century.

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[87] Under "vernacular systems," Michael lists only four grammars published before 1715. See Ian Michael, *English Grammatical Categories, and the Tradition to 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 254–62. Michael defines "vernacular systems" as "deliberate modifications of the Latin systems, which they profess to reform. They agree in proposing four primary parts of speech (substantive, adjective, verb, particular) though they vary in their distribution of the secondary parts. They are here called 'vernacular' systems because they are closely associated with the reforming movement which sought to give English a grammar in its own right" (210).

[88] Hughes cites Gildon and Brightland's vernacular method, Greenwood's (1711) Latin method, and Maitaire's (1712) Greek method as competing. See Shaun F. D. Hughes, "Salutary Lessons from the History of Linguistics," in *The Real-World Linguist: Linguistic Applications in the 1980s*, ed. V. Raskin and P. Bjarkman (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1986), 313.

[89] Michael, *English Grammatical Categories*, 203. See also Hughes, "Salutary Lessons from the History of Linguistics."

[90] Gildon and Brightland's grammar was not only early, but also influential: it was recommended by the *Tatler*, and it went through eight editions by 1759.

[91] *A Grammar of the English Tongue*, "The Preface," (London, 1711).

Elstob's primary aim in *Rudiments* is to defend Anglo-Saxon from its detractors, a language that she thinks has suffered from "unkind prejudice," and her lengthy preface systematically rebuts the criticisms that have been levied against "the English tongue." Although her investment in the study of "northern antiquities" might appear to be at odds with a shift toward the vernacular—merely exchanging classical languages (Latin and Greek) for Anglo-Saxon—Elstob builds her case for Old English by carefully tying the ancient language to its modern form: "our Language," Elstob maintains, cannot be separated from its "Saxon Root, whose Branches were so copious and numerous."[92] Here Elstob represents Anglo-Saxon and vernacular English as two parts of a single living organism; for Elstob, one cannot exist without the other. This inextricable link recurs throughout Elstob's introduction; for instance, as part of her effort to demonstrate Anglo-Saxon's utility, she insists that "the old Saxon, except in some few Variations in the Orthography, is the same in most original Words with our present English" (*Rudiments*, ix). Likewise, in a direct critique of Swift's *Proposal*, she writes, "I cannot but think it a great Pity, that in our Considerations, for Refinement of the English Tongue, so little Regard is had to Antiquity, and the Original of our present Language, which is the Saxon" (*Rudiments*, ix).[93] The repetition of the word "present" points to Elstob's faith in Anglo-Saxon's value, which resides in its close connection to the *present* form of English. In addition to Swift, Elstob takes particular aim at Gildon and Brightland; despite their shared investment in promoting female education, Elstob resents Gildon and Brightland for slighting her adviser, Hickes, in their *Grammar of the English Tongue*, and her preface ardently contests their claim that Anglo-Saxon

[92] Elizabeth Elstob, *The Rudiments of English Grammar for the English-Saxon Tongue* (London, 1715), iv, hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

[93] Elstob directly references Swift's proposal by using the phrase "correcting, improving and ascertaining."

is irrelevant to the study of contemporary English.[94] Hughes argues that Elstob's "commitment to Saxon studies far outweighs her commitment to the education of women, for she should have been allied with Gildon and Brightland,"[95] but the heavily gendered language of Elstob's preface—and the great effort she makes to advocate for women—suggests that Hughes may be overstating his case.

Anticipating Piozzi's claim to "familiar talk" by almost eighty years, Elstob includes an epigraph that explicitly confers linguistic authority on women, identifying the vernacular as an area of *female* expertise. Taken from "a Letter from a Right Reverend Prelate to the Author," the epigraph reads: "Our Earthly Possessions are truly enough called a PATRIMONY, as derived to us by the Industry of our Fathers; but the Language that we speak is our MOTHER-TONGUE; And who so proper to play the Criticks in this as the FEMALES." This epigraph both proclaims Elstob's interest in "the Language that we speak"—the vernacular—and aligns this spoken language with women; moreover, in identifying women as most "proper to play the Criticks," Elstob asserts authority over the vernacular on the basis of her sex. This is an interesting choice for a woman who had to fight for an education and for inclusion in the exclusively male circles of Oxford: one would think that Elstob would attempt to prove her scholarly legitimacy by affiliating herself with, not differentiating herself from, her male peers. To be sure, Elstob goes out of her way to demonstrate her fluency in contemporary scholarly debates, carefully ally herself with Hickes, and dazzle with her linguistic expertise, but she does not shy away from distinguishing herself on the basis of her gender.

[94] For a fuller account of this controversy, see Shaun F. D. Hughes, "Mrs. Elstob's Defense of Antiquarian Learning in her *Rudiments of Grammar for the English-Saxon Tongue* (1715)," *Harvard Library Bulletin* 27, no. 2 (1979): 172–91.

[95] Hughes, "Elizabeth Elstob," 13.

Even beyond the epigraph, *Rudiments* repeatedly reminds the reader of Elstob's sex: in the dedication, she describes her work as "the humble tribute of a female," and the preface begins with a story about "a young Lady" whose desire to learn Anglo-Saxon gave Elstob the idea of writing her book.[96] In addition, Elstob constructs her argument in gendered terms, frequently reminding her readers that the scholars who deride Anglo-Saxon are *men*: "I have given most, if not all the Grammatical terms in true old Saxon, to shew the polite Men of our Age, that the Language of their Forefathers is neither so barren nor barbarous as they affirm, with equal Ignorance and Boldness" (*Rudiments*, iii). Elstob's use of the definite article in the phrase "the polite Men," suggests that "Men" has a specific referent, bringing the gendered terms of this debate to the fore: much as Elstob asserts a particularly female authority, she also identifies her opponents as male.

Elstob's most overt feminization of her text occurs in the dedication, which is addressed to the new Princess of Wales, Caroline of Ansbach. In 1715, Princess Caroline had only recently moved to England, leaving her native Prussia when George I (her father-in-law) assumed the British throne. In keeping with its female addressee, Elstob's dedication features a frontispiece that celebrates female learning (fig. 3): two women, one modestly hooded, the other valiantly arrayed for battle, sit with open books on either side of a medallion that depicts yet another woman (perhaps Queen Anne or Princess Sophia). The warlike figure on the right is almost certainly Athena, identifiable by the helmet and gorgoneion (on her chest) with which she is

[96] This "young lady" is most likely Mary Stanhope, the daughter of George Stanhope (dean of Canterbury) and the wife of William Burnet (who would later become the governor of New York). See Hughes, "Elizabeth Elstob," 13.

TO

HER ROYAL HIGHNESS

THE

PRINCESS of *WALES.*

MADAM,

HIS ſmall Treatiſe, which the Author once hoped to have had the Honour of dedicating to Her Royal Highneſs the Princeſs

A 2 *SOPHIA,*

Figure 3. The image celebrates female learning by depicting two women, one with a book in hand and one with a book at her feet. Elstob, *The Rudiments of English Grammar* (London, 1715).

frequently associated.[97] Athena, goddess of wisdom, is a fitting choice for a book that not only promotes female learning but also begins by praising the patronage of the recently deceased Princess Sophia, whose name means wisdom. This framework, coupled with Elstob's language throughout the preface, asserts woman's dominion over her "Mother Tongue" and thus issues a proclamation of female linguistic authority that will resonate throughout the century.

Ann Fisher, 1719–78

Thirty-five years later, Ann Fisher's *A New Grammar* reproduces two key features of Elstob's *Rudiments*; although there is no evidence that Fisher was familiar with Elstob,[98] both their texts—the only two grammars by women at this time—promote vernacular grammatical instruction and align the vernacular with women. Born in Cumberland in 1719, Fisher opened her own school in 1745, published her first book in the same year, and married the Newcastle printer, Thomas Slack, in 1751. Between 1745 and her death in 1778, Fisher published numerous instructional books and educational treatises, three of which will be considered here: *A New Grammar* (1750),[99] *An Accurate New Spelling Dictionary* (1773?),[100] and *The Pleasing Instructor* (1756). These works were tremendously popular: for instance, with thirty-one editions by 1800,[101] Fisher's *New Grammar*, or *Practical New Grammar* (as it was called after 1762) was

[97] Hughes, "Elizabeth Elstob," 20.

[98] According to Cajka, very little is known about Fisher's education. See "The Forgotten Women Grammarians of Eighteenth-Century England," 20.

[99] 1750 is the date of the second edition of *A New Grammar*; no copy of the first edition has yet been located, but Michael estimates that it was published in 1745. See *The Teaching of English*, 457. See also Cajka, "The Forgotten Women Grammarians of Eighteenth-Century England," 260.

[100] The exact publication date of Fisher's dictionary is uncertain. Michael writes that "the publication details of this work seem to be particularly confused" and speculates that it may have been published in 1773. See *The Teaching of English*, 457.

[101] Alston, 25–30.

the most frequently published eighteenth-century English grammar after John Ash's *Grammatical Institutes* (1760), Robert Lowth's *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762), and Lindley Murray's *English Grammar* (1795).[102] Fisher's work stands out among her fellow grammarians for its strong class- and gender-based investment in vernacular education, and for the way that she overtly politicizes questions about how grammar should be taught.

Our understanding of Fisher is deeply indebted to both Cajka and Rodríguez-Gil, whose work has significantly expanded knowledge of Fisher's life and educational philosophy.[103] As Cajka points out,[104] Fisher wanted her work to be intelligible to those "without a classical education," and her *Grammar* makes a vehement case in favor of the vernacular:

> It is a frequent, nay almost generally received notion, that without learning Latin or other languages, we cannot arrive at a thorough knowledge of English. In answer to which, I beg leave to observe, that the reason why those among us, who have learned Latin, &c. are greater adepts in our own language than those who have learned English at random, or ungrammatically, is entirely from the knowledge of grammar in general; which they acquire by learning such or such languages by it: for though every language has its peculiar properties or idioms, the nature of grammar is, in a great measure, the same in all tongues, as before observed.[105]

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[102] Popularity as determined by editions and reprints. Ash's grammar went through forty-one editions before 1800 (Alston, 32–38); Lowth's saw "at least forty" before 1838 (Michael, *The Teaching of English*, 507); and Murray's as many as 133 by 1864 (Alston, 102).

[103] See especially Maria E. Rodríguez-Gil, "Ann Fisher: First Female Grammarian," *Historical Sociolinguistics and Sociohistorical Linguistics* 2 (2002): no pagination.

[104] Cajka, "The Forgotten Women Grammarians of Eighteenth-Century England," 64–65.

[105] Ann Fisher, *A Practical New Grammar, with Exercises of Bad English*, Seventh Edition (Newcastle: Printed for Thomas Slack, 1762), v–vi, *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

Unlike Elstob's *Rudiments*, Fisher's *Grammar* does not immediately specify the gender of "those who have learned English at random," and although Fisher advocates for a more inclusionary system of grammatical education, she is unusual among female grammarians in that she does not identify herself or her audience as *women*. Where Elstob uses her full name on the title page of *Rudiments*, Fisher calls herself only "A. Fisher" and adopts a neutral, or what Cajka has called masculine,[106] authorial voice throughout her writing. The "masculine" quality of Fisher's work is further underscored by her promotion of the sex-indefinite *he*, which was originally credited to John Kirkby,[107] but which Tieken-Boon van Ostade has shown to be Fisher's own innovation.[108] Nonetheless, this lack of an overt female framework does not hinder Fisher in her efforts to expose the exclusionary practices of Latinate grammatical instruction, and her argument in favor of "those who have learned English at random" strongly resembles Elstob's defense of "those whose Education, hath not allow'd them an Acquaintance with the Grammars of other Languages" (*Rudiments*, iii).

Eleven years after the initial publication of her *Grammar*, however, Fisher is less shy about gendering her work, touting the benefits of a vernacular grammar for her own sex in her collection of educational essays, *The Pleasing Instructor*:

> Grammatical learning is at present, perhaps, too much out of fashion, especially among the ladies. Most of our English Grammars are so dependent upon the Latin, that they

[106] Cajka, "Ann Fisher: Reforming Education for 'the mere English Scholar,'" *European Romantic Review* vol. 22 no. 5 (October 2011), 583.

[107] Ann Bodine, "Androcentrism in prescriptive grammar: Singular 'they,' sex-indefinite 'he,' and 'he or she,'" *Language in Society* 4 (1975): 129–46.

[108] Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade writes, "It is therefore ironical that it is always Kirkby who is cited disapprovingly as being the first grammarian to provide the rule on the use of sex-indefinite *he*, for the rule may be found *verbatim* in Ann Fisher's grammar which possibly even provided the source of Kirkby's rule," in "John Kirkby and *The Practice of Speaking and Writing English*: Identification of a Manuscript," *Leeds Studies in English* 23 (1992), 167.

> appear only translations of them…Therefore it becomes necessary that a practical English Grammar should be consistent with itself, and independent of the Latin.[109]

In this quotation, Fisher directly links the lack of education among women to the overreliance of grammars on Latin. Later in this same essay she laments the fact that women have been rendered "lame" by the absence of vernacular education:

> Girls being thus left lame in their learning, are in a great measure incapable of improving themselves further, in spite of all the pains that writers have taken, or may take, till the obstacle [lack of grammatical knowledge] be removed: And still, to aggravate the case, they are mostly put to sewing, or similar articles, under the care of some mistress, who is perhaps utterly incapable of assisting them in the pursuit of knowledge…These impediments are very lamentable, especially as they occur in the very nick of time that a young lady should be taught to think, reflect, and form a taste of life in [*sic*]. (*Pleasing Instructor*, ix)

Much like Mary Wollstonecraft would later argue in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Fisher suggests that women's minds are endangered by the absence of a rational education; unlike Wollstonecraft, however, Fisher points to grammatical learning as the cornerstone of this rational education. Thus, where Fisher's *Grammar* declined to specify the sex of readers who might benefit from it, *The Pleasing Instructor* not only names women explicitly but also identifies grammar as key to elevating women's status in society.

Although Elstob's *Rudiments* makes a stronger case for female education, Fisher's *Grammar* is in many ways a bolder project, advocating grammatical reform both on the page and in the classroom. While Elstob retained the terms and categories of Latin grammar, Fisher

[109] A. [Ann] Fisher, *The Pleasing Instructor: or, Entertaining Moralist* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1756), viii, hereafter cited parenthetically in the text. A footnote to this passage refers readers to "Fisher's English Grammar."

participated in the radical overhaul of these conventions, using the "native metalanguage"[110] for English grammar that Michael calls a "vernacular system."[111] Moreover, Fisher's was one of the first "reforming grammars": in his list of "Reforming grammars advocating both the fourfold system and a vernacular terminology," Michael includes only six grammars (Gildon and Brightland first among them) that precede the publication of Fisher's *New Grammar*.[112] She also introduced, for the first time, "examples of bad English," an exercise that invites students to correct grammatical errors. In addition to these technical modifications, Fisher also hoped to improve the practices of those responsible for teaching children, as she makes clear in the introductory essay of *The Pleasing Instructor*: "An austere or learned pedant has sometimes whipped *Latin*, *Greek*, &c. into a lad, whose very disgust to it increased, perhaps with the acquisition thereof" (*Pleasing Instructor*, iii). Making Latin and Greek instructors the target of her critique, this quotation is suggestive of how closely Fisher aligns content and method: much as she disputes the value of Latin grammar, she also finds fault with its teachers, whom she represents as ineffective—and, as Cajka argues, male—pedants.[113] The above quotation contends that "austere" teaching methods instill knowledge at the expense of enjoyment, and a few pages later Fisher expands on this sentiment, defining the risks of bad instruction in much starker terms: "Narrow reserve and pedantic moroseness have passed for sound wisdom and profound discretion; instructors of youth have degenerated into corrupters and depravers of it, authority into tyranny, and submission into slavery" (*Pleasing Instructor*, vii). Drawing on her considerable experience as a teacher, Fisher condemns traditional language instruction, thereby

[110] Tieken-Boon van Ostade, "Female grammarians."

[111] Michael, *English Grammatical Categories*, 258–59.

[112] Michael, *English Grammatical Categories*, 509–10.

[113] Cajka, "The Forgotten Women Grammarians of Eighteenth-Century England," 37–40.

representing the vernacular as not only serving a new kind of student but also as requiring a new kind of teacher. What is more, Fisher's language in this quotation begins to politicize this debate about the vernacular: by depicting practitioners of the old way as defenders of tyranny and slavery, Fisher implicitly affiliates champions of the new vernacular with freedom and emancipation.

In addition to promoting the vernacular and advocating pedagogical reform, Fisher also exemplifies the pronounced preference among female grammarians for the question-and-answer method. Fisher's *New Grammar*, for instance, is written entirely in this format, using questions to deliver each new piece of information:

> Q. *What do you mean by a* proper Dipthong?
>
> *A.* A *Proper Dipthong* is where both Vowels are sounded; as *oi* in *Voice*; *ou*, in *House*.
>
> Q. *Do they always retain their mixed Sound?*
>
> *A.* Not always; for, *ai* is sometimes turned into the Sound of *e* or *i* short; as *Fountain*…
>
> (*Grammar*, 11)

Although reminiscent of other dialogic forms—Socratic dialogues, Renaissance dialogues, and dialogues of the dead[114]—the question-and-answer format has long been associated with grammatical instruction. Originating with Donatus's fourth-century *ars minor*,[115] the method enjoyed continued popularity throughout the eighteenth century and appeared in some of the period's most influential grammars, including James Greenwood's *An Essay Toward a Practical*

[114] For more on the predecessors to the question-and-answer format, see Cohen, "The Role of 'Familiar Format,'" 108.

[115] Emma Vorlat, "On the History of English Teaching Grammars," *Sprachtheorien der Neuziet III/2*, ed. Peter Schmitter (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2007), 518.

English Grammar (1711) and Joseph Priestley's *The Rudiments of English Grammar* (1761).[116] Fisher's "Q" and "A" presentation is typical of this method, although some grammars by men replace "Q" and "A" with "master" and "scholar."[117] Still other grammars present the majority of their information without questions, but include a list of questions at the end of each section (or at the back of the grammar) for instructors to use when assessing students.[118]

Among male grammarians there is no clear preference for the question-and-answer method: fewer than half of the male grammarians listed in R. C. Alston's *English Grammars Written in English* (1965) use question-and-answer. Among female grammarians, however, these numbers shift significantly: although there are many fewer female grammarians (ten compared to their 144 male counterparts), nearly all these women opt to employ the question-and-answer format in their grammars, with only two, Mrs. Taylor and Dorothea DuBois, favoring an affirmative (as opposed to interrogative) presentation. Indeed, even those grammarians whom Karlijn Navest has shown to be influenced by Ash's non-interrogative *Grammatical Institutes*—including Ellin Devis and Mrs. M. C. Edwards[119]—assimilate Ash's material into a question-and-answer format.[120] Thus, although the question-and-answer format extends beyond female-authored grammars, I suggest that the strong bias in favor of this format among female grammarians is exemplary of the special kinship between women and conversational learning

[116] Both these grammars went through nine editions by 1800. See Alston, 20 and 40–41. For more on Priestley, see Robin Straaijer, *Joseph Priestley, Grammarian: Late Modern English Normativism and Usage in a Sociohistorical Context* (Utrecht: LOT, 2011).

[117] See Anslem Bayly, *A Plain and Complete Grammar with The English Accidence* (London, 1772); John Entick, *Speculum Latinum* (London, 1728).

[118] See John Collyer, *The General Principles of Grammar* (Nottingham, 1735); Samuel Saxon, *The English Scholar's Assistant* (Reading, 1737).

[119] Karlijn Navest, *John Ash and the Rise of the Children's Grammar* (Utrecht: LOT, 2011), 144–50.

[120] The majority of Devis's *Accidence* (1775) and Mrs. M.C. Edwards's *Short Compendium of English Grammar* (1796) are written in Q&A.

that emerges in the second half of the century. Conversational learning is not merely instruction delivered in the vernacular, but rather a pedagogical method that advocates familiar, quotidian dialogue between teacher and pupil; and several grammars by women demonstrate this shift toward conversation by transforming the traditional "Q" and "A" into narrated dialogues.[121] In an effort to uncover the way that conversation becomes an instrument of female authority—as Piozzi will claim at the end of the century—the final section of this chapter looks at the coincidence of the movement away from Latin with the promotion of conversational learning in female-authored texts.

Lady Ellenor Fenn, 1744–1813

The tendencies we have observed in Elstob and Fisher—the shift toward the vernacular, the promotion of learning for women, and the assertion of female lexical expertise—coalesce in the work of the intriguingly polymathic Lady Ellenor Fenn. Whereas Elstob and Fisher were anomalies in their respective eras, Fenn's writing is characteristic of two key trends of the late eighteenth century: the increasing visibility of the female author and the emergence of the "mother teacher."[122] In contrast to Fisher, Fenn was not a schoolmistress, although she was involved in the opening of two schools.[123] Accordingly, Fenn shifts the locus of instruction away from the classroom and toward the domestic sphere, and her many books tend to feature (with very few exceptions) a rational mother responsible for educating her children. Fenn was born in Suffolk in 1743 to a prominent family, and she married an antiquarian, John Fenn, in 1766. The

[121] See, for instance, Mrs. Eves's *Grammatical Play-Thing* (1800) or Murry's *Mentoria* (1778).

[122] Mitzi Myers, "Romancing the Moral Tale: Maria Edgeworth and the Problematics of Pedagogy," *Romanticism and Children's Literature in Nineteenth-Century England*, ed. James Holt McGavran Jr. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1991). See also Cajka, "Eighteenth-century teacher-grammarians."

[123] Fenn helped open a Sunday school (where she taught a class) and an industrial school for women and children from the lower class. See Navest, *John Ash and the Rise of the Children's Grammar*, 156.

couple had no children, but they adopted and raised an heiress who was orphaned at age eleven, and Fenn took a particular interest in her nieces and nephews.[124] Inspired by Anna Laetitia Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* (1778)—which many scholars cite as the first and most influential children's book—Fenn began writing books for children in the 1770s and began publishing in 1783.[125] Her numerous books (twenty-seven in total) enjoyed considerable success: *The Child's Grammar* (1795),[126] for instance, had twenty-six editions, and its complement, *The Mother's Grammar* (c.1795/1796), was equally popular with twenty-one.[127] Fenn's work showcases her broad interests, ranging from grammars and dictionaries to books about natural history and texts that delineate "rational" games for children. Fenn's writings are especially notable for their explicit interest in educating—and, I would argue, elevating—young mothers; indeed most of her books for children double as manuals for mothers. *The Child's Grammar* (1795), for instance, "is designed to enable ladies, who may not have attended to the subject themselves, to instruct their children in the rudiments of grammar at a very early age."[128] Similarly, *The Rational Dame* (1786) professes Fenn's "ambition to have my little volume be the pocket companion of young mothers when they walk abroad with their children."[129]

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[124] David Stoker, "Fenn, Ellenor, Lady Fenn (1744–1813)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2005 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/9279, accessed 10 Dec 2014].

[125] For more on Fenn, see Andrea Immel, "'Mistress of Infantine Language': Lady Ellenor Fenn, Her Set of Toys, and the 'Education of Each Moment,'" *Children's Literature* 25 (1997): 215–28; Karlijn Navest, "'Borrowing a few passages': Lady Ellenor Fenn and her use of sources," in *Grammars, Grammarians and Grammar-Writing*; and Percy, "Disciplining Women?"

[126] There is some debate about the publication date of *The Child's Grammar*. For a full explanation see Navest, *John Ash and the Rise of the Children's Grammar*, 173. See Cajka for a complete list of Fenn's works, "The Forgotten Women Grammarians of Eighteenth-Century England," 252–58.

[127] Alston records the date of publication as 1798, but Navest cites additional information that places this date around 1795 or 1796. See Alston, 104; Navest, *John Ash and the Rise of the Children's Grammar*, 180.

[128] Ellenor Fenn, *The Child's Grammar*, 35th ed. (London, 1831), v.

[129] Ellenor Fenn, *The Rational Dame* (London, 1783), x–xi.

Additionally, she sometimes targets mothers even more directly, as in *The Mother's Grammar*, *The Friend of Mothers* (1799), and the "Address to Mothers" that appears at the back of *Fables* (1783). As Fenn's work demonstrates, grammars by women gradually shift genres over the course of the century—from Elstob's scholarly work, to Fisher's schoolbook, to Fenn's children's book—thus exposing an inverse relationship between the prominence of grammars by women and the universality of these same texts. Fenn's *Child's Grammar*, for instance, suggests that as grammars by women became more common in the eighteenth century, they also became more specialized, as Fenn's grammar is aimed at a much narrower audience (young, probably upper-class children) than Fisher's.[130] Nonetheless, in spite of her more specialized audience, Fenn should be seen as the inheritor of Elstob's and Fisher's efforts to "improve" women through vernacular education; moreover, Fenn expands this project by attempting to render women capable of improving others (their children) as well as themselves.

By the time Fenn begins writing her books, this shift to vernacular education is firmly established; but despite the successful movement away from Latinate instruction, the concomitant debate about pedagogical methods continues in the work of Fenn and her peers. Although her *Child's Grammar* and *Mother's Grammar* both use Latin systems of English grammar (in comparison to Fisher's vernacular system),[131] Fenn routinely attacks an "old" methodology that she usually identifies as rote memorization. Much as Fisher condemned the pedantry she associated with Latin instruction, Fenn diagnoses the problem this way: "when we are taken under tuition, what are we taught? to repeat by rote what we neither understand nor

[130] For more the class of Fenn's intended readership, see Percy, "Disciplining Women," 113.

[131] Michael, *English Grammatical Categories*, 223–25.

regard."[132] Echoing Fisher's criticisms of the "morose" pedant, Fenn claims that conversational learning will be more effective than rote memorization because it is both more enjoyable for the child and more natural.[133] The belief that conversation should be the vehicle for more enjoyable learning suffuses the literature of the late eighteenth century; Maria Edgeworth, for instance, repeats and elaborates Fenn's sentiment:

> Much that would be tiresome and insufferable to young people, if offered by preceptors in a didactic tone, will be eagerly accepted when suggested in conversation, especially in conversations between themselves: in these there is always a certain proportion of nonsense; an alloy, which is necessary to make sense work well. Children can go on talking to one another much longer than they can bear to hear the address, however wise or eloquent, of any grown person.[134]

With the recurrence of the dull, dry, and overly prescriptive instructor, this passage recalls not only Fenn but also Fisher, thus invoking a kind of shorthand for the rejection of male pedagogical authority in favor of female.

This confluence of grammarians and educators is important for at least two reasons: first, it points to one of the ways that these women claimed legitimacy for themselves, marshaling traditional sources of female authority in order to intervene in the linguistic debates of the century; second, by situating female grammarians and lexicographers within the wider field of female-authored children's books, it becomes apparent that these texts share a reliance on the

[132] Fenn, *Rational Dame*, ii.

[133] This regard for the student's enjoyment originates in Locke's suggestion that "learning might be made a play and recreation to children," *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*.

[134] Maria Edgeworth, *Harry and Lucy Concluded* (London, 1825), xi–xii.

vernacular and an insistence on verbal instruction.[135] Fisher's *Grammar* uses a question-and-answer format, but nothing quite so conversational as in the almost play-like grammars that surface toward the end of the century, a difference that can be at least partly attributed to a difference in audience: Fisher wrote for a general student, whereas Fenn, for instance, began her career writing for very young children.[136] Four years after Fisher published the first edition of her *Grammar*, Sarah Fielding published *The Governess; or, The Little Female Academy* (1749), the first novel for children, which counts dramatic dialogue among its various narrative styles. Fielding's inclusion of this conversational method in her work presages the strong preference for this format that characterizes the majority of children's writing by 1800.

Almost thirty years after the publication of *The Governess*, Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* adapts Fielding's dialogues and the question-and-answer format common to grammars for verbal instruction between a mother and her child:

> When tomorrow is come, today will be yesterday.
>
> I do not understand that.
>
> What is today?
>
> Monday.
>
> And tomorrow?
>
> Tuesday.

[135] For more on educational texts in this period see Mary Hilton, *Women and the Shaping of the Nation's Young: Education and Public Doctrine in Britain, 1750–1850* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); Mary Hilton and Jill Shefrin, eds., *Educating the Child in Enlightenment Britain: Beliefs, Cultures, Practices* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009); Alan Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[136] Fenn's best-known book, *Cobwebs to Catch Flies* (1783), was written for children ages 3 to 5. See Navest, *John Ash and the Rise of the Children's Grammar*, 156–57.

Then, on Tuesday, Monday will be yesterday.[137]

Mitzi Myers points to Barbauld as the pioneer mother-teacher, arguing that Barbauld wields both motherhood and the vernacular as tools of authority.[138] But Myers, looking only at children's literature, neglects to consider the ways that a growing tradition of female grammarians may have also informed the evolution of the mother-teacher. Indeed, in another article Myers cites Barbauld's contributions to the conversational pedagogy of the Edgeworths but fails to mention Fenn's influence on the same, even though the famous father-daughter team was undoubtedly familiar with Fenn's work.[139] What is more, it is likely that Fenn influenced Barbauld herself, as *Evenings at Home* (1792)—a collaboration between Barbauld and her brother, John Aikin—more closely resembles Fenn's *Rational Sports* (1783) than Barbauld's own *Lessons for Children*. Barbauld's interest in conversation was probably informed by her affiliation with Warrington Academy—a school in the Dissenting tradition, and where her father was a tutor, that employed conversation as a central tenet of its pedagogy.[140] In *Lessons for Children* Barbauld's reimagining of the traditional question-and-answer format as *conversation* gives special privilege to the vernacular, presenting information not merely in dialogue but in a

[137] Barbauld, no page.

[138] Mitzi Myers, "Of Mice and Mothers: Mrs Barbauld's 'New Walk' and Gendered Codes in Children's Literature," in *Feminine Principles and Women's Experience in American Composition and Rhetoric*, ed. Louise Wetherbee Phelps and Janet Emig (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 261.

[139] The beginning of their *Rational Primer* (1799) provides evidence of the Edgeworths' familiarity with Fenn (here referred to as "Mrs. Teachwell"): "Since this book was printed, Mrs. Teachwell's Spelling-Book has fallen into the Author's hands. Had he seen it sooner, he would have availed himself of the excellent arrangement which she has followed;—indeed the whole book shews accurate knowledge of the subject, and the preface contains good sense, conveyed in good writing. - - - -If this primer should fall into the hands of Mrs. Teachwell, the author would esteem it as a great favour if she, or any of her intelligent friends, would try his method, and acquaint him with the result of her experience." For more on Maria Edgeworth and conversation see Mitzi Myers, "'Anecdotes from the Nursery' in Maria Edgeworth's *Practical Education* (1798): Learning from Children 'Abroad and At Home,'" *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 60, no. 2 (1999): 220–50.

[140] For more on Barbauld and conversation see Cohen, 109; Anne Janowitz, "Amiable and radical sociability: Anna Barbauld's 'free familiar conversation,'" in *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770–1840*, ed. Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 62–81.

recognizably spoken form. Moreover, insofar as Barbauld casts the mother in role of educator, we begin to see how Elstob and Fisher's philosophical investment in their mother tongue is rendered literal by the female educators who succeed them, as they shift the responsibility for language instruction not only to women but, specifically, to mothers.

Several of Fenn's texts rely on same conversational method evident in Barbauld, but Fenn makes her philosophical investment in this method explicit, presenting conversation as the means through which mothers can both claim and exert the authority that accompanies their position as teacher. Fenn defines "dialogues" as "the method which it is believed would succeed in leading children to a relish of knowledge,"[141] and her texts range from simply encouraging women to converse with their children to presenting scripted conversations. Fenn's most popular book, *Cobwebs to Catch Flies; or, Dialogues in Short Sentences Adapted to Small Children* (1783) very closely resembles Barbauld's *Lessons*—with which Fenn was familiar—in that it is comprised of a series of conversations between "Mamma" and "Boy" (unlike Barbauld's text, however, Fenn's also includes conversations between "Mamma" and "Girl"). *School Occurrences* (1783) features conversation even more prominently, including a page that lists the cast of characters, as well as a series of exchanges that are not only formatted like a play, but in which a narrator never intervenes, and *Rational Sports* (1783) maintains this same theatrical structure throughout its eighty-eight pages. Consider, for example, this scene in *Rational Sports*:

> BARTLE. I know that Sugar is the juice of a Cane; but where does it grow?
>
> *Mrs.* WORTHY. It is very much cultivated in the *East Indies*, but more in the islands of *America.*—Nutmeg, you know, is the seed of a tree, one of its coverings is Mace; but who knows where this tree grows?

[141] Ellenor Fenn, *Rational Sports, or The Game of Trades and Commerce* (London, 1823), 15.

JANE. I do not; pray tell us.[142]

As in this scene between a mother and her children, Fenn's conversational texts cast mothers in the role of both facilitator and expert, helping their children navigate a field of knowledge while also providing information and correctives at key moments. Even in instances where Fenn does not present the content of her book in a fully conversational form, conversation is still important to her instructional method. Fenn's *Child's Grammar*, for instance, is one of the few grammars by women that diverges from a strict question-and-answer format, following John Ash's example instead,[143] but conversation still appears in a series of oral exams that Fenn provides for mothers to administer to their children (entitled "Full Examination" and "Queries to the Child's Grammar"). Likewise, Fenn's *Spelling Book* (1787) is also designed with conversation in mind: in the preface, Fenn encourages mothers to use the book as a springboard to conversation, and she includes columns of words under the heading "conversation" (fig. 4), presumably as a starting point for discourse between mother and child.

In Fenn's texts, the conversational method not only confers authority on women, but confers a certain *kind* of authority on them: rational authority. Consider, for instance, the titles of two of Fenn's works: first, *The Rational Dame; or Hints Toward Supplying Prattle for Children* (1786); second, *Rational Sports in Dialogues Passing Among the Children of a Family. Designed as a Hint to Mothers How They May Inform the Minds of Their Little People* (1783). In both cases, Fenn yokes conversation ("prattle" or "dialogues") to reason ("rational dame," "rational sports") and identifies *mothers* as the facilitators of this rational discourse.

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[142] Fenn, *Rational Sports*, 29.

[143] Karlijn Navest, "Ash's *Grammatical Institutes* and 'Mrs Teachwell's Library for her young ladies,'" in *Perspectives on Prescriptivism*, ed. Joan C. Beal, Carmela Nocera, and Massimo Sturiale (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008). Ash's *Grammatical Institutes* (1760) was written two years earlier than Lowth's *Short Introduction* (1762). Although both were written with children in mind, Ash's was thought more appropriate for the instruction of young children, and thus became known as an introduction to Lowth's text. For more information see Navest (2011), 10–11.

The GOOD CHILD's DELIGHT.

LESSON XV.

A-gain	lit-tle	ſad-ly
al-ways	lov-ed	ſiſ-ter
an-y	mam-ma	ſor-ry
broth-er	na-med	ſtop-ped
com-fort	par-ty	tri-ed
dri-ed	pic-ture	u-ſed
fright-en-ed	play-ing	ver-y
go-ing	per-ſon	walk-ing

SHORT CONVERSATIONS.

CONVERSATION I.

A-bout	din-ner	pun-iſh
al-ways	ev-e-ry	rea-ſon
an-gry	hand-ker-chief	re-mem-ber
an-ſwer	hiſ-to-ry	ſto-ry
ba-ſin	in-deed	tum-ble
be-cauſe	mam-ma	wa-ter
be-lieve	naugh-ty	win-dow
de-ſerve	pa-pa	with-out

Figure 4. Fenn includes a series of tables labeled "conversations," presumably intended as the basis for conversations that employ progressively more sophisticated vocabulary. Fenn, *Spelling Book* (London, 1787).

Additionally, Fenn exhorts mothers to educate themselves and take themselves seriously, and she presents this model of didactic motherhood as an alternative to feminine frivolity: "I write for *real Mothers*, not ladies who leave their offspring to imbibe the follies of the kitchen, whilst they roam to places of diversion."[144] Fenn's juxtaposition of "real mothers" with "ladies" is surely symptomatic of the growing anti-aristocratic sentiments of the period, but it also strongly resembles the criticisms that Wollstonecraft would levy against her sex some ten years later. Some twenty-first-century critics have urged caution in progressive readings of Fenn, arguing that such interpretations minimize Fenn's contributions to the cult of domesticity, in which "women's identity [is] relational, and their always secondary social value contingent on their ability to 'civilize' men."[145] Indeed, as one might expect from a movement in which the evangelist Hannah More was a prominent figure, there is a strong conservative bent to Fenn's investment in the mother-teacher, and her books are full of sentences that betray a traditional view of womanhood: for example, "The REAL MOTHER finds her reward in the attachment of her son; does she need a farther? she meets it in her husband's eye."[146] This conservatism, however, should be offset by her continual efforts to cast women as rational figures of authority: like Wollstonecraft, Fenn uses motherhood as a justification for liberating women from ignorance and superficiality; and like Elstob and Fisher, Fenn recommends the vernacular as a tool of this liberation.

Finally, then, by the time Mary Wollstonecraft and Maria Edgeworth begin writing books for the instruction of children, they have completely assimilated conversation as a pedagogical

[144] Fenn, *Rational Sports*, 11.

[145] Percy, "Disciplining Women?," 112–13.

[146] Fenn, *Rational Sports*, 12.

method.[147] As Michèle Cohen has noted,[148] Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories from Real Life* (1791) adapts conversation for prose, narrating instructional conversations between a teacher and her pupils and, in so doing, modeling the conversational method for the reader: Mrs. Mason, Wollstonecraft's paradigmatic instructor, tells her young charges, "as we walk along attend to what I say, and make the best answers you can; and do you, Caroline, join in the conversation."[149] Like Fenn, Wollstonecraft imagines that her book will serve the dual function of "assist[ing] the teacher as well as the pupil"[150]; and in a further echo of Fenn, Wollstonecraft emphasizes the importance of the mother's role in shaping the child's early education, especially with regard to language:

> In the nursery too, they are taught to speak; and there they not only hear nonsense, but that nonsense retailed out in such silly, affected tones as must disgust;—yet these are the tones which the child first imitates, and its innocent playful manner renders them tolerable, if not pleasing; but afterwards they are not easily got the better of—nay, many women always retain the pretty prattle of the nursery, and do not forget to lisp, when they have learnt to languish.[151]

Wollstonecraft's characteristic critique of women who "lisp" and "languish" takes up the mantle of Fenn's educational project and suggests the need for an alternative, rational mother, whose conversation would enrich her children rather than degrade them.

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[147] For more on Mary Wollstonecraft and education see Mitzi Myers, "Impeccable Governesses, Rational Dames, and Moral Mothers: Mary Wollstonecraft and the Female Tradition in Georgian Children's Books," *Children's Literature* 14 (1986): 31–59. For more on Maria Edgeworth and conversation see Myers (1999).

[148] Cohen, "The Role of 'Familiar Format,'" 113–14.

[149] Mary Wollstonecraft, *Original Stories from Real Life; with Conversations, Calculated to Regulate the Affections, and Form the Mind to Truth and Goodness* (London, 1791), 3.

[150] Wollstonecraft, *Original Stories*, v.

[151] Mary Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (London, 1787), 8.

Wollstonecraft wrote numerous reviews of children's literature and books about children's education, including one of Fenn's *Juvenile Tatler* (1789). Wollstonecraft's (unfavorable) review comments directly on the conversational quality of the text:

> When such a useful improving series of dialogues as the Theatre of Education, by Madame Genlis, may be read either in French or English, by our young ladies, we cannot recommend those before us; for they do not contain instruction for children, and can scarcely be intended for youth.[152]

Though Wollstonecraft objects, in this instance, to Fenn's book, she does not discount the virtues of the conversational method: Genlis's *Theatre of Education* (1779–80), which Wollstonecraft calls "a useful improving series of dialogues," is a didactic play that, like Fenn's *Rational Sports*, uses conversation to impart information. Moreover, Wollstonecraft's support for the conversational method extends beyond her reviews and her own books for children: in the proposal for reforming England's national system of education that she includes in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Wollstonecraft follows Elstob, Fisher, and Fenn in their critique of rote memorization—which results, she says, in "parrot-like prattle"—and instead advocates instruction via conversation.[153] Wollstonecraft's incorporation of these measures in her famous treatise speaks to the success of Elstob's, Fisher's, and Fenn's projects: by the turn of the century, the vernacular, conversation, and conversational pedagogy had become not only sources of female authority but also important tools in the effort to recast women as rational and intelligent.

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[152] Mary Wollstonecraft, *Analytical Review*, vol. 4, 1789, in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Volume 7*, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler (New York: New York University Press, 1989), 123.

[153] Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Volume 5*, 240.

Conclusion

This two-hundred-fifty-year linguistic tradition—beginning with Withals's *Dictionarie* (1553) and ending with the female pedagogues of the late eighteenth century—makes visible a peculiar inversion of our expectations: as books proliferated and literacy increased, dictionaries and grammars became more attentive to spoken language, not less. This shift might be accounted for, at least in part, by the fact that groups of people who had been excluded from grammar and lexicography (particularly women) gained greater influence in these fields, especially toward the end of the eighteenth century. Indeed, of the four dissenting genres this chapter considers (pronouncing dictionaries, cant dictionaries, American dictionaries, and grammars by women), all four are written by (or record the language of) people on the margins; even Sheridan, who expressed a strong preference for the "civilized" and "polite" language of the metropolis, was an Irishman. Moreover, in resisting dominant linguistic trends, these dictionaries and grammars become sites of political resistance themselves, from Francis Grose locating quintessential Englishness in the speech of the lower classes to Ann Fisher rejecting the "tyranny" of male pedagogues. Although more recent discussions of eighteenth-century language have begun to expose the persistent influence of speech, Johnson's legacy has continued to obscure the many eighteenth-century lexicographers and grammarians who favored a speech-based model of standard English. This chapter has attempted to rectify this oversight by identifying some of the linguistic subgenres in which speech flourished. Moreover, this chapter has attempted to articulate some of what is at stake in the effort to standardize a language: to the well-trodden ground of class and nationality, I have endeavored to elucidate the gendered implications of the way that linguistic boundaries are drawn.

Chapter Two

Boswell's Auricular Confessions: Constituting the Eighteenth-Century Self through Speech

In a 1768 journal entry, twenty-seven-year-old James Boswell reflects on the evolution of his mind, using the extended metaphor of a lodging house as a way of describing his self-construction:

> Formerly my mind was a lodging-house for all ideas who chose to put up there, so that it was at the mercy of accident, for I had no fixed mind of my own. Now my mind is a house where, though the street rooms and the upper floors are open to strangers, yet there is always a settled family in the back parlour and sleeping-closet behind it; and this family can judge of the ideas which come to lodge . . . The ideas—my lodgers—are of all sorts . . . Divines of all sorts have been with me, and have ever disturbed me. When I first took up house, Presbyterian ministers used to make me melancholy with dreary tones. Methodists next shook my passions. *Romish clergy filled me with solemn ideas, and, although their statues and many movable ornaments are gone, yet they drew some pictures upon my walls with such deep strokes that they still remain. They are, indeed, the only agreeable ones*.[1]

Emphasizing interaction with others as a key feature of self-knowledge, the lodging house is a particularly apt metaphor for Boswell's approach to selfhood: the "family" of Boswell's mind comes into constant contact with "strangers" of every variety, and Boswell is the product of these

[1] Frank Brady and Frederick A. Pottle, eds., *Boswell in Search of a Wife, 1766–1769* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956), 137–38 (italics mine), hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

interactions. Although Boswell claims that the lodging house and its strangers are mere symbols of his mental vicissitudes, the power of this metaphor resides in the fact that it closely resembles Boswell's actual practice of seeking out interlocutors, projecting himself onto them, and interpreting or modifying himself as a result of their response. What is more, in its emphasis on the "deep strokes" of the "Romish clergy," this passage points to the particular importance of Catholic interlocutors in Boswell's self-fashioning and, thus, brings together two strains of Boswell's writing that are central to my inquiry: the conversational and the Catholic.

In this chapter I propose that Catholicism's influence on Boswell is visible in the prominent confessional bent of his writing, which is marked especially by a tendency to seek out mediators and look to others in order to better understand himself. Were it not for Boswell's frequent recourse to a Catholic confessional lexicon in his journals and letters, this connection might be considered a tenuous one. That said, Boswell's habitual invocation of both the language and structure of auricular confession suggests that his reliance on others to facilitate self-reflection could be a byproduct of his lifelong attraction to the Catholic Church and, thus, that a "Catholic" autobiographical framework is worth exploring as a counterpoint to the more traditional Protestant history of the genre.[2]

In designating Boswell's autobiographical practice as "Catholic" I do not suggest that he participates in the modest tradition of Roman Catholic autobiography in Britain. In the seventeenth century, when Protestant autobiography was burgeoning, similar writings by Catholics were increasingly rare and tended to be descriptions of religious life rather than deeply

[2] See especially George Starr, *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965); Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957). See also Philippe Lejeune, "The Autobiographical Pact," *On Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); Felicity Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); James Olney, *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972); and Wayne Shumaker, *English Autobiography: Its Emergence, Materials, and Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954).

introspective reflections on the soul. To this point Paul Delany writes,

> There is a certain barrenness and holding-back of emotion in the group of autobiographies I have been describing; but given the desperate political plight of the British Catholic Church it is hardly surprising that the great devotional and meditative Catholic tradition bore little fruit in Britain at this time.[3]

Indeed, in their "barrenness" and "holding-back," these Catholic autobiographies bear little resemblance to Boswell's voluminous and effusive writings. Rather, in calling Boswell's confessions "Catholic," my analysis responds to a long history of literary criticism that identifies life writing as "Protestant" and locates autobiography's origins in "introspective Puritanism."[4] Although Boswell is undeniably drawn to introspection, his journals depict a mode of self-inquiry that looks *out* as well as in; and in light of Catholicism's usually strong reliance on earthly mediators, there might seem to be more of the Catholic than the Protestant in Boswell's persistent outward turn. Describing the way that diaries foster a multiplicity of selves, Felicity Nussbaum writes that, "dividing the self from the self, the diary sets out an alternative self to ponder"[5]; but for Boswell, the comparison between himself and *others*, especially mentors or priest-like figures, is at least as important as the comparison between his various selves.

Treating auricular confession as a trope throughout Boswell's journals, this chapter examines the confessional tenor of many of Boswell's most significant relationships, including famous conquests like Samuel Johnson, General Pasquale de Paoli, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Voltaire, as well as close friends like William Temple, love interests like the Dutch writer Belle

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[3] Paul Delany, *British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 46. For more on the status of Catholics in eighteenth-century Britain, see David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

[4] Shumaker, 29.

[5] Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject*, 27.

de Zuylen and his future wife Margaret Montgomerie, and clients like the "sheep-stealer" John Reid. Spanning the years between Boswell's arrival in London in 1762 and his marriage to Margaret in 1769—with the sole exception of the Reid episode, which takes place in 1774—this chapter elucidates the persistent recurrence of confessional language in Boswell's record of his conversations with his many interlocutors, as well as in his letters and in his writing about these relationships. Through an analysis of how and when Boswell deploys the language of confession, we come to understand what might be called the "collaborative" nature of eighteenth-century selfhood: though autobiography can give the illusion of a self formed in isolation, Boswell's affinity for conversational exchange points to the crucial role of interlocutors in constructing that self.

The phrase "collaborative autobiography" has previously been used by Philippe Lejeune to describe first-person, oral histories that are transcribed, edited, and arranged by another party.[6] Although Lejeune's usage of this term could easily be applied to some of Boswell's writing—notably in the record of his strange relationship with Reid—I will focus on a mode of collaboration in which the autobiographer himself invokes the participation and feedback of those around him. In his confessions, Boswell attempts to startle, shock, move, and connect with his interlocutors, persistently casting them in the role of priest and closely attending to their responses in order to better understand himself. Consequently, though these conversations provide marvelous windows into the lives of luminaries like Johnson and Rousseau, they often reveal more about Boswell than they do about his mentors.

This chapter begins with a discussion of traditional "Protestant" autobiography, charting some of the ways that Boswell's confessional writing diverges from this template, and then turns to a brief history of auricular confession and Boswell's affiliation with Roman Catholicism,

[6] Lejeune, "The Autobiography of Those Who Do Not Write," in *On Autobiography*.

furnishing a Catholic lexicon on which the rest of the chapter will draw. In assessing the role of confession in Boswell's writing, I look first at his relationship with Rousseau, which I argue forms the pattern on which all other confessional relationships are based. I then turn to relationships that conform to this Rousseauian pattern—other mentors like Johnson, Paoli, Temple, and Voltaire—and finally conclude with relationships that reconfigure the confessional dynamic, including Belle de Zuylen and John Reid.

From "Protestant" to "Catholic": Competing autobiographical frameworks

Within the scope of autobiographical criticism, a discussion of "confession" in Boswell's journals prompts associations with St. Augustine's *Confessions* or with the many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century spiritual autobiographies of the same title.[7] This tradition of spiritual autobiography and, subsequently, of journal and diary keeping, emerges out of the deep-seated Calvinist ritual of self-examination—to subject the self to rigorous and regular scrutiny via writing—which critic George Starr describes as "a duty, not an option."[8] Ian Watt elaborates this point, writing that although the practice of spiritual self-examination predates Calvinism (as Augustine's *Confessions* attests), and although Calvinists were by no means the only Protestants to participate in this practice,

> it is generally agreed that it was Calvin, in the sixteenth century, who re-established and systematized this earlier pattern of purposive spiritual introspection, and made it the supreme religious ritual for the layman as well as for the priest: every good Puritan conducted a continual scrutiny of his inner man for evidence of his own place in the

[7] Kathleen Lynch argues that the terms "spiritual autobiography" and "confession" can be used almost interchangeably, as well as "testimony" and "conversion narrative," *Protestant Autobiography in the Seventeenth-Century Anglophone World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 19.

[8] Starr, 7.

divine plot of election and reprobation.[9]

Amplifying the way that Puritan self-scrutiny departs from its Catholic precedent, William Haller describes the Puritan diary as "the Puritan substitute for the confessional" and Jeremy Tambling writes that, in such writing, "the confessor is internalised fully."[10]

There are good reasons to think of Boswell as the beneficiary of this Calvinist "internalization of conscience," not least his childhood in the Calvinist Church, and the affiliation between Boswell's journals and Protestant forms of life writing is well-documented.[11] Boswell famously opens his *London Journal* (1762–1763) with a typical declaration of Protestant self-scrutiny, writing that "knowing that I am to record my transactions will make me more carefull [*sic*] to do well."[12] But despite this almost obsessive impulse to analyze his own behavior, Boswell's confessions differ from those of his Protestant forebears in numerous ways. For one, spiritual autobiographies hinge on a transformative event that leads to a conversion, but there is no single transformative event in Boswell's journals, nor does he undergo any (lasting) conversion. Instead, Boswell cycles through sin and repentance almost endlessly, taking solace in atonement but always relishing his return to earthly pleasures. As Gordon Turnbull observes, "the rhythms of the great Christian narrative of fall and redemption govern and are repeated in the rhythms of Boswell's behaviour as recorded in the journal, but in repetition without resolution" (*London*, xxxvi). For another, though his journals may be written a day or two hence,

[9] Watt, 74–75. On the wider community of English Protestants who practice religious self-scrutiny, see Charles H. and Katherine George, *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation, 1570–1640* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).

[10] Jeremy Tambling, *Confession: Sexuality, Sin, and the Subject* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 92.

[11] See for instance Fredric V. Bogel, "Crisis and Character in Autobiography: The Later Eighteenth Century," *SEL* 21, no. 3, Restoration and Eighteenth Century (Summer, 1981); Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject*; Tambling, 100; and Watt, 75.

[12] Gordon Turnbull, ed., *London Journal, 1762–1763* (New York: Penguin, 2010), 3, hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

Boswell's writing is largely in-the-moment as opposed to the strictly retrospective structure of most spiritual autobiographies.[13] Stuart Sherman, for instance, has demonstrated that eighteenth-century diarists, like Boswell, increasingly used diurnal forms to structure their journals; indeed, Sherman suggests that Boswell's *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* is at least partly responsible for a new attentiveness to temporality in the novel.[14] This may seem like a superficial distinction, but the "punctual" quality of Boswell's writing (as Michael Warner might call it) is intimately bound to Boswell's perception of self as infinitely revisable and to his willingness to experiment with selfhood by bringing himself into contact with others.[15]

I refer to spiritual autobiography in an effort to throw Boswell's life writing into relief; indeed, this Protestant backdrop makes visible yet another component of Catholicism's appeal to Boswell: the endless repeatability and immediacy of Catholic confessional practice as opposed to the more rigid teleology of Protestant confessional texts. The comparison with spiritual autobiography also elucidates the strong oral character of Boswell's confessions and the extent to which his journals rely on in-person, verbal exchange. Although spiritual autobiographies sometimes include "conversations" between the narrator and God (as much as a human can converse with a divine being), the narrator's communication with God is more often mediated through scripture and, thus, strongly dependent on text. Consider, for instance, this excerpt from John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* (1666): "So coming home, I presently went to my Bible, to see

[13] Of Boswell's compositional style, Pottle writes, "In posting his journal Boswell seldom writes from the point of view of the actual date of composition. He goes back and describes each moment as it was lived, carefully excluding knowledge of what happened later. This must be very rare among diarists, who generally give to the experiences they record the emotional tone of the moment of writing," *Boswell on the Grand Tour: Germany and Switzerland, 1764*, ed. Frederick A. Pottle (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), 217, hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

[14] Stuart Sherman, *Telling Time: Clocks, Diaries, and English Diurnal Form, 1660–1785* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

[15] Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (Cambridge: Zone Books, 2002), 97.

if I could find that saying, not doubting but to find it presently; for it was so fresh, and with such strength and comfort on my spirit, that *it was as if it talked with me.*"[16] Here Bunyan imagines conversational reciprocity in his description of the text as "talking" with him, such that the *text* becomes his primary interlocutor. As Tambling says of Bunyan, "The book has become all."[17]

Boswell, by contrast, has no sacred text: for Boswell, the text is but a ghost of the man. When attempting to meet with Frederick the Great of Prussia (a few months before his interviews with Rousseau), he wrote, "What makes me wish still more to see your monarch . . . is that I know the Philosopher of Sans Souci so well. Am I not reading him every morning," and, "I am not satisfied with having seen the King. If it is possible, I should like to hear him speak" (*Germany and Switzerland*, 44–5). Here Boswell describes his reading as mere preparation for a much-anticipated (although, in this case, never realized) in-person meeting. These texts cannot talk with him as Bunyan's can; Boswell must see the man himself. He demonstrates similar sentiments in advance of his interviews with Rousseau:

> Your writings, Sir, have melted my heart, have elevated my soul, have fired my imagination. Believe me, you will be glad to have seen me . . . O dear Saint-Preux! Enlightened Mentor! Eloquent and amiable Rousseau! I have a presentiment that a truly noble friendship will be born today. (*Germany and Switzerland*, 219)

Boswell's confident use of the future tense ("you will be glad," a friendship "will be born") gives their encounter a sense of inevitability; Rousseau's books, then, are mere precursors to this fated in-person meeting. We see a similar sense of inevitability in Bunyan, but for Bunyan this inevitability culminates in the *text*:

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[16] Bunyan (italics mine). Henry Louis Gates Jr. discusses the trope of the talking book in *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[17] Tambling, 95–96.

> when the Lord Jesus did speak these words, He then did think of me: and that He knowing that the time would come, that I should be afflicted with fear, that there was no place left for me in His bosom, did before speak this word, and *leave it upon record*, that I might find help thereby against this vile temptation.[18]

Note the opposite vectors: for Bunyan, the spoken word of God is made real through the text, while for Boswell, Rousseau's text merely taunts him with the possibility of in-person exchange. We begin to see, then, how important face-to-face conversation is to Boswell's autobiographical method: his self-perception coalesces through interaction with others, and his journals take shape from the dialogic record of those meetings.

Historical background

The divergence between Boswell's privileging of speech and Bunyan's privileging of text mirrors the doctrinal differences between Catholicism and Calvinism, especially with regard to confession. Spiritual autobiographies like Bunyan's are governed by the Protestant view that "no earthly mediation, no clerical intercession can affect the weal or woe of one's immortal soul, but that one's own exertions can and must influence it."[19] This disavowal of "earthly mediation" is evident throughout Bunyan's and Norwood's writing: to the extent that they seek conversation, they direct themselves to God; to the extent that they seek spiritual authority, they look to the Bible. By contrast, Catholicism relies heavily on priests as the earthly intermediaries between the layperson and God, especially in confession. Catholicism not only requires that confession be made in-person, to a priest, but also grants priests the God-like power of absolution.

Auricular confession as we know it dates to the thirteenth century, a result of Pope

[18] Bunyan (italics mine).

[19] Starr, 5.

Innocent III's efforts in the Lateran council of 1215–16.[20] At this point, confession shifted away from the public model previously employed by the Church to the private model with which we are familiar today: in other words, the sacrament of confession moved out of the public sphere and into the confessional box. The Church also introduced what is known as the "seal of confession," a law that assures the penitent of the "inviolable secrecy of his admissions of wrong-doing."[21] Most importantly for this chapter, the Church began to conceive of confession as an explicitly and necessarily *verbal* practice. Catholic doctrine holds that auricular confession is manifestly superior to written confession, and that written confessions should be made only when oral confession is absolutely impossible.[22] On the subject of why confession should be oral, Pope Innocent IV remarks that it seems "contrary to nature to trust the skin of a dead animal

[20] Henry Charles Lea, *A History of Auricular Confession and Indulgences in the Latin Church*, vol. 1 (New York: Glenwood Press, 1968), 227–28. Lea's three-volume work is by far the most comprehensive source on confession, and I rely heavily on him in this paper. Thomas N. Tentler, however, offers the following caution about Lea: "Lea offers an abundance of accurate information; but his research techniques and his obvious bias limit the usefulness of his work," *Sin and Confession on the Eve of Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), xii.

[21] Lea, 412. For more on the seal of confession, see Lea, vol. 1, 412–59.

[22] *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, vol. 3, ed. A. Vacant and E. Mangenot (Paris, 1908), s.v. "Confession: Du Concile de Latran au Concile de Trent," section V. "Mode de la Confession et Loi du Secret." This quotation is only one part of the section that outlines the necessity of oral confession (La confession doit régulièrement être faite de vive voix). Here it is in full: *"Saint Bonaventure donne comme raison de ce précepte que la honte est plus grande. Saint Thomas découvre une raison plus profonde. Tous les sacrements, dit-il, ont une matière symbolisant de la façon la plus expressive l'effet propre du sacrement. Dès lors, puisque la confession est comme la matière du sacrement de pénitence, étant l'acte qui soumet les péchés à la sentence du juge, il convient que cet acte soit aussi expressif qu'il peut l'être et qu'il emprunte, à cet effet, les resources de la parole humaine. Aussi les anciens scolastiques sont-ils d'accord pour prohiber la confession écrite, hors les cas de nécessité, la nécessité n'ayant pas de loi. Saint Thomas va jusqu'a contester la validité de la confession écrite, hors le cas de nécessité."* (Saint Bonaventure gives, as a reason for this precept, that the shame is greater. Saint Thomas discovers a more profound reason. All the sacraments, he says, have a matter/substance that symbolizes, in the most expressive fashion, the individual effect of each sacrament. Consequently, since confession is the substance of the sacrament of penitence, being the act that subjects sins to the sentence of the judge, it is suitable that this act be as expressive as possible and that it uses, to this effect, the resources of human speech. What's more, ancient scholastics agree that written confession be prohibited except in cases of necessity, the necessity not having the law. Saint Thomas will go as far as to contest the validity of written confession, excepting cases of necessity.)

more than the voice of a living man."[23] Similarly, Saint Bonaventure claims that confession must be oral because it leads to greater shame: "*Tenentur proprio ore dicere propter meritum erubescentiae*" (They should speak with their own mouth for the purpose of blushing).[24] Orality, then, is not an incidental but rather an essential element of Catholic doctrine; for the Catholic Church, writing is but a shadow of the spoken word.

After the Protestant Reformation, confession remained an integral component of Protestant practice, even though it began to shift away from the Catholic auricular model. Interestingly, Luther approved of oral confession, diverging from Catholic teaching only in his suggestion that such confessions might be made to laypeople in addition to priests.[25] In the end, however, Luther's teachings on this topic were discarded; instead, Calvin's and Zwingli's notion that no human can grant absolution won the day, leading to the Protestant practice of confessing directly to God himself. In the Church of England, the status of confession was somewhat more ambiguous: auricular confession was practiced, but rarely; and, when practiced, the priest was sometimes granted the power of absolution and sometimes not, depending on the circumstances.[26] Modern readers who assume a similitude between the Anglican and the Catholic Churches might be surprised to know that the twenty-first century Anglican Church resembles the Catholic Church much more closely than it did in the eighteenth century; indeed, although the eighteenth-century Anglican Church allowed for auricular confession, its common

[23] James A. Brundage, *Medieval Canon Law* (London: Longman, 1995), 133. Brundage cites Innocent IV, Apparatus to X 2.22 15 §1 (Frankfurt, 1570).

[24] *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*.

[25] Lea, vol. 1, 515.

[26] Lea, vol. 1, 520–23. Lea tells us that in 1793, "Henry Digby Beste, a Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, preached a sermon in which he urged its [absolution's] revival . . . The so-called Tractarian movement revived the dormant claim . . . and, in the higher or Ritualistic section of Anglicanism, confession and absolution are practised, in very much the same fashion as in the Latin Church, except that the rite is voluntary" (522–23).

confessional practice more closely approximated that of other Protestants than Catholics. For my purposes here, it is enough to say that Boswell would have been familiar with the form of auricular confession through the Catholic Church, the Church of England, or both.[27]

This history forms an important part of the backdrop of Boswell's lifelong fascination with Catholicism; and, indeed, the influence of Catholicism on Boswell's writing is a long-neglected aspect of Boswellian criticism.[28] Even Boswell's most renowned scholar, Frederick Pottle, has dismissed Catholicism's influence as negligible, arguing that,

> It is obvious that Boswell's conviction as regards the claims of Rome could not have gone very deep, and it is probable that the whole Roman Catholic episode, like his Pythagoreanism, was in part inspired by a wish to be different from other people, especially his father.[29]

Pottle similarly remarks that "after a few years [Boswell] settled down into his final religious position," a position that Pottle adamantly maintains was *not* Catholic.[30] The passage that opens this chapter, however, would seem to suggest otherwise. Boswell's reference to a "settled family" that can "judge of the ideas which come to lodge" indicates a certain maturity of mind;

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[27] Pottle suggests that Boswell would have been familiar with both Catholic and Anglican confession. In a footnote in *Boswell in Holland*, Pottle writes, "Boswell, who had never previously made his communion in the Church of England, presumably wished to know whether he was expected to make confession and abjuration of heresy as he had done when received into Roman Catholic communion." *Boswell in Holland, 1763–1764*, ed. Frederick A. Pottle (London: William Heinemann, 1952), 104, hereafter cited parenthetically in the text. Peter Brooks takes a much broader view of this issue, arguing that the Catholic confessional model is so pervasive that no one in the Western world could be unaware of it: "even those whose religion has no place for the Roman Catholic practice of confession are nonetheless deeply influenced by the model," *Troubling Confessions: Speaking Guilt in Law & Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 2.

[28] There is very little scholarship on Boswell and Catholicism. Among the few are Victor M. Hamm, "Boswell's Interest in Catholicism," *Thought* 21 (1946): 649–66; Sharon L. Priestley, "'Happy to Worship in a Romish Church': Boswell and Roman Catholicism," *Studies in Scottish Literature* 32 (2001): 150–63.

[29] Frederick A. Pottle, *James Boswell: The Earlier Years, 1740–1769* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 52.

[30] ibid. See also Frank Brady, *James Boswell: The Later Years, 1769–1795* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984).

and, in sharp contrast to Pottle's claim, Boswell observes that although he has flirted with a number of religions, Catholicism made a particularly lasting impression: "[Romish clergy] drew some pictures upon my walls with such deep strokes that they still remain." Indeed, Boswell's assertion that Romish clergy drew pictures with "deep strokes" directly contradicts Pottle's statement that Boswell's Catholic convictions "could not have gone very deep." Although Boswell officially devotes himself to the National Church of Scotland later in his life, evidence suggests that his association is more social and political than religious. In an article discussing this relationship, Mary Margaret Stewart writes, "[Boswell] was a Presbyterian because he was a Scotsman and felt that he should support the organized religion of his country and because he did not wish to displease his father. But he disliked the Presbyterian form of worship and could not accept many of the key doctrines of the denomination."[31] What is more, Boswell's continued attendance at Catholic Masses throughout his life testifies to his ongoing fascination with (if not devotion to) "Romish worship." By compiling references to Catholic Mass and Catholic chapels found in Boswell's journals, Victor M. Hamm documents fairly consistent attendance (mostly in London) until 1786, approximately ten years before Boswell's death. In combination with Boswell's assertion that the impressions left by "Romish clergy" are "the only agreeable ones," this evidence strongly suggests that Boswell elevated Catholicism to a position of prominence over his many other religions; and, indeed, its influence is especially visible in Boswell's confessional exchanges with Rousseau.

[31] Mary Margaret Stewart, "James Boswell and the National Church of Scotland," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 30 (1967), 376. See also Richard B. Sher, "Scottish Divines and Legal Lairds: Boswell's Scots Presbyterian Identity," in *New Light on Boswell*, ed. Greg Clingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

"Hear me, illustrious philosopher!": Confession in Boswell's interviews with Rousseau

When Boswell met Rousseau in Môitiers on December 3, 1764, he was twenty-four and Rousseau was fifty-two years old. Carrying a letter of introduction from Lord Marischal,[32] and reading *Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) and *Émile* (1762) in preparation, Boswell set out for Môtiers with the express hope of being granted an audience with the famous philosopher, whom he had planned to visit since the summer of 1763 (*Germany and Switzerland*, 200). Expelled from his native Switzerland for his controversial views on religion,[33] Rousseau sought asylum in Môtiers, then an independent principality, where he remained with his longtime mistress Thérèse Levasseur from July 1762 to September 1765. The Rousseau of Boswell's journals is an often-disgruntled and ailing old man, whose tendency toward reclusion is happily overcome by Boswell's audacity and whose intellectual vigor and humor abides despite his poor health.

The triumph that Boswell's friendship with Rousseau represents cannot be overstated. Boswell was far from the only traveler to attempt to see Rousseau, but he was one of the few to gain admittance. In the words of a young local woman whom Boswell met at an inn near Môtiers,

> he doesn't like to have people come and stare at him as if he were a man with two heads. Heavens! the curiosity of people is incredible. Many, many people come to see him; and often he will not receive them. He is ill, and doesn't wish to be disturbed. (*Germany and Switzerland*, 215)

Boswell, however, is undeterred. Shunning Lord Marischal's recommendation in favor of his own "romantic genius," Boswell sends Rousseau a brazen letter of introduction, presenting

[32] George Keith, tenth Earl Marischal of Scotland and trusted advisor to Frederick the Great of Prussia, with whom Boswell traveled from Utrecht to Potsdam at the beginning of his Grand Tour in 1764.

[33] The text that led to Rousseau's condemnation (in both Paris and Geneva) was *Émile*, especially the section entitled "The Creed of a Savoyard Vicar."

himself as "a man of singular merit" and begging Rousseau to receive him: "Place your confidence in a stranger who is different. You will not regret it" (*Germany and Switzerland*, 219–20).

In the letter of introduction we see the seeds of the confessional relationship that would blossom in the resulting six interviews. It is evident from this letter that Boswell longs for a priest-like mediator, as he urges Rousseau not only to hear him ("I have much to tell you") but also to pass judgment: "It is in the silence and the solitude of your sacred retreat that you shall judge of me, and think you in such circumstances I shall be able to dissimulate?" (*Germany and Switzerland*, 219). In keeping with the way that Catholic confession privileges "human contact,"[34] Boswell emphasizes Rousseau's *physical presence* and explicitly connects the possibility of an in-person exchange to his own inability to dissimulate. Moreover, Boswell's description of Rousseau's residence resembles the confessional itself: a sacred and solitary space in which priest and penitent are brought together.[35] As a space used exclusively for the admission of sins, the confessional box itself seems to compel confession, and it is thus that Boswell imagines Rousseau's "sacred retreat": the very space itself will compel Boswell's honesty. In addition, Boswell insists on the privacy typically associated with the confessional box: "I beg you, be alone. In spite of all my enthusiasm, after having written to you in this fashion, I know not if I would not prefer never to see you than to see you for the first time in company" (*Germany and Switzerland*, 220). Here it is as if Boswell imagines their exchange as protected by the seal of confession: privacy is paramount (although, of course, Boswell violates that

[34] Phillipe Boutry writes, "La confession auriculaire s'inscrit au sein d'une culture orale qui privilége un contact humain" (Oral confession inscribes itself within an oral culture that privileges human contact), in "Réflexions sur la confession au XIXe siècle," in *Pratiques de la confession*, ed. Groupe de la Bussière (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1983), 227.

[35] For more on confessionals, see Lea, vol. 1, 394–96.

privacy by later recording their conversations). Finally, Boswell also subscribes to the Catholic contention that *all* sins must be laid bare, *confessio integra* ("confessing everything"). In Lea's words, "there can be no partial reconciliation to God, and the willful omission of a single moral sin renders the whole confession invalid and unsacramental."[36] In his brief autobiographical piece "Sketch of my Life" (*"Ébauche de ma vie"*), sent to Rousseau midway through their acquaintance, Boswell opens by promising, "I shall not conceal my weaknesses and follies. I shall not even conceal my crimes"[37]; likewise, he closes by asserting, "I have given you an account of all the evil in my nature."[38]

Boswell not only positions Rousseau as a mediator (and imagines his residence as a confessional), but he also grants him something like the power of absolution (the power of a priest to absolve sin and impose penance).[39] During their third meeting Boswell asks, "Will you, Sir, assume direction of me?" but Rousseau does not immediately agree to the role of confessor, replying, "I cannot. I can be responsible only for myself" (*Germany and Switzerland*, 231). Not easily dissuaded, Boswell persists in his efforts to recruit Rousseau as his interlocutor, sending him the "Sketch of My Life" and urging him to respond to it on the occasion of their next meeting. "Sketch" includes the usual biographical details—date and place of birth, parentage, education, travels—but is most notable for its confessional tone and content. Here Boswell continues to cast Rousseau in the role of all-powerful priest, writing, "I have given you a record of all the evil I have done. Tell me, is it possible for me yet to make myself a man? Tell me if I

[36] Lea, vol. 1, 348.

[37] Pottle, *Earlier Years*, 1.

[38] Pottle, *Earlier Years*, 6.

[39] For more on absolution, see Lea, vol. 1, 142–61. Lea writes, "Sacerdotalism could ask no more; by successive steps it had succeeded in eliminating God from the pardon of sin and had replaced him with the priest" (154).

can be a worthy Scots laird."[40] In his requests that Rousseau "judge," "direct," "tell," as well as "help" and "kindle," Boswell seems to perceive the reclusive writer as both an audience for his confession and an arbiter of his fate. Moreover, these imperatives suggest the immediacy of response that he desires from Rousseau—an immediacy that is only attainable in a Catholic confessional dynamic, which necessitates the participation of two parties (penitent and priest) rather than one (as in Calvinist confession). Boswell's language invites reaction and conversation: it envisions the confession as incomplete without Rousseau's participation.

Boswell foregrounds this reciprocity and immediacy in his written representations of these exchanges, as well. As any reader of Boswell knows, he employs an unusual strategy for the representation of speech—what Pottle has called his "dramatic method"—in which the names and speech of two conversationalists appear in quick succession with minimal editorial material.[41] For instance:

> BOSWELL. "Tell me, Sir, do you not find that I answer to the description I gave you of myself?" ROUSSEAU. "Sir, it is too early for me to judge. But all appearances are in your favour." BOSWELL. "I fear I have stayed too long. I shall take the honour of returning tomorrow." ROUSSEAU. "Oh, as to that, I can't tell." (*Germany and Switzerland*, 224)

This visual representation of Boswell's interviews further reveals the conversational dimension of Boswell's confessions. Boswell's "dramatic method" captures the evocative property of speech, and demonstrates how Boswell's own speech is but one half of a larger whole. Boswell's conversation has some resemblance to a heroic couplet (perhaps therein testifying to the

[40] Pottle, *Earlier Years*, 6.

[41] Frederick A. Pottle, "James Boswell, Journalist," *The Age of Johnson: Essays Presented to Chauncey Brewster Tinker*, ed. Frederick W. Hilles (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949). The Greek term for this is "stichomythia."

effectiveness of the heroic couplet as a conversational verse form): his own speech finds its resolution in the response of his interlocutor. Neither party's speech can stand on its own: only together do they form a complete unit.

Boswell, however, does not wish merely to converse with Rousseau; rather, he hopes to receive a definitive judgment and incontrovertible instructions. For instance, having confessed his sins, Boswell seeks penance. Boswell asks Rousseau, "How can I be happy, I, who have done so much evil?" and Rousseau replies, "Begin your life anew. God is good, for he is just. Do good. You will cancel all the debt of evil. Say to yourself in the morning, 'Come now, I am going to *pay off* so much evil.' Six well-spent years will pay off all the evil you have committed" (*Germany and Switzerland*, 231). Despite his earlier reluctance ("I can be responsible only for myself"), this exchange shows Rousseau fully inhabiting Boswell's confessional dynamic. Rousseau's language of debt—"cancel all the debt of evil," "pay off so much evil"—echoes the transactional nature of confession and penance between the penitent and the priest. In particular, Rousseau's determination that "six well-spent years will pay off the evil you have committed" is reminiscent of the priest's calculation of penance in proportion to the sin.

Lest this be confused for an actual Catholic confession, it is worth noting that—his reluctant participation notwithstanding—Rousseau does not subscribe to Boswell's Catholic doctrines, despite having once been Catholic himself. Throughout the course of these interviews, Rousseau explicitly denounces Catholicism and, more specifically, Catholic forms of penance. For instance,

> I [Boswell] told him [Rousseau] how I had turned Roman Catholic and had intended to hide myself in a convent in France. He said, "What folly! I too was Catholic in my youth. I changed, and then I changed back again. I returned to Geneva and was readmitted to the

> Protestant faith. I went again among Catholics, and used to say to them, 'I am no longer one of you'; and I got on with them excellently." (*Germany and Switzerland*, 230)

Similarly, he tells Boswell, "I have read your Memoir [the Sketch]. You have been gulled. You ought never to see a priest" (*Germany and Switzerland*, 252). Finally, when Boswell asks, "What do you think of cloisters, penances, and remedies of that sort?" Rousseau replies,

> Mummeries, all of them, invented by men. Do not be guided by men's judgments, or you will find yourself tossed to and fro perpetually. Do not base your life on the judgments of others; first, because they are as likely to be mistaken as you are, and further, because you cannot know that they are telling you their true thoughts; they may be impelled by motives of interest or convention to talk to you in a way not corresponding to what they really think. (*Germany and Switzerland*, 231)

Boswell, however, has every intention of continuing to be "guided by men's judgments," as his later relationships with men like Johnson and Paoli demonstrate. In fact, it is immediately after this response from Rousseau that Boswell asks, "Will you, Sir, assume direction of me?", almost as if he has not listened to a word Rousseau said.

Having established the "Catholic" framework of Boswell's confessions, let us return to the idea of Boswell's writing as a stand-in or approximation of speech. I interpret Boswell's frequent references to Catholic confession in his letters as a kind of shorthand for in-person exchange. For example, in his letters to Rousseau Boswell invokes the auricular dimension of their previous confessional exchanges—reiterating much of their earlier confessional rhetoric—as if to capitalize on and perpetuate that orality. For instance, he writes, "I thought of myself as a

penitent who must expiate the sins which he had confessed to you in your sacred retreat,"[42] and similarly, "O dear St. Preux! Yes, my soul is bound to yours. I have loved like you, I am pious like you. If we have committed crimes, we have also expiated them" (*Italy, Corsica, and France*, 20). This language of sin and atonement hearkens back to their exchange in Môtiers and Boswell's desire for absolution.

We see a very similar dynamic in Boswell's longstanding correspondence with his dear friend William Johnson Temple (whom he met in 1755 at the age of fifteen).[43] In a 1775 letter to Temple, Boswell writes, "I have no *confession* to make, my *Priest*: so be not curious."[44] Much as in his letters to Rousseau, Boswell conceives of his written exchanges with Temple in the terms of auricular confession ("confession," "priest"). Moreover, here, as with Rousseau, the language of auricular confession in letters recalls a series of in-person confessional exchanges. For example, the *London Journal* contains evidence of Boswell's confessional relationship with Temple: "At 2 call Temp[le] confess errors, & not only resolve but promise, So as to be under his power" (*London*, 227). Here Boswell's language invokes not only confession, but also penance ("resolve," "promise") and absolution ("be under his power"). We also see this language of auricular confession in another letter to Temple, wherein Boswell describes a letter from his (slightly older) friend George Dempster:

[Dempster] has since written me a long letter, in which he has given me his advice to stay

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[42] Frank Brady and Frederick A. Pottle, eds., *Boswell on the Grand Tour: Italy, Corsica, and France, 1765–1766* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1955), 3, hereafter cited parenthetically in the text. Letter to Rousseau, 3 October 1765.

[43] It is worth noting here that Temple took Boswell to his first Anglican service. In *The Earlier Years* Pottle writes: "Temple was an Anglican. Soon after the inception of their intimacy (probably on Christmas Day, 1755), he took Boswell to a Church-of-England chapel at the foot of the service. The Presbyterian worship made him think of hell; here he felt he was in heaven" (30).

[44] *The Correspondence of James Boswell and William Johnson Temple, 1756–1795: Volume 1: 1756–1777*, ed. Thomas Crawford (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 359. The italics are Boswell's.

> some time at Utrecht and then go to a French academy. But, like a too lenient *father-confessor*, he bids me follow my inclinations and allows me to return to my chambers in the Inner Temple. (*Holland*, 15, my italics)

Given that there is no precedent for written confession in Catholicism, the repetition of this language influenced by Catholicism ("priest," "father-confessor") in Boswell's letters invokes and imitates an unequivocally oral exchange. Moreover, Catholic language aside, Boswell frequently imagines his letters as oral utterances. For instance, in describing the letter of introduction that he sent to Rousseau he writes, "My letter was a true piece of *oratory*" (*Germany and Switzerland*, 291, my italics). Likewise, in a letter to Rousseau almost a year later he writes, "Hear me, illustrious philosopher!," and in another letter, "If I return safely, you will have a valuable account. I cannot write. I shall be able to speak" (*Italy, Corsica, and France*, 18 and 140). These consistent references to oral exchange—whether explicit or via a Catholic lexicon—suggests that Boswell's written confessions can only ever be a shadow of what he envisions as the Platonic ideal: the auricular mode.

Boswell's many priests: The pattern of confession in Boswell's journals

Boswell's confessional discourse may find its most characteristic, and most complete, expression in his friendship with Rousseau, but the pattern that Boswell establishes with Rousseau appears in the exchanges with his other father confessors, as well. In the period between 1762 and 1765, beginning with Boswell's stay in London and ending with the culmination of his Grand Tour in Corsica, Boswell initiates and refines the confessional techniques that will inform his approach to life writing for the duration of his literary career. By the time Boswell travels to Môtiers, he has already begun practicing his confessional technique

with the great Samuel Johnson; and after meeting Rousseau, Boswell attempts to recreate their dynamic in his interactions with Voltaire and Paoli. As such, we might say that Boswell's confessions even further resemble Catholic confessional practice in that they are highly ritualized, occurring over and over again, and rehearsing the same conventions every time.

Boswell's London meetings with Johnson in 1763 read like a rehearsal for the subsequent interviews with Rousseau: he not only follows the same patterns, but he also uses almost identical language. Indeed, the exactitude of the language—and the frequency with which it recurs—is part of what makes this confessional trope so powerful throughout Boswell's work. His persistent reliance on the language of confession suggests that this auricular structure is central to the way that Boswell conceives of himself in relation to others. Meeting Johnson for the first time in May 1763, Boswell diligently courted the esteemed man's friendship, arranging numerous encounters before leaving London to study law in Utrecht in August of that same year. In the record of these meetings we observe Boswell practicing the confessional techniques that he would later use to great effect in Môtiers. For example, much as he invites Rousseau to be his mentor—"Will you, Sir, assume direction of me?"—he also asks Johnson, "Will you really take a charge of me?" thereby imagining Johnson as priest and courting his judgment (*London*, 251). Unlike Rousseau, who resists Boswell's pleas for guidance, Johnson quickly accedes to his requests, replying, "I will put you upon a plan . . . I am glad we have met. I hope we shall pass many evenings and mornings too together" (*London*, 251). So begins a long-lasting confessional relationship, which yields copious material for both Boswell's own journal and his later biography of Johnson.

The linguistic equivalence in Boswell's requests for guidance bleeds into other aspects of the confessional ritual, as well. Just as he does in Môtiers, Boswell makes his *confessio integra*

once Johnson has consented to be his priest. Never satisfied with a partial confession, Boswell seeks to render himself completely transparent, using the same turn of phrase in both cases in order to describe this transparency: "I have not had anybody to whom I could lay open entirely my mind till I found Monsieur Rousseau" (*Germany and Switzerland*, 254), and similarly of Johnson, "I opened my mind to him ingenuously."[45] Even more striking, Boswell follows this comment by remarking that he gave Johnson "a little sketch of my life, to which he was pleased to listen with great attention" (*Life*, vol. 1, 404). This phrase, "sketch of my life," points to further parallels between his relationships with Johnson and Rousseau, as "sketch of my life" is the exact phrase that Boswell later uses to describe the confessional document that he sends to Rousseau. Interestingly, the "sketch" that Boswell gives Johnson is oral rather than written, pointing once more to the primary spoken-ness of Boswell's confessions: the oral history is the archetypal form of the confessional "sketch." That said, although a version of this conversation with Johnson appears in the *London Journal*, the particular language that corresponds to Boswell's interviews with Rousseau ("opened my mind," "sketch of my life") does not; rather, this language only appears in Boswell's revision of the exchange for the *Life of Johnson*. The fact that Boswell rewrites earlier conversations in the language of the Môtiers episode affirms Rousseau's preeminence amongst his confessors: the confessional tenor of his relationship with Rousseau both sets a tone for future exchanges and forms the lens through which Boswell views exchanges past.

Boswell recreates this same confessional dynamic with Voltaire in December 1764, albeit to less dramatic effect, since their relationship is neither as enduring nor as intimate as Boswell's friendships with Johnson and Rousseau. Meeting for the first (and only) time in Ferney, less than

[45] James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, vol. 1, eds. George Birkbeck Norman Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), 404 (italics mine), hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

two weeks after his stay in Môtiers, Boswell conducts a series of interviews with Voltaire over the course of four days, but never in the complete seclusion that distinguished his meetings with Rousseau. Indeed, in stark contrast to the monastic isolation of Môtiers, Boswell encounters Voltaire at his bustling country house, "amidst a constant crowd of guests."[46] In his biography of Boswell, Pottle writes that Boswell

> came to Voltaire with no confession to make, expected no magic pronouncement that would enable him to live to the end of his days. This was merely a great man, from whom, in a short space of time, he had to elicit just as many memorable remarks as he could.[47]

But given the prominence of confessional language in Boswell's discussions with Voltaire, it seems that Pottle overstates the difference between these conversations and those with Rousseau. Boswell's interviews with Voltaire may be significantly less personal in content, but they demonstrate a characteristic reliance on the language and structure of confession:

> I talked to him serious and earnest. I demanded of him an *honest confession* of his real sentiments. He gave it me with candour and with a mild eloquence which touched my heart. I did not believe him capable of thinking in the manner that he declared to me was "from the bottom of his heart" … I was moved; I was sorry. I doubted his sincerity. I called to him with emotion, "Are you sincere? are you really sincere?" He answered, "Before God, I am." (*Germany and Switzerland*, 294, my italics)

In addition to the demand for an "honest confession," this exchange almost exactly replicates an earlier conversation with Rousseau: "I stopped him in the middle of the room and I said to him, 'But tell me sincerely, are you a Christian?' … He replied, 'Yes. I pique myself upon being

[46] Pottle, *The Earlier Years*, 185.

[47] Pottle, *The Earlier Years*, 186.

one'" (*Germany and Switzerland*, 230). Moreover, the flurry of adjectives that punctuate this passage—"earnest," "honest," "real," "sincere"—evoke a confessional tone that belies the more impersonal content of the conversation. To the extent that this interview diverges from previous confessional exchanges, it illuminates the versatile quality of Boswell's confessional language: here Boswell employs familiar language to unfamiliar ends, shifting the emphasis away from his own revelations and focusing instead on those of his interlocutor. Thus, in his interviews with Voltaire, Boswell deploys the language of auricular confession in the service of journalistic inquiry rather than self-exploration.

The confessional pattern that Boswell rehearses with Johnson, refines with Rousseau, and repeats with Voltaire also appears in Boswell's interviews with General Pasquale de Paoli. Boswell arrives in Corsica in late 1765, nearly a year after meeting Rousseau in Môtiers. In fact, the conversations with Rousseau largely motivate Boswell's tour of Corsica, as he becomes enthralled by the possibility of witnessing Rousseau's "state of nature" playing out amongst the Corsican people. On a more pragmatic level, Boswell's friendship with Rousseau facilitates his trip to Corsica in that Rousseau furnishes him with a letter of introduction to the General himself.

Over the course of his week with Paoli, Boswell's language strongly recalls the confessional exchanges with Johnson and Rousseau, but does not always reproduce them exactly. For instance, in keeping with his habit of "opening his mind," Boswell writes, "Paoli became more affable with me. I made myself known to him. I forgot the great distance between us, and had every day some hours of private conversation with him" (*Italy, Corsica, and France*, 164, my italics). Occasionally, however, we discover a stricter consonance, as when Boswell writes, "I had stood in the presence of many a prince, but I never had such a trial as in the presence of Paoli" (*Italy, Corsica, and France*, 162). This use of "trial" closely resembles the

language of test and judgment that we find throughout Boswell's meetings with Rousseau: "My romantic genius, which will never be extinguished, made me eager to put my own merit to the severest trial" (*Germany and Switzerland*, 217). But even when Boswell more closely adheres to his confessional script, the *Journal of a Tour to Corsica* differs from the record of previous interviews in that it significantly diminishes Boswell's own role in these exchanges. This self-effacement is most visible in the shift in Boswell's transcription techniques: even in the interviews with Voltaire, Boswell still records his own speech, whereas the conversations with Paoli merely report Boswell's speech while transcribing Paoli's faithfully. Thus, although Boswell employs the language of auricular confession with each of his mentors, the records of these confessions vary widely.

Comparative confessions

As the divergences between Rousseau, Voltaire, and Paoli demonstrate, Boswell deploys the language of confession differently depending on his interlocutor, thereby serving the interests of various forms of life writing with a single technique. This generic variability depends on both the content of the interviews themselves (as we have seen) and the editorial choices Boswell makes about what information to include and how to present that information in his transcriptions. In order to elucidate this generic spectrum, and the role that confessional discourse plays in establishing that spectrum, I would like to look closely at Boswell's various methods of transcription when discussing one his favorite topics, melancholy. As usual, I will begin with Rousseau, whose interviews form the model against which all others are measured, and then turn to Paoli and, finally, Johnson. Through a careful assessment of Boswell's

transcription techniques, we can come to a clearer understanding of the way that confessional discourse informs Boswell's (auto)biographical practices.

Boswell records his interviews with Rousseau in his classic dramatic format, wherein the absence of editorial comment gives equal weight to both parties:

> BOSWELL. "But tell me, do you suffer from melancholy?" ROUSSEAU. "I was born placid. I have no natural disposition to melancholy. My misfortunes have infected me with it." BOSWELL. "I, for my part, suffer from it severely. And how can I be happy, I, who have done so much evil?" ROUSSEAU. "Begin your life anew." (*Germany and Switzerland*, 231)

Here Boswell brings Rousseau into dialogue, makes confessions in order to receive a judgment, and looks to Rousseau in order to better understand himself, pointedly soliciting advice from Rousseau (rather than simply asking Rousseau to comment on melancholy as an abstract concept). In this record of their exchange, Boswell is a prominent character and active voice, and his trademark dramatic method magnifies his own role. This dramatic transcription, then, suggests that Boswell's comments are just as interesting as Rousseau's and places the two men on equal footing within the journal, thereby accentuating the autobiographical quality of the text.

In conversation with General Paoli, the content of Boswell's confessions remains much the same as with Rousseau, but his presentation of their interaction elevates Paoli's voice over Boswell's own. For instance,

> This kind of conversation led me to tell him how much I had suffered from anxious speculations. With a mind naturally inclined to melancholy, and a keen desire of enquiry, I had intensely applied myself to metaphysical researches, and reasoned beyond my depth on such subjects as it is not given to man to know. I told him I had rendered my mind a

> *camera obscura*, that in the very heat of youth I felt the *non est tanti*, the *omnia vanitas* of one who has exhausted all the sweets of his being and is weary with dull repetition. I told him that I had almost become for ever incapable of taking part in active life.
>
> "All this," said Paoli, "is melancholy. I have also studied metaphysics. I know the arguments for fate and free will, for the materiality and immateriality of the soul, and even the subtle arguments for and against the existence of matter. But let us leave these disputes to the idle. I hold always firm one great object. I never feel a moment of despondency." (*Italy, Corsica, and France*, 178)

Rather than presenting the confession as a dialogue in which he features prominently, Boswell diminishes his participation in this exchange by merely reporting his own speech while directly quoting Paoli's response. Moreover, Boswell eschews the stichomythic dialogue of his interviews with Rousseau in favor of a less lively question-and-answer format. Consequently, Paoli's language is privileged in this transcription, forming a sharp contrast to the conversational parity of Boswell and Rousseau and shifting the text's genre away from autobiography and toward biography.

This generic shift becomes even clearer in an analysis of a 22 July 1763 conversation that appears in both the *London Journal* and the *Life of Johnson*. In the *London Journal*, Boswell writes,

> I complained to Mr. Johnson that I was much afflicted with melancholy, which was hereditary in our family. He said that he himself had been greatly distressed with it, and for that reason had been obliged to fly from study and meditation to the dissipating variety of life. He advised me to have constant occupation of mind, to take a great deal of exercise, and to live moderately; especially to shun drinking at night. "Melancholy

> people," said he, "are apt to fly to intemperance, which gives a momentary relief but sinks the soul much lower in misery." He observed that labouring men who work much and live sparingly are seldom or never troubled with low spirits. It gave me great relief to talk of my disorder with Mr. Johnson; and when I discovered that he himself was subject to it, I felt that strange satisfaction which human nature feels at the idea of participating distress with others; and the greater person our fellow sufferer is, so much the more good does it to us. (*London*, 287–88)

As in the conversation with Paoli, here Boswell merely reports his own speech, rather than quoting it directly; but unlike the conversation with Paoli, Boswell frames Johnson's response as a direct reply to *him* ("he advised me"). Moreover, as in the conversation with Rousseau, Boswell then deploys Johnson's response as a lens through which to interpret himself: the fact that Johnson also suffers from melancholy elevates Boswell's standing in his own mind. Like the correspondent exchange with Rousseau, this quotation exemplifies the critical role of confession in Boswell's autobiographical practice: unsure how to understand his own melancholic tendencies, Boswell confesses his struggles to Johnson, and attends carefully to his response.

The record of this same conversation in the *Life*, however, effaces Boswell's confession entirely:

> He mentioned to me now, for the first time, that he had been distrest by melancholy, and for that reason had been obliged to fly from study and meditation, to the dissipating variety of life. Against melancholy he recommended constant occupation of mind, a great deal of exercise, moderation in eating and drinking, and especially to shun drinking at night. He said melancholic people were apt to fly to intemperance for relief, but that it sunk them much deeper in misery. He observed, that labouring men who work hard, and

live sparingly, are seldom or never troubled with low spirits. (*Life*, vol. 1, 446–47)

Although Johnson's comments on melancholy originated as advice tailored to Boswell's specific complaints, they are here revised to emphasize Johnson's personal experience with melancholy, as well as his general musings on the subject. In addition to erasing Boswell's participation in the exchange—not an uncommon occurrence in the *Life*—this example also renders the confessional mechanisms on which Boswell relies invisible to the reader. That said, this erasure amplifies Johnson's own confessions, realigning the confessional dynamic such that the reader might occupy the position of priest. Thus we begin to realize the enormous versatility of Boswell's confessional discourse, as it serves the many and varying interests of his prolific writing about himself and others.

Boswell as priest: Subversion of the confessional dynamic

As we have seen, Boswell routinely uses his own confessions as a segue into the personal questions that he poses to his confessor, but he seldom plays the priest himself, at least not in his relationships with men like Johnson, Rousseau, Voltaire, and Paoli. A look at Boswell's broader circle, however, reveals that he occupies the position of priest with much greater authority in relationships where his superior status is already firmly established: namely, relationships with women and the lower classes. Although Boswell exhorts his priests to confess, he never presumes to advise them or to adjudicate their dilemmas; with women and the lower classes, however, Boswell liberally offers both advice and judgment. In this section I will consider the peculiarities of Boswell's confessional relationship with women, especially Belle de Zuylen and Margaret Montgomerie, and I will then conclude the chapter with an examination of Boswell's frantic, priest-like interactions with his client John Reid. These episodes reveal the dark side of

Boswell's reliance on confession, suggesting that his desire for relationships to conform to a confessional dynamic exceeds his commitment to truth, and that he prefers to misinterpret his interlocutors rather than diverge from his script.

Boswell becomes acquainted with the young Dutch noblewoman Belle de Zuylen (Zélide) in 1763 during his time in Utrecht.[48] A sparkling wit who defied convention despite her family's high social standing, Zélide is more Boswell's equal than any other woman in his journals; and yet, perhaps unsurprisingly, Zélide's spiritedness makes Boswell wary rather than warm. Here I examine their correspondence, which begins in June 1764 when Boswell departs from Utrecht, and which depicts Boswell in his role as mentor and Zélide at her confessional best.

Zélide's first letter to Boswell, written on 14 June 1764, illustrates her characteristic confidence and acumen. She writes,

> I am affected by your departure; I have thought of you all the evening. I find you odd and lovable. I have a higher regard for you than for any one, and I am proud of being your friend. Are you not satisfied?
>
> What I find *less* admirable in you is to have so quickly rid yourself of those generous scruples for which you took so much credit to yourself the other day.[49] The circumstances were the same today … why did you not reason as you did before? …

[48] For more on Belle de Zuylen see C. P. Courtney's biography, *Isabelle de Charrière (Belle de Zuylen)* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1993). See also the special issue of *Eighteenth Century Life: Isabelle de Charrière, Belle Van Zuylen*, ed. Beatrice Fink, vol. 13 (February 1989): 1–94. Zuylen has many names: before marriage she was also known by her family name, Van Tuyll, and after marriage she was known as Isabelle de Charrière. "Zélide" is the moniker that Zuylen gave herself, and that is how I will refer to her henceforth.

[49] Here Pottle's note reads, "Boswell had said that he would not correspond with her surreptitiously because of his respect for her father," *Holland*, 290.

> If you do not like my plan, and I am to go on writing to you, I shall write with the utmost freedom. With libertines I am rigid and reserved, but I can afford to be free with a discreet friend, a prudent man …
>
> Good-bye, I have said everything; or at least I have said much. (*Holland*, 290–93)

More than anything, this excerpt illustrates Zélide's direct style and faith in her own convictions. As she writes in the opening paragraph of her letter, "it is natural to me to say what I feel and what I think" (*Holland*, 289). Not unlike Boswell himself, Zélide imagines her letters as candid confessions—"With Monsieur Boswell, there is no need for prudence. Give him the letter; it is an act of frankness, it is the diary of the heart of a live and feeling woman" (*Holland*, 295)—but her letters include none of the fretful questions that worry Boswell's confessional epistles. Likewise, Zélide uses the language of *confessio integra* ("I have said everything"), but where Boswell "opens his mind" in an effort to receive judgment and guidance, Zélide lays herself bare without requests for affirmation or reassurance. Instead, and in a move we have rarely seen from Boswell himself, she passes judgment on her interlocutor, freely offering her opinion of Boswell's behavior and then calmly informing him of her plan of action. Boswell's characteristic outward turn, looking to others in order to better understand himself, is absent in Zélide's letters: she might make her confession, but she knows her own mind without waiting to read Boswell's response.

Despite her self-assurance, however, Boswell projects his own desire for guidance onto Zélide, resulting in a startling misinterpretation of his correspondent. For example, Boswell writes,

> Your genius and your many accomplishments may do you great honour. But take care. If those enchanting qualities are not governed by prudence, they may do you a great deal of

> harm. You have confessed to me that you are subject to hypochondria. I well believe it. You have a delicate constitution and a strong imagination. In order to be free from a distemper which renders you miserable, you must not act like one in despair. You must be careful of your health by living regularly, and careful of your mind by employing it moderately. If you act thus, you may expect to be happy. (*Holland*, 312)

Boswell warns Zélide against "harm," "hypochondria," "distempter," and "despair," yet she has not complained of any of these ailments in their correspondence thus far. To the contrary, she has written, "I think I shall take hold of the first happiness that may present itself," and, "You believe that out of mere goodness, out of compassion, a woman, such as I am, might be weak; I believe you are mistaken" (*Holland*, 290). Even after Boswell denies having any affection for her, she replies with characteristic composure: "Your friendship is more worth having than love … As for your peace of mind and my own (as I understood the matter), these were never in danger … I am very glad to have told you everything and I will always be equally frank with you" (*Holland*, 294–95). Far from "acting like one in despair," Zélide betrays an equanimity that directly contradicts Boswell's representation of her.

Boswell's misinterpretations of Zélide allow him to enact the confessor/confessant dynamic on which his self-image depends, subverting the paradigm by imagining himself as a Johnson-like confessor to a Boswellian confessant. Although he does not discuss the confessional aspects of Boswell's writing, Frank Brady suggests that this kind of role-playing is endemic in Boswell's relationships with women, writing, "Nowhere did Boswell strike more poses, or assign roles more rigidly to himself and others, than in his relations with women" (*Wife*, xvi). In the correspondence with Zélide, Boswell assumes the part of mentor, identifying himself as such explicitly: "Forgive me for talking to you with such an air of authority. I have

assumed the person of Mentor. I must keep it up. Perhaps I judge too hardly of you" (*Holland*, 306). In addition to naming Boswell as "Mentor," this quotation also invokes the same language of judgment and authority that pervades Boswell's interactions with his own mentors. Here, however, he confers that authority on *himself*.

In a further instance of role-playing, Boswell writes, "You know I am a man of form, a man who says to himself, 'Thus will I act,' and acts accordingly. In short, a man subjected to discipline" (*Holland*, 299). Zélide may not see through this statement, but anyone familiar with Boswell's journals will; indeed, even for the casual reader of Boswell it would be difficult to see this assertion as anything but a stark misrepresentation—part of his performance of authority rather than an accurate assessment of self. Although he repeatedly resolves to follow a "regular plan" (*London*, 40), part of what makes Boswell's journals so engaging is his utter inability to adhere to his resolutions, and the frequency with which he alternates between restraint and intemperance. As Pottle says, "If [Boswell] had lived by Roman motto, or by his own delicious 'Inviolable Plan,' we would never have heard of him" (*London*, xxxii). Boswell's description of himself as "a man subjected to discipline," then, seems more like an aspiration than a fact—a model of the kind of self-control that Boswell wanted for himself and looked for in a mentor. Thus in his correspondence with Zélide, Boswell not only adopts the role of mentor, but also assumes the qualities of the men he admires.

Just as Boswell plays the mentor, he also imagines a correspondent far more reminiscent of himself than of Zélide. As Brady writes, "casting a woman in a particular role defined her for him, making her far easier to cope with than if he had tried to understand her personality in full" (*Wife*, xvi), and the correspondence with Zélide affirms the truth of this statement, as Boswell consistently misinterprets Zélide's letters to his own advantage. We have already witnessed his

misdirected concern for Zélide's "hypochrondria," "distemper," and "despair," and we see a similar treatment of what Boswell calls her "libertine sentiments": "let me prevail with you to give up your attachment to pleasure and to court mild happiness. Believe me, God does not intend that we should have much pleasure in this world" (*Holland*, 304 and 302). Although Boswell does not completely fabricate Zélide's libertinism, he greatly exaggerates it (indeed, the term itself constitutes hyperbole) and responds to her as if she were the Boswell of his soon-to-be-written "Sketch" rather than a defiant, but chaste, young woman. For her own part, Zélide describes her pursuit of pleasure with her trademark confidence, and she betrays none of the anxiety and doubt that plague Boswell's admissions of his own libertinism. As such, Boswell's injunction to Zélide to "give up her attachment to pleasure and court mild happiness" might more aptly be directed at himself, as happiness and pleasure are not at odds for Zélide (as they are for Boswell).

Similarly, though Zélide refers to what she calls her religious "doubts," her explanation of those doubts is, once again, forceful and unambiguous, forming a sharp contrast to Boswell's own religious vicissitudes and seemingly endless inquiries about what he should believe. In reflecting on her theological position, Zélide writes, "There you have my ideas. I hope they will not lose me a friend's esteem. I hope I shall seem to you, in all this, less blameworthy and less unhappy than you thought" (*Holland*, 298). But Boswell, rather than admitting that he too wrestles with religious uncertainty, once again assumes his role, pretending to the kind of religious conviction that he finds in mentors like Paoli but rarely experiences himself: "I worship my Creator and I fear no evil. You see, my dear Zélide, that your friend is very happy as to the great article of religion. Be you the same" (*Holland*, 302–3). In order to expose Boswell's claims as false (or, at least, exaggerated) we need only turn to his journals. Not two weeks after penning

the above statement, Boswell confides to his journal, "I entered a moment St. Peter's Church, was devout and not gloomy. I hope to get free of my dreary associations of sadness to public worship in any form. I fear however that the Presbyterian *Kirk* cannot be overcome" (*Germany and Switzerland*, 31). But in addition to misrepresenting his own sentiments, Boswell also misinterprets Zélide's: immediately after Zélide has attempted to convince him that she is "less unhappy than you thought," he advises her to be "happy to as the great article of religion," admitting none of the subtlety of Zélide's religious musings. Thus, in order to play priest to Zélide's penitent, Boswell must ignore much of what Zélide says, preferring instead to project a version of himself onto her.

Boswell's hypocrisy in his advice to Zélide resounds throughout their correspondence. In addition to projecting his own concerns onto her where they do not already exist, he also fails to recognize (or refuses to admit) where their habits of mind overlap. For instance, in response to Zélide's elegant exposition of her religious beliefs, Boswell writes, "Pray make a firm resolution never to think of metaphysics. Speculations of that kind are absurd in a man, but in a woman are more absurd than I choose to express" (*Holland*, 303). Putting the egregious sexism of this statement aside, Boswell's disingenuousness here is staggering. Indeed, his purported belief that metaphysical speculations are "absurd" does not prevent him from initiating a conversation on this very topic with Paoli a year later (*Holland*, 303fn78). Although Boswell confesses his "metaphysical researches" to Paoli as a point of shame, he nonetheless admits that he has entertained such thoughts. By contrast, his letter to Zélide on the same subject merely dismisses such ideas as "absurd in a man," failing to acknowledge their shared preoccupations and pretending a distance from metaphysics that the interview with Paoli belies. Adding insult to injury, Boswell goes on to disparage Zélide's intellect, responding to her candid and clever letter

by writing, "You have fine talents of one kind, but are you not deficient in others? Do you think your *reason* is as distinguished as your imagination? Believe me, Zélide, it is not. Believe me, and endeavor to improve" (*Holland*, 304). Taken together, these quotations provide further examples of Boswell's grievous misinterpretation of his Dutch friend, and suggest his investment in imagining her not only as lesser than he, but also as less than she is.

Boswell's refusal to identify with Zélide, and his insistence his superiority despite their similarity, exposes the limits of Boswell's ability to understand himself through others. Unlike his relationships with Johnson, Rousseau, and Paoli, he is utterly unwilling to allow Zélide to teach him anything new about himself. Boswell most clearly articulates his attitude toward Zélide in his straightforward statement, "you are not the person to whom I could without reserve write *all* I think" (*Holland*, 306). Zélide, according to Boswell, is an insufficient interlocutor: she cannot, in his opinion, fulfill the role that he so assiduously pursues elsewhere. So far this chapter has focused on Boswell's preferred interlocutors (Johnson, Rousseau, Voltaire, Paoli, Temple), but it is equally revealing to consider those people whom Boswell rejects or deems unworthy: perhaps unsurprisingly, this category is largely comprised of women. Boswell's journal between 1766 and 1769, given the title *Boswell in Search of a Wife* by editors Pottle and Brady, makes this aversion to female interlocutors particularly clear: he is in constant confessional contact with Temple, but holds the many women of the journal at arms length, with the notable exception of the woman who would ultimately become his wife, his cousin, Margaret Montgomerie.

Boswell's tendency to reduce women to characters, and likewise to cast himself in roles opposite them, is especially pronounced in the early pages of this journal. He refers to the gardener's attractive daughter as an "angelic creature," an "enchanting creature," and himself as

"Agamemnon amongst the Thracian girls" (*Wife*, 3–5). He calls Mrs. Dodds, his mistress, "an angel," a "Circe," a "Laïs," and himself a "perfect Don Quixote" (*Wife*, 40, 43, 44, and 35).[50] Miss Blair, an eighteen-year-old Ayrshire heiress, becomes "the Princess," and Boswell "the jealous Moor" of *Othello* (*Wife*, 109). To be sure, Boswell occasionally turns to the language of character in his other relationships, as well: he pictures Rousseau, for instance, not only as the "Wild Philosopher," but also as "dear Saint-Preux," the hero in Rousseau's own *Nouvelle Héloïse*. Such characterizations are offset, however, by the much more substantive and personal content of their conversations, which allow the reader to perceive mentors like Rousseau as fully developed people. By contrast, the flat, almost caricature-like quality of these women in *Boswell in Search of a Wife* is amplified by the fact that we rarely hear from them in their own words; unlike Zélide, there is no correspondence with the love interests of this journal, and Boswell rarely deems their conversation worthy of transcription. What is more, he seldom engages them in confessional discourse, except to confess the extent of his passion.

Until the relationship with Margaret Montgomerie, Boswell's most confessional exchanges in this period occur in his correspondence with Temple, with whom he is far more candid than he ever is in conversation with a woman. In one notable passage, Boswell even compares their friendship to their imagined relationships with future wives:

> I am persuaded, Temple, that true exalted friendship never was stronger than it is between you and me. It has grown within ourselves and is in more vigour than ever. It has stood the trial of many a long absence and of my extensive travels … It has one more severe trial to stand—our marriage. Few have ever enjoyed the singular happiness that we have.

[50] Pottle writes that little is known about Mrs. Dodds, but that "she was probably the wife or daughter of some small laird, for she was known not only to Boswell's city friends, but also to his Ayrshire acquaintances, and she had income enough to live at Moffat or in Edinburgh, but her rompishness and ill breeding indicate no great experience of polite society," *Earlier Years*, 290.

> Let us value it and preserve it. If we cannot have wives that will be united as are their husbands, let us take care to have such as will not offend us, as will be complaisant and agreeable and entertain us with elegance. I confess, my dear Temple, that you are the best adviser. (*Wife*, 6)

This quotation not only recapitulates the now-familiar language of confession and mentorship, but also acknowledges Boswell's perception of women—even the woman he might choose as a wife—as inherently inferior companions and confidants. From Boswell's statement that Temple is "the best adviser," we might infer that no woman could equal him: no wife could adequately play the role of confessor or mentor that Temple has performed throughout their long friendship. (This, of course, will be proven wrong by Margaret Montgomerie, as we shall see.) For Boswell, men occupy the rarified world of "true exalted friendship," while woman inhabit the meager realm of "complaisant" and "agreeable" entertainment.

The most notable exception to this trend is the woman who eventually became Boswell's wife, Margaret Montgomerie. Margaret is perhaps the only woman in any of the journals whom Boswell addresses with the same candor as he does his male mentors and whose advice he both solicits and respects. For instance, in a manner typical of his other full confessions, he tells Margaret, "I am sure I have told you everything bad about myself: my melancholy, my jealousy, every unhappy feeling to which I am subject" (*Wife*, 257). In a letter to Temple, Boswell describes his relationship with Margaret thus:

> You must know that she and I have always been in the greatest intimacy. I have proved her on a thousand occasions, and found her sensible, agreeable, and generous. When I was not in love with some one or other of my numerous flames, I have been in love with her; and during the intervals of all my passions Margaret has been constantly my mistress

> as well as my friend … Then she smiled, was my confidante, and in time I returned to herself. (*Wife*, 200–1)

As we have seen, Boswell rarely uses this language of intimacy and confidence to describe his relationships with women; indeed, this passage is more reminiscent of the description of his friendship with Temple than of any previous female friendship. What is more, this quotation is especially uncharacteristic of Boswell's descriptions of his love interests, who tend to be discussed in the far more superficial language of "passion," "charm," and "enchantment." Additionally, in contrast to the correspondence with Zélide, Boswell neither casts Margaret in the role of penitent nor represents himself as priest; if anything, Margaret occupies the position of mentor in their relationship, hearing his complaints and counseling him in the style of Johnson, Rousseau, and Paoli.

Indeed, Margaret's advice to Boswell is strongly reminiscent of the advice he receives from his other mentors. For instance, she writes,

> May I once more entreat you to keep up your spirits, and do not keep the house too close. Exercise is absolutely necessary for your body, and society is a great relaxation to the mind. I approve much of your sober plan and hope you will continue it, and I am certain you will find it will make a great change on your sentiments; but is it necessary to be shut up to live sober? I hope not. Keep company with those who are so, and you will soon have a relish for that way of life. (*Wife*, 212)

Yet even while this passage might remind us of Johnson's directives ("take a great deal of exercise," and "live moderately") or Paoli's recommendations ("hold always firm one great object"), it also reveals what Boswell finds palatable about Margaret's feedback: her deference. Unlike Zélide's frank criticism of Boswell ("What I find *less* admirable in you"), Margaret

tempers her comments with conciliatory phrases like, "May I entreat you," "I approve much," and "I hope not." One need not read far in Margaret's letters to find further evidence of the deferential tone with which she addresses her future husband, even when advising him. For example, she repeatedly asks Boswell if she has angered him: "Are you angry at me for keeping up a correspondence with one I could never view in the black colours you do? … If that will not do, I promise never to mention her name to you again" (*Wife*, 211). Likewise, she inquires, "You are not angry at me for calling you by your name? Tell me and I will not do it again" (*Wife*, 248).

Perhaps most appealing to Boswell, Margaret, unlike his other mentors, actively solicits his confessions, asking, "What is the reason of your uneasiness? Why do you conceal from me what is the cause of your unhappiness? Surely you forget how much I am interested in what concerns you; otherwise you would not have left me in uncertainty" (*Wife*, 211). Whereas Boswell must scheme and maneuver to convince men like Rousseau to listen and respond to him, Margaret does so willingly, indulging Boswell's melancholy and assuming his burdens as her own. Indeed, in a letter to Margaret written shortly after she has accepted his proposal, Boswell confidently declares, "You have been kind enough to accept me with all my faults … You are prepared to bear them all, or to prevent them by your kindness" (*Wife*, 257). Thus, we can conclude that although Boswell is willing to enter into a confessional relationship with a woman, he will only accept her advice when it is tempered with sweetness and supplication.

Boswell and John Reid: The priest and the unwilling penitent

Although Boswell debuts the part in his correspondence with Zélide, his most significant role as priest occurs in his relationship with his client John Reid. When Boswell defends Reid in 1774, ten years after his interview with Rousseau, it is for the second time: Reid was Boswell's

first criminal client, whom Boswell successfully defended against the charge of sheep-stealing in 1766. This chapter looks at his second, unsuccessful defense of Reid for the same charge, focusing particularly on the period between Reid's conviction and execution.

Like the correspondence with Zélide, the Reid episode is notable not only for Boswell's frequent recourse to the language of confession, but also for his obstinate misinterpretation of his client. As Reid's execution date approaches, Boswell implores Reid with increasing desperation to confess his guilt. Boswell makes such appeals—with no success—on at least eight separate occasions, and only rarely does he entertain the possibility that Reid could be telling the truth when he says that he is innocent. Boswell's insistence on verbal confession in this case is especially striking, and his interactions with Reid are further testament to the power that auricular confession exerts on Boswell's imagination. Gordon Turnbull has written that "Boswell turns Reid, like himself, into a confessional autobiographer,"[51] but I would argue instead that Boswell pushes Reid to become, like himself, an oral confessant. In the end, however, Boswell's unrelenting faith in the confessional dynamic comes at the cost of an accurate assessment of the situation and an honest relationship with Reid.

Boswell's confessional relationship with Reid is truly auricular, privileging speech more than almost any other relationship considered in this chapter; indeed, the language of speech and hearing surfaces repeatedly in Boswell's interactions with Reid. He writes, "Ritchie pressed John much to make an authentic last speech," "I again exhorted him to truth," and "I once more

[51] Gordon Turnbull, "Boswell and Sympathy: The Trial and Execution of John Reid," in *New Light on Boswell*, 110. For more on Reid see Colby H. Kullman, "Boswell's Account of the 'Flesher of Hillend': A Total Plan for a Criminal Drama," *Ball State University Forum* 23 (Summer 1982): 25–34; and Colby H. Kullman, "James Boswell, Compassionate Lawyer and Harsh Criminologist: A Divided Self," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 217 (1983): 199–205.

conjured him to tell the truth."[52] More than anything, Boswell wants Reid to *say*, aloud, that he is guilty. Boswell is eager to know the truth for himself, but his desire for his client to make an oral confession exceeds even his desire to be Reid's confessor: "I took him by the hand with both mine, saying, 'John, it is not yet too late. If you have any thing to acknowledge, do it at the last to the reverend gentlemen'" (*Defence*, 333). At one point, Boswell articulates what we might consider a fairly conventional Calvinist opinion, telling Reid, "It is between God and your own conscience if you have told the truth." But he quickly follows this statement with another that almost directly contradicts it: "you should not allow me to believe it if it is not true" (*Defence* 331). In each of these instances, Boswell emphasizes both the need for Reid to speak his confession and the need for a mediator between Reid and God; the confession, Boswell contends, must be made to another person, it cannot be made directly to God.

Indeed, the third party (the mediator between God and man) remains of paramount importance in Boswell's confessional discourse with Reid. We see further evidence of his insistence on a mediator here:

> "John," said I, "you hear that clock strike. You hear that bell. If this does not move you, nothing will. That you are to consider as your last bell … After this day you are to look upon yourself as a dead man; as a man in a middle state between the two worlds … You are to look on this fortnight as so much time allowed to you to repent of all your wickedness, and particularly of your lying to me in such a way as you have done … I think it your duty to own your being guilty on this occasion if you be really so, which I cannot but think is the case. By doing so you will make all the atonement in your power

[52] William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Frederick A. Pottle, eds., *Boswell for the Defence, 1769–1774* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), 287, 326, 331, hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

to society. But at any rate I beseech you not to deny your guilt contrary to truth." (*Defence*, 305, my italics)

As before, Boswell makes it clear that he does not consider Reid's guilt a matter "between God and your own conscience," but rather one that requires an interlocutor. Here, however, Boswell suggests that this interlocutor might be the public ("you will make all the atonement in your power to society") rather than a particular priest. This idea of public judgment points to yet another way that Boswell's reliance on confession informs his (auto)biographical practices: much as his own confessors are the mediators between himself and God, Boswell's readers become the mediators between himself and his subjects, judging as if they were a jury. In Boswell's biographies, then, he forfeits his own position as priest, preferring to turn that role over to his readership.

The importance Boswell places on spoken language is further evident in his admonition to Reid not to die without confessing: "Consider what a shocking thing it is to go out of the world with a lie in your mouth" (*Defence*, 305, my italics). Boswell uses this same phrase when pressuring Reid's wife to join him in soliciting a confession: "[I told her that] she could not hope for the blessing of Providence on her and her children if by her advice John went out of the world with a lie in his mouth" (*Defence*, 330, my italics). This particular phrase once again directs our attention to the way that Boswell privileges orality. Notably, it is not Reid's heart nor his soul where the lie resides, but his mouth.

In a further parallel to other confessional episodes, Boswell introduces the possibility of a written confession (much like the "Sketch"), first leaving pen and paper for Reid and, ultimately, in an act of desperation, writing a fake confession on his behalf. Shirley Tung interprets this feigned confession as an instance of ghost writing, arguing that Boswell assumes Reid's voice in

an effort to legitimize his client.[53] I would add to this that Boswell views confession as the most effective means of legitimization, even if such a confession (paradoxically) entails misinterpreting or misrepresenting the situation. That said, just as the Catholic Church considers written confession to be inherently inferior to spoken—a last resort—so Boswell would infinitely prefer to hear Reid's confession rather than read it. This insistence on hearing Reid's confession seems to be born out of his conviction that spoken language, particularly "last words," is somehow more authentic than written. For instance,

> As I considered him [Reid] as now a gone man, I resolved to know the truth by being with him to the very last moment of his life, even to walk a step or two up the ladder and ask him then, just before his going off, what was the real matter of fact; for if he should deny then, I could not resist the conviction. (*Defence*, 293)

This quotation suggests that part of what Boswell finds so compelling about spoken language is its in-the-moment spontaneity—its power to evoke an authentic response.

This episode, however, begin to test the limits of speech as a guarantor of authenticity. Boswell's repeated appeals to Reid start to feel a bit like coercion, and we cannot help but notice the strong association in Boswell's mind between guilt and truth. When Boswell says, for instance, "I determined to try again to know the truth" (*Defence*, 304), what he means is, "I determined to try again to hear Reid's confession." Oddly, in his insistence on this particular version of authenticity, Boswell unintentionally participates in what J. A. Sharpe calls the "theater of punishment," in which confessions are treated as legitimate because they serve the

[53] Shirley F. Tung, "Dead Man Talking: James Boswell, Ghostwriting, and the Dying Speech of John Reid," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 77 (Spring 2014): 59–78.

interests of the state and denials are silenced or ignored.[54] Just as Boswell shows little regard for Zélide's self-representation, so too he consistently dismisses Reid's version of the story. As such, they cycle endless through their failed confession: Reid repeatedly denies his guilt, and Boswell repeatedly impugns his honesty, writing, for instance, "He persisted in his tale" (*Defence*, 305).

John Reid's final words, spoken from the scaffold, are, "Take warning. Mine is an unjust sentence," but Boswell—in his certainty that Reid is guilty—hears just instead of unjust and has to be corrected: "To me it sounded as if he said, 'just sentence'; and the people were divided, some crying, 'He says his sentence is just.' Some: 'No. He says unjust.' Mr. Laing, the clerk to Mr. Tait, one of the town clerks, put me out of doubt, by telling me he had asked the executioner, who said it was unjust" (*Defence*, 335). This act of almost willful mishearing, and Boswell's relationship with Reid in general, exposes the limits of Boswell's faith in and continual privileging of spoken language, reminding us (and Boswell) of the impossibility of rendering another person fully transparent, even through confession.

Conclusion

Speaking with Johnson in 1769, Boswell asks the great man what he thinks of confession. "Why, I don't know but that is a good thing," Johnson replies, "the scripture says, 'Confess your faults one to another,' and the priests confess as well as the laity" (*Life*, vol. 2, 105). Johnson's response echoes Boswell's faith in the advantages of confession, and articulates part of confession's appeal to Boswell: its potential for reciprocal exchange. Boswell makes the most of

[54] J. A. Sharpe writes that "[The men and women being executed] were the willing central participants in a theatre of punishment, which offered not merely a spectacle, but also a reinforcement of certain values. When felons stood on the gallows and confessed their guilt not only for the offence for which they suffered death, but for a whole catalogue of wrongdoing, and expressed their true repentance for the same, they were helping to assert the legitimacy of the power which had brought them to their sad end," in "'Last Dying Speeches': Religion, Ideology and Public Execution in Seventeenth-Century England" *Past and Present* 107 (1985), 156.

this potential, using his own confessions as a point of departure for the shameless questions he poses to Johnson, Rousseau, Voltaire, and Paoli, and examining their answers in an effort to comprehend his own inchoate self. Though the excellent work of critics like Starr and Watt convincingly demonstrates that written confessions heavily influenced the development of autobiography as a genre, Boswell's pervasive Catholic lexicon and his insatiable desire to confess his sins in person, and to have his "priests" confess in kind, compel a consideration of the role of oral practices, as well as written, in the construction of the eighteenth-century self. Additionally, Boswell's persistent turn outward, along with the powerful introspective strain of his writing, suggests a more collaborative, less isolated version of eighteenth-century autobiography than the traditional critical narrative allows. In looking to others in order to better understand himself, Boswell's writing might even be said to blur the lines between biography and autobiography. His portrait of Rousseau, for instance, tells us just as much about Boswell and his desire to rise "above the vulgar crowd" as it does about the exiled philosopher. Although I am hardly the first person to make this observation about Boswell—the autobiographical character of *The Life of Johnson*, for instance, is widely discussed—I hope that my argument has been suggestive of the ways that confession, specifically, contributes to the blurring of those generic lines, thereby problematizing our standard assumptions about the solitary nature of autobiography and introducing an alternative to the standard Protestant narrative of the genre. At the same time, Boswell's relationships with Zélide and Reid warn of the potential for a ritual like confession to become more of a performance than an authentic exchange; and, thus, this chapter illuminates the fine line between performance and authenticity in spoken language, even in something as seemingly credible as auricular confession.

Chapter Three

Textual Intimacy and the Trope of the Talking Letter

Perhaps more than any other written form, the letter has long been imagined as having a special kinship with orality and, as such, as occupying a middle ground between speech and writing. As critic Janet Altman writes, "epistolary discourse is obsessed with its oral model."[1] The association between epistolarity and orality dates back to the ancients—Cicero refers to letters as "written conversation"—and is reinvigorated in the Renaissance by Erasmus, who describes letter writing as, "carrying on a conversation with the dearest of friends in his very presence."[2] This perception of letters as conversation persists well into the eighteenth century; in strikingly similar turns of phrase, Alexander Pope describes letter writing as "talking on paper,"[3] Johnson as "prattling on paper," and Hugh Blair as "conversation carried on upon paper." Nonetheless, as with other forms of orality, the trope of the speaking letter is complicated by the rapidly expanding textuality of eighteenth-century life: no longer a straightforward extension of speech, the eighteenth-century letter becomes a nexus of written and spoken language. In this chapter I will examine the evolution of the trope of the talking letter throughout the eighteenth

[1] Janet Gurkin Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982), 135.

[2] Erasmus, *De Conscribendis Epistolis*, vol. 25 of *Collected Works of Erasmus*, ed. J. K. Sowards (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 75.

[3] Alexander Pope, *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, vol. 1, ed. George Sherburn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 105.

century, as well the emergence of a form of textual, material intimacy that rivals speech as a means of fortifying relationships across distance.[4]

Epistolary fiction becomes a prominent genre in the eighteenth century,[5] but this chapter will look almost exclusively at historical letters, especially those of Swift, Sterne, and Piozzi. From the many and varied historical letters of the period, I have narrowed my field of inquiry to three parallel sets of texts—Jonathan Swift's *Journal to Stella* (1784),[6] Laurence Sterne's *Journal to Eliza* (written 1767),[7] and Hester Lynch Piozzi's letters to William Augustus Conway (written 1819–21)—each of which lay bare one side of a personal correspondence between a man and a woman. What is more, these texts share the somewhat uneasy classification of "love letters"; although none of these three pairs of friends were ever romantically involved (at least not publically), the intimate quality of the letters has led to much speculation about the nature of the relationship depicted therein. Consequently, the *Journal to Stella*, *Journal to Eliza*, and the letters to Conway offer a study in textual intimacy, and this chapter is particularly interested in the methods that Swift, Sterne, and Piozzi use to foster closeness in their writing and to what extent their concept of the personal relies on an approximation of speech.

[4] For a discussion of *published* letters, see Sören Hammerschmidt, "Character, Cultural Agency, and Abolition: Ignatius Sancho's Published Letters," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 31 (June 2008): 259–86.

[5] See especially Thomas O. Beebee, *Epistolary Fiction in Europe, 1500–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook, *Epistolary Bodies: Gender and Genre in the Eighteenth-Century Republic of Letters* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

[6] This date marks the first time that Swift's letters to Stella were published as a separate volume, but 1784 was not the first time that any of this material appeared in print. For more on the complicated publication history of these letters, see Jonathan Swift, *Journal to Stella: Letters to Esther Johnson and Rebecca Dingley, 1710–1713*, ed. Abigail Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), lxxi–lxxvi, hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

[7] Though written in 1767, Sterne's *Journal to Eliza* was not published until 1904.

"Prattling on paper": A history of the trope of the talking letter in eighteenth-century Britain

Despite the increasing textuality of British society, the association between epistolarity and orality continued throughout the century, for reasons practical as well as theoretical. The trope of the talking letter strongly informs the eighteenth-century writer's relationship to the genre, and, as we shall see, letter writers continued to perceive the epistle as a substitute for the absent voice of their interlocutor and, thus, often to write in a style that attempted to replicate in-person conversation.[8] In addition to this theoretical commonplace, there are also historically-specific explanations for this association; for instance, it was common in all social strata to read letters aloud, and this practice was so prevalent that letter-writing manuals provided instruction in letter-*reading*, as well.[9] Furthermore, for women who were regularly barred from public spaces where face-to-face conversation took place, letters provided a crucial forum for discussions that men might conduct in pubs, clubs, or coffeehouses. As Felicity Nussbaum reminds us in her discussion of Bluestocking correspondence, for women "letters do not merely simulate conversation or act as a substitute for it: they are often the thing itself."[10]

Both eighteenth-century and modern critics have subjected this idea to scrutiny, however, observing that this comparison of speech and letters requires a willing suspension of disbelief. Clare Brant observes that although letters in the period were compared to speech, "Talk was not compared to letters. If familiar letter-writing was so like polite conversation, why did that

[8] Gary Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity: Vernacular Letters and Letter Writing in Early Modern England, 1500–1700* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 28–29.

[9] Eve Tavor Bannet not only describes the practice of reading letters aloud, but connects it to the elocution movement led by Thomas Sheridan and others, *Empire of Letters: Letter Manuals and Transatlantic Correspondence, 1688–1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 89–94.

[10] Felicity Nussbaum, *Limits of the Human* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 92.

likeness not come to mind when people were talking?"[11] Similarly, Susan Fitzmaurice calls the comparison between speech and writing "more conventional than real."[12] Wendy Jones reminds us that even if we accept that letters are like familiar conversation, we must ask what is meant by "familiar": Augustans, she suggests, "would have been horrified had they actually encountered in their correspondence the colloquial or the random discourse which might realistically approximate their oft-expressed belief that the perfect epistolary style must resemble intimate discourse."[13] The talking letter, then, is not a strictly mimetic form; rather, it occupies a middle ground between speech and writing, employing a set of conventions that readers recognize as being *like* speech, but which do not replicate that speech exactly.[14] This failure of mimesis is, at least partly, a function of the limitations of the medium: as in all writing, letters lack the ability to convey tone, gesture, or non-lexical sounds, and thus the letter writer must develop strategies to overcome these limitations. Meanwhile, Schneider points out, the letter reader must engage in "a great imaginative leap of faith."[15] For this reason, Bruce Redford perceives the "oral" aspects of letters as a kind of performance: "The letter-writer is an actor, but a *magician*-actor who works on his audience by sustaining the illusion of physical presence. Consequently the truest letter, we might say, is the most feigning."[16]

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[11] Clare Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 21.

[12] S. Fitzmaurice, "Like talking on paper? The pragmatics of courtship and the eighteenth-century familiar letter," *Language Sciences* 22 (2000), 362.

[13] Wendy L. Jones, *Talking on Paper: Alexander Pope's Letters* (Victoria: University of Victoria, 1990), 21.

[14] See Schneider, 32. See also Altman, 134–35.

[15] Schneider, 32.

[16] Bruce Redford, *The Converse of the Pen: Acts of Intimacy in the Eighteenth-Century Familiar Letter* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 7.

The cultural affinity for the trope of the talking letter seems to stem, at least partly, from a desire to assert the letter's legitimacy *despite* its textuality; in other words, the trope of the talking letter responds to a pervasive cultural mistrust of the written word. As Leah Marcus has shown, this ambivalence was especially pronounced in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England:

> Sixteenth-century audiences frequently lamented that manuscript and printed versions of a speech offered only a pale, obscure reflection, an imperfect copy, of the utterance as communicated orally by its author-speaker. Sixteenth-century English culture—even learned culture—had not quite adjusted to the idea that writing could constitute a primary mode of communication.[17]

Such concerns endure, however, well into the eighteenth century: as I argue in chapter two, Boswell's journals, for instance, rest heavily on the assumption that spoken language is somehow truer than written. Within this discussion of speech—both eighteenth-century and modern—the language of hierarchy appears again and again; as Schneider writes, "early modern Europe valorized speech as the more authentic communicative medium,"[18] and letters derive their special status in this hierarchy of media from their perceived kinship with speech. Swift, Sterne, and Piozzi all recapitulate this hierarchy to varying degrees—claiming authenticity by performing orality—but each of these three sets of letters also creates intimacy through the material aspects of correspondence, thus flummoxing the privileged status of speech in epistolary exchange.

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[17] Leah Marcus, "From Oral Delivery to Print in the Speeches of Elizabeth I" in *Print, Manuscript, & Performance: The Changing Relations of the Media in Early Modern England*, ed. Arthur F. Marotti and Michael D. Bristol (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000), 34.

[18] Schneider, 29.

The turn away from the association between letters and speech—even as the trope of the talking letter continues to shape eighteenth-century correspondence—is surely connected to one of the most influential linguistic developments of the period: the effort to standardize and regulate the English language. As I have described in my chapter on lexicography, the champions of a so-called "standard" English tended to discredit speech as an unreliable foundation on which to build a national language, and sought instead a more widely applicable linguistic standard. Within this battle for linguistic authority, the letter became one more contested territory, and, as with dictionaries and grammars, we can see this battle playing out in the pages of letter-writing manuals. Both widely accessible and wildly popular, eighteenth-century letter manuals participate in the effort to bridge the gap between disparate versions of English spoken in the British isles and thus fortify an emergent sense of national identity.[19] Eve Tavor Bannet explores the letter manual's role in this standardization process in great detail, identifying these manuals as a crucial component of the effort to make Britons into what Paul Langford has called "a polite and commercial people."[20] Letter manuals attempted to teach form and style through the inclusion of sample letters appropriate to various occasions, such as "business," "duty," "amusement," "affection," "courtship," "marriage," and "friendship," and the most popular of these manuals, *The Complete Letter-Writer, or Polite English Secretary* (1755),[21] targeted middle-class readers (indeed, one of the most significant differences between

[19] On the question of popularity, Bannet writes, "The number of editions and reprints of the most popular manuals in London alone confirm that a very large number of people were buying letter manuals throughout the long eighteenth century. Even the least regarded manuals generally managed three or four London editions. The most popular London compendium and *vade mecums* were reprinted upwards of twenty or thirty times," 22.

[20] Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727–1783* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). For a discussion of this connection, see Bannet, 23–24.

[21] Bannet writes that *The Complete Letter-Writer* "came as close to becoming a standard, universally available compendium during the second half of the eighteenth century as any letter manual managed to get," 152. For more on this particular manual, see Bannet, 152–70.

The Complete Letter-Writer and other such texts is the elimination of letters befitting the aristocracy). The influence of this particular manual was both long-lived and widespread: seeing nineteen London editions by 1800, *The Complete Letter-Writer* was also published in Scotland and America, where it enjoyed popularity into the nineteenth century.[22] Most interesting to me, the connection between letter manuals and other reference books was not only philosophical but *material*: letter writing manuals often included "grammars, spellers, dictionaries of hard words, and directions for manners and epistolary etiquette, in place of the collections of commonplaces and rhetorical tropes that letter manuals had offered until quite late in the seventeenth century."[23] Such physical proximity to dictionaries and grammars generates new written associations for letters that, partly, begin to displace the longstanding connection between letters and conversation.

This displacement occurs theoretically, too, as manuals like *The Complete Letter-Writer* emphasize the virtues of writing. At first, *The Complete Letter-Writer* echoes the conventional association of letters with speech: "In short we should write as we speak, and that's a true familiar Letter, which expresseth our Meaning the same as if we were discoursing with the Party to whom we write, in succinct and easy Terms."[24] And yet, the manual qualifies this statement, writing, "The Tongue and the Pen are both Interpreters of the Mind; but the Pen, the most faithful of the two, and as it has all the Advantage of Premeditation, is not apt to err, and leaves

[22] Bannet notes that the "comparatively minor variations" between these versions mean that "users of this manual in different parts of Britain and American were exposed to mostly the same letters in the same contexts, despite America's political break with England" (152–53).

[23] Bannet, 15–16. In fact, *The Lady's Polite Secretary* (1772), one of the many letter writing manuals that emerged in the late eighteenth century, was written by one of the female grammarians mentioned (but not discussed at length) in my chapter on dictionaries and grammars: Lady Dorothea DuBois (1728–74).

[24] *The Complete Letter-Writer: or, New and Polite English Secretary*, 2nd edition (London, 1756), 2.

Things behind, on a more authentic as well as lasting Record."[25] Thus, according to *The Complete Letter-Writer*, a letter both is and is not like speech: "we should write as we speak," but the *pen* is more "faithful" than the tongue. This quotation breaks with early-modern convention by realigning the site of authenticity, locating it in the written document rather than the spoken word: the "Record" that the pen leaves behind is "more authentic" than that of the tongue. Premeditation emerges as an increasingly dominant virtue in eighteenth-century discussions of language: in his essay on letter writing—published only a year before *The Complete Letter-Writer*—Samuel Johnson expresses a similar preference for careful, studied composition:

> The qualities of the epistolary stile most frequently required are ease and simplicity, an even flow of unlaboured diction, and an artless arrangement of obvious sentiments. But these directions are no sooner applied to use, than their scantiness and imperfection became evident.[26]

Johnson highlights the inadequacies of "unlabored" diction, calling it "artless," "obvious," "scant," and "imperfect." Although Johnson shares the widely held belief that epistolary exchange fosters intimacy in the absence of physical proximity ("to preserve in the minds of the absent either love or esteem"), he argues that the best way to create such intimacy is through deliberate language: "The pebble must be polished with care, which hopes to be valued as a diamond; and words ought surely to be labored when they are intended to stand for things."[27] At the same time, Johnson's most intimate correspondence (with Hester Lynch Piozzi, then Thrale) betrays the conception of letters as speech that is difficult to avoid in the eighteenth century: for

[25] ibid.

[26] Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler, No. 152*.

[27] ibid.

instance, Johnson writes, "I have prattled now till the paper will not hold much more."[28] Bruce Redford argues that Johnson's letters to Thrale are unusually intimate and conversational among Johnson's correspondence[29]; nonetheless, Johnson's recourse to the language of "prattling" suggests the continued power of the trope of the talking letter, even as this trope was beginning to be revised by an increasingly textual eighteenth century.

Little languages and lexical games: The linguistic hybridity of Swift's Journal to Stella

The Complete Letter-Writer, echoing the beliefs of the past while defining the standards of the future, exemplifies a linguistic heterogeneity that is typical of the eighteenth century. With an increasingly literate population and a flourishing print culture, the eighteenth century witnessed an explosion of text even while earlier oral cultures and attitudes about spoken language persisted. Swift's *Journal to Stella* is particularly representative of this cultural flux: of the three sets of letters in this chapter, the *Journal to Stella* is most closely aligned with the trope of the talking letter, and yet, even here, we begin to see the erosion of this trope as Swift repeatedly pushes up against its limits.

The *Journal*'s heterogeneity is immediately signaled by its title[30]: although called a "journal," the text is composed of letters that Swift wrote to Esther Johnson ("Stella") and Rebecca Dingley between September 1710 and 1713. This collection was not given the name

[28] Johnson to Hester Thrale, Brighthelmston, 15 October 1778, in *The Letters of Samuel Johnson, With Mrs. Thrale's Genuine Letters to Him*, vol. 2, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 258.

[29] Redford, 207–8.

[30] This heterogeneity has also been observed by Williams, introduction to *Journal to Stella*, lviii–lix.

"Journal to Stella" until some sixty years later,[31] but Swift himself uses the term in one of his first letters, writing, "Henceforth I will writt something every day to Md; and make it a sort of Journall, & when it is full, I will send it; whether Md writes or no" (*Journal to Stella*, 7).[32] As it turns out, this was an apt characterization: containing letters from Swift alone, the collection assumes the one-sided quality of a journal (none of Johnson and Dingley's responses to Swift survive).[33] The *Journal*'s generic ambiguity is further complicated by its publication history. There is no evidence to suggest that Swift ever intended these letters for publication, and they did not appear in print until 1784 (Swift died in 1745); moreover, the initial editions pose a problem to modern scholars—especially those of us interested in the slippage between speech and writing in Swift's letters—as they were cleaned up for the sake of Swift's posthumous reputation. Particularly unfortunate (although not surprising) is the fact that Deane Swift, Swift's cousin and the first editor of the letters, removed or translated much of the intimate "little language" that Swift uses when addressing Johnson and Dingley. In her excellent new edition of the *Journal*, Abigail Williams has attempted to consult the manuscript version wherever possible, but her effort to restore the original is hampered by the fact that only twenty-six of the original sixty-five letters exist in manuscript form (*Journal to Stella*, lxxvi–lxxxiv). Despite the perceived threat to Swift's dignity, the *Journal to Stella* has been receiving serious critical attention since the 1980s,[34] and several critics have observed the oral qualities of Swift's

[31] The letters were first collected and given the name "Journal to Stella" by Thomas Sheridan as part of his *Works of the Revered Dr Jonathan Swift* (1784). For more on the genre of the *Journal*, see Williams, introduction to *Journal to Stella*, xlvii.

[32] "Md" was Swift's abbreviation for both Johnson and Dingley together, and may stand for "my dears."

[33] Frances Burney's letters to her sisters demonstrate a similar generic ambiguity.

[34] See Irvin Ehrenpreis, "Swift's Letters," in *The Character of Swift's Satire: A Revised Focus*, ed. Claude Rawson (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1983).

letters.[35] To this already dynamic body of work, I add a consideration of how Swift uses (or neglects) the trope of the talking letter in his efforts to foster intimacy with Stella.[36]

In many ways, Swift's letters to Stella epitomize the early-modern talking letter: he conceives of the letter as absence made presence, bringing Stella to life in their pages.[37] Moreover, the letters participate in the tradition of oral performance, since Dingley must have read them aloud to her nearsighted companion (*Journal to Stella*, lix); they have been interpreted as representative of Swift's "spontaneous, private self," and thus perpetuate the connection between letters and authenticity[38]; and, finally, and perhaps most persuasively, Swift himself frequently describes the letters as conversation. For instance, he writes that the letters will allow him to "always be in Conversation with Md and Md with Pdfr" (*Journal to Stella*, 7).[39] Likewise, he says, "I would have some little conversation with MD before your pdfr goes to bed, because it makes me sleep and dream, and so forth" (*Journal to Stella*, 280). In addition to explicitly conceptualizing correspondence as conversation, Swift also writes passages in which he imagines Johnson and Dingley responding to him in the moment, as if his own letter were actually conversing with him. For example:

> Well, and what have you to say to pdfr now he is a-bed? Come now, let us hear your speeches. No, 'tis a lie, I an't sleepy yet. Let us sit up a little longer, and talk. Well, where

[35] See Frederik N. Smith, "Swift's Correspondence: The 'Dramatic' Style and the Assumption of Roles," *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 14, no. 3 (Summer 1974): 357–71; Abigail Williams, "'I Hope to Write as Bad as Ever': Swift's *Journal to Stella* and the Intimacy of Correspondence," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 35 (Winter 2011), 103–5.

[36] Paul McDowell looks closely at Swift as a barometer of eighteenth-century attitudes toward speech and writing, but she does not look at the *Journal to Stella* in any detail. See "Mediating Media Past and Present" and "Of Grubs and Other Insects."

[37] Williams, "Swift's *Journal to Stella* and the Intimacy of Correspondence," 105.

[38] Smith, 357.

[39] "Pdfr" is Swift's abbreviation for himself.

> have you been to-day, that you are but just this minute come home in a coach? What have you lost? Pay the coachman, Ppt. No, faith, no I, he'll grumble.—What new acquaintance have you got? come, let us hear. (*Journal to Stella*, 80)

Here Swift once again employs speech as a metaphor for letter writing ("sit up a little longer, and talk"), and he imagines this talk in the halting rhythms of conversation ("No, faith, no I"). In another similar instance, he writes, "Pshaw, I write so plaguy little, I can hardly see it myself. Write bigger, sirrah pdfr. No, but I won't. Oh, you are a saucy rogue, Mr. pdfr, you are so impudent. Come, dear rogues, let pdfr go to sleep; I have been with the dean, and 'tis near twelve" (*Journal to Stella*, 218). Recording a playful back-and-forth, Swift imitates in-person conversation on the page of his letters. Interestingly, conversation only appears in these imagined contexts; unlike Boswell, for instance, Swift does not usually transcribe actual conversations in the body of his letters. This absence of other kinds of dialogue suggests that Swift conceives of conversation exclusively as a tool for the promotion of intimacy between himself and his imagined interlocutors.

Despite this lack of interest in transcribing conversation, Swift's letters exemplify what has been called a conversational style; in fact, many critics have remarked on this aspect of the letters. Frederik N. Smith, for instance, writes that Swift "remains consistently closer than any of his contemporaries to the patterns of speech,"[40] a conclusion he reaches by juxtaposing Swift's "extreme looseness of syntax" with the periodic style of contemporaries like Addison. Swift's infamous "little language," however, goes beyond loose syntax and reproduces the childlike speech that Swift used in conversation with Stella[41]: "Must loo mimitate pdfr, pay? Iss, and so la

[40] Smith, 365.

[41] In his letters, Swift refers to speaking this language with Stella: "Do you know that every syllable I write I hold my lips just for all the world as if I were talking in our own little language to MD."

shall. And so leles fol ee rettle. Dood mollow" (*Journal to Stella*, 158). Similarly, Swift—in a way that anticipates the prolific dashes of *Tristram Shandy*—uses dashes to replicate the rhythms of conversational speech: "I lost four pound seven shillings at play—with a — — — a — a — bookseller" (*Journal to Stella*, 193).[42] Swift even attempts to transcribe non-lexical sounds, such as when he writes "Uth, uth, uth, uth, uth" or "urge urge urge" (*Journal to Stella*, 126 and 387).[43] The *Journal to Stella*, then, exemplifies the two primary ways that speech manifests itself in eighteenth-century letters: first, speech as a metaphor for epistolary exchange; and second, a familiar style that evokes (but can never exactly replicate) in-person conversation.

This connection between speech and intimacy is not ubiquitous in eighteenth-century letters, and the *Journal to Stella* makes visible the gendered dimensions of this notion of speech-based intimacy. Swift's "little language," in particular, points to the feminization of intimate discourse, creating a stark distinction between the stately language of the republic of letters and the childlike prattle of the domestic spaces that Swift invokes when writing to Stella and Dingley. This distinction is especially apparent in the way that critics have discussed the *Journal* over the years. It is reported, for instance, that Deane Swift and Hawkesworth thought that the "little language" should be altered in order to preserve Swift's "dignity."[44] Much as Johnson's reputation was considered compromised by picture of domesticity presented in Thrale's *Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson* (1786), Swift's legacy was endangered—or so thought his executors—by the domestic quality of his letters to Stella. Indeed, the examples of both Swift and Johnson suggest that textual intimacy is closely tied to the domestic, and thus—to the extent

[42] Williams's footnote observes, "The dashes seem to represent a hesitation or stutter over the confession."

[43] In her footnote to "urge urge urge," Williams writes, "perhaps to indicate the sound of coughing or throat clearing, or an 'urgh' of complaint."

[44] Abigail Williams, "The Difficulties of Swift's *Journal to Stella*," *Review of English Studies* 62 (Nov. 2011), 759.

that the domestic is a feminine space—to the female. Commenting on the unusual closeness of Swift's relationship with Stella, Virginia Woolf elaborates this connection between the intimate and the domestic: "without effort or concealment he could use those precious moments late at night or the first thing on waking to pour out upon her the whole story of his day, with its charities and meannesses, its affections and ambitions and despairs, as though he were thinking aloud."[45] In Woolf's rendering, the domestic space ("late at night or the first thing on waking") is the site of unrestrained intimacy such as Swift and Stella enjoyed.[46]

Despite the prominence of speech in Swift's letters, the *Journal to Stella* also grapples with the limitations of the trope of the talking letter; indeed, part of what makes the *Journal to Stella* such an interesting experiment in epistolary orality is the fact that it consistently points to the shortcomings of text as a proxy for speech. For instance, Swift writes, "I wish you could hear me repeating all I have said of this in its proper tone, just as I am writing it. 'Tis all with the same cadence with oh hoo, or as when little girls say, I have got an apple, miss, and I won't give you some" (*Journal to Stella*, 50–51). Swift's language, "I *wish* you could hear me," suggests that writing restricts his ability to communicate tone; the best he can do is refer to familiar tone as a point of comparison. What is more, Swift seems keenly aware of the material realities of epistolary communication; the letters are filled with references to space, length, handwriting, paper size, paper thickness, and reading light. For instance, he writes, "I will write plainer if I can remember it; for Ppt must not spoil her eyes, and Dd can't read my hand very well; and I am afraid my letters are too long" (*Journal to Stella*, 40).[47] Thus, for all that Swift attempts to

[45] Virginia Woolf, "Swift's 'Journal to Stella,'" *The Second Common Reader* (New York: Harcourt, 1932), 71.

[46] Margaret Doody discusses Swift as a domestic writer in "Swift Among the Women," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 18 (1988): 68–92.

[47] See also Swift, 43 and 66.

engage the oral, he cannot seem to forget—nor will he let his reader forget—the indisputable *textuality* of their exchange. Swift is willing to participate in and play with the early-modern commonplace of the letter as speech, but he cannot quite suspend his disbelief: he is always acutely aware of the fact that he is writing.

Moreover, Swift's letters go beyond acknowledging textuality to exploiting it for its communicative potential: the *Journal* includes a kind of lexical play that could not be accomplished orally. For example, he writes, "He gave me al bsadnuk lboinlpl dfaonr ufainfbtoy dpionufnad, which I sent him again by mr. Lewis" (*Journal to Stella*, 156),[48] requiring Johnson and Dingley to decode his message and thereby drawing them further into the jocular dynamic of the correspondence. In a fascinating reversal of the common assumption that in-person conversation fosters intimacy more effectively than writing, Abigail Williams argues that Swift instead uses this kind of "textual obscurity" to promote intimacy between himself and his interlocutors:

> Both these sets of letters suggest that the act of reading, or deciphering, is as important as the writing itself, and that in making their correspondence 'difficult,' both Swift and his female addressees hoped to provoke their readers into more active or engaged participation in their texts.[49]

Williams's analysis relies heavily on the manuscripts and pays particular attention to the places where text has been crossed out or, in some cases, entirely obscured:

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[48] Williams's footnote cracks the code: "by reading the alternate letters of this simple code: 'a bank bill for fifty pound.'"

[49] Williams, "Difficulties," 774. Williams also presents a version of this argument in "Swift's *Journal to Stella* and the Intimacy of Correspondence," where she writes, "Swift seeks nonverbal marks of the pen as a suitable embodiment of the exclusive relationship between writer and reader. Moreover, in their obscurity, they also offer protection again the textual interloper" (114). For more on the *Journal to Stella* and intimacy, see Woolf, "Swift's 'Journal to Stella.'"

> I believe that these obliterations were done by Swift himself, before he sent the letters. The *Journal*'s most recent editor, Sir Harold Williams, along with previous editors and casual readers, seems to have assumed that this swirled obliteration was either the effort of later eighteenth-century editors to salvage Swift's dignity, or Swift's own intervention at a later date.[50]

Between the "obliterations" and lexical games, Swift's letters—and the experience of reading them—imagine a distinctly *unspoken* closeness. Moreover, in Swift's keen awareness of these letters as *text*, the *Journal* gives the lie to the assumption that letters can fully replicate spoken exchange.

Laurence Sterne's letters and journal to Eliza

The vigorous textuality of the *Journal to Stella* is evocative of another eighteenth-century writer, one with whom Swift has much in common: Laurence Sterne. Though Sterne was born almost fifty years after Swift, the two men resemble one another both on and off the page: both play with the boundaries of speech and text in their writing, and both were successful satirists and Anglo-Irish clergymen with an affinity for much younger women. What is more, their respective intimate relationships resulted in two surprisingly similar texts: Swift's letters to Esther Johnson, collected as the *Journal to Stella*, and Sterne's letters to Eliza Draper, collected as *Letters from Yorick to Eliza* (1773), and its companion text, the *Journal to Eliza* or the *Bramine's Journal* (written 1767).[51] Though notably alike in their conception, however, Swift's

[50] Williams, "Difficulties," 762.

[51] Despite their similarities, Swift's text probably did not influence Sterne's: "Sterne's journal-letters to Eliza Draper were written in 1767, and first published in 1773, making it unlikely that he was influenced by the initial publication of a selection of the Swift journal-letters in the 1760s," Williams, introduction to *Journal to Stella*, lxvii.

and Sterne's letters diverge in their execution, especially with regard to the status of speech and the trope of the talking letter.

Given the many similarities between Swift and Sterne, we might expect a rich critical tradition of comparison; and, indeed, scholars have long paired them together. That said, these critical comparisons tend to focus much more heavily on their sermons than on their fictional works or their letters,[52] and no one has looked at Swift and Sterne together in the context of eighteenth-century orality.[53] Swift's lexical games and textual awareness most closely resemble the playfulness of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1760-67), whose asterisks, dashes, blank pages, and squiggles bring its textuality to the fore. Indeed, the similarities between Swift's *Journal* and Sterne's *Tristram* are striking and worth examining in greater detail. For example, much as Swift imagines his reader as an interlocutor, and thus imagines conversations between them, so does Sterne: "But pray, Sir, What was your father doing all *December,—January, and February*?——Why, Madam,—he was all that time afflicted with a Sciatica."[54] Such moments literalize the trope of the talking letter, making the page the site of conversational exchange and allowing the text itself to respond to the writer (or in this case, the narrator).

Also like Swift, Sterne deploys the dash as a substitute for the halting quality of conversational exchange: "——Bless my soul!——my poor mistress is ready to faint,——and her pains are gone,——and the drops are done,——and the bottle of julap is broke,——and the

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[52] See for example Christopher Fanning, "Sermons on Sermonizing: The Pulpit Rhetoric of Swift and of Sterne," *Philological Quarterly* 76 (Fall 1997): 413–36; Melvyn New, "Sterne and Swift: Sermons and Satire," *Modern Language Quarterly* 30 (1969): 198–211. For a comparison of Swift and Sterne that does not restrict itself to the sermons, see Melvyn New "Swift and Sterne: Two Tales, Several Sermons, and a Relationship Revisited," in *Critical Essays on Jonathan Swift*, ed. Frank Palmeri (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1993).

[53] Alexis Tadié has written in great detail about the various ways that Sterne attempts to reproduce and approximate orality in his writing, focusing especially on *Tristram Shandy*, in *Sterne's Whimsical Theatres of Language: Orality, Gesture, Literacy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

[54] Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, ed. Ian Campbell Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 9, hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

nurse has cut her arm" (*Tristram*, 146). In its gaps and pauses, fits and starts, the dash is also evocative of the aspects of conversation that text cannot accommodate (like gesture, for instance). Likewise, both Swift and Sterne use textual apparatuses to represent non-lexical sounds: "Here my uncle Toby throwing back his head, gave a monstrous long, loud Whew—w—w—— something betwixt the interjectional whistle of *Hey day!* and the word itself" (*Tristram*, 141). In these, and many other instances, Sterne's attempt to represent spoken language and other kinds of nonverbal sounds in *Tristram Shandy* suggests not only a formal interest in speech but also an awareness of eighteenth-century discourses about orality.

The comparisons between Swift and Sterne extend beyond mere formal experimentation to a broader philosophical engagement with the limits of the written word. In *Tristram Shandy*, Sterne seems to answer this question implicitly through the gaps, omissions, and failures of transcription that pervade the narrative. For instance,

> Because, continued Dr. Slop . . . 'tis a point very difficult to know . . . because, Sir, if the hip is mistaken for the head,—there is a possibility (if it is a boy) that the forceps **——What the possibility was, Dr. Slop whispered very low to my father." (*Tristram*, 148–49)

Here, as is common in *Tristram Shandy*, Sterne uses asterisks to emphasize the shortcomings of text: as I interpret it, the text is simply unable to accommodate the variety (or, in this case, obscenity) of spoken language. The asterisks allude to spoken exchange, but the content of that spoken exchange cannot (or should not) be written down. At the same time, however, both authors explicitly theorize their writing in terms of speech. Much as Swift imagines his letters as conversation, Sterne envisions his novel in the very same way: "Writing," Tristram says, "is but a different name for conversation" (*Tristram*, 87).

In light of the many similarities between *Journal to Stella* and *Tristram Shandy*, we might expect to see a comparable engagement with the boundary between speech and text in Sterne's letters. Surprisingly, however, these letters are almost unambiguously textual, betraying none of the playful interest in spoken language that we see in *Tristram*. The letters examined here, ten in total, were written by Sterne to the young Eliza Draper in 1767 while she was traveling to India with her husband and were first published in 1773 as *Letters from Yorick to Eliza*. Although alleged replies from Draper, entitled *Letters from Eliza to Yorick*, surfaced shortly after the initial publication of Sterne's letters, "it seems quite certain that they are part of the cottage industry that evolved from hints in the 1773 letters, from Sterne's penchant for broadcasting his amours without a modicum of discretion, and from hints in *A Sentimental Journey*."[55] The ten letters from Sterne, then, appear to be the only letters whose authenticity is certain. Unlike Swift, who is rumored to have been married to Johnson despite the fact that they lived apart, nothing ever came of Sterne's infatuation with Draper; thus, these ten letters, together with the journal, are practically the sum and substance of their relationship: a relationship conducted almost entirely through text.

In some small ways, Sterne's letters retain remnants of the traditional early-modern concept of letters as speech. For example, he imagines Eliza's letters speaking to him: "Write to me, my child, only such, let them speak the easy chearfulness of a heart that opens itself any how."[56] So too, he privileges a "loose" style, and aligns this style with honesty and authenticity:

> I hope, too, you will perceive loose touches of an honest heart in every one of them, which speak more than the most studied periods, and will give thee more ground of trust

[55] Melvyn New, introduction to *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy and Continuation of the Bramine's Journal: The Text and Notes*, by Laurence Sterne (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), xxii.

[56] Sterne, *Letters from Yorick to Eliza* (London, 1773), 12, hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

> and reliance upon Yorick, than all that labour'd eloquence cou'd supply—lean then thy whole weight Eliza, upon them and upon me. (*Yorick to Eliza*, 38)

And finally, in a rare moment, he imagines his own letters as conversing with Eliza: "I trust they [the letters] will be a perpetual refuge to thee from time to time, and that thou wilt (when weary of fools and uninteresting discourse) retire and converse an hour with them and me" (*Yorick to Eliza*, 37). In this quotation the letters assume a peculiar animation—conversing on their own, independent of Sterne—almost as if they become a kind of presence in and of themselves, rather vessels merely transmitting Sterne's voice. (This notion of the letter as an independent presence will become especially pronounced in Piozzi's letters.) It is worth noting that two of these three references to speech are contained within the same letter. Thus, of the ten letters, only two engage explicitly with the notion of orality and the traditional conversational quality of the genre.

Despite these nods to spoken language, Sterne's letters are by and large far less interested in speech than both Swift's letters and Sterne's own *Tristram Shandy*. Indeed, when compared to Sterne's larger corpus, including his sermons and his correspondence, *Tristram Shandy*'s interest in speech begins to look anomalous. Sterne's general correspondence maintains a characteristic "loose" style, but the letters to Eliza—though certainly not "periodic"—contain far fewer of Sterne's trademark dashes and interjectional phrases than any of his other writing. By his own account, his lovesickness seems to have affected his style: "I have not had power or the heart, to aim at enlivening one of them [his letters] with a single stroke of wit or humour; but they contain something better, and what you will feel more suited to your situation—a long detail of much advice, truth, and knowledge" (*Yorick to Eliza*, 37–38). What is more, despite the fact of writing, Sterne often seems to be at a loss for words in these letters, writing such things as "the sufferings

I have sustain'd all night on account of thine, Eliza, are beyond my power of words" (*Yorick to Eliza*, 8). When confronted with his overwhelming attachment to Eliza, Sterne appears to lose faith in the power of language to do those feelings justice, and thus, in a marked departure from Swift, Sterne turns away from language in his effort to emphasize his closeness to Eliza. Sterne's vision of intimacy, then, appears less oral and more sentimental, in keeping with the way that sentimental texts tend to "privilege the visible, somatic expression of the sympathy evoked by their various spectacles" and "condemn verbal language as an inadequate means of communicating the emotions of the feeling heart."[57] Within this sentimental framework, letter-writers must devise ways of communicating intimacy that (paradoxically) do *not* rely on language: the tear-stained page, for instance.

This turn away from a speech-based notion of intimacy is further signaled by the way that Sterne both addresses and describes his correspondent. Sterne consistently resorts to the third person in phrases such as "to whom should Eliza apply," or "Yorick wou'd be offended" (*Yorick to Eliza*, 20). On the face of it, the third person hardly seems to foreclose orality; after all, Swift uses the third person practically to excess. But in the absence of imagined conversations such as we find in Swift, the third person becomes distancing and alienating, formal rather than familiar, and thus obstructs intimacy instead of fostering it. In further contrast to Swift's letters, and in keeping with the sentimental tradition, Sterne betrays a relentless preoccupation with Eliza's *image* rather than her voice. He writes, for instance, of her "picture":

> In the one you are dressed in smiles, and with all the advantages of silks, pearls, and ermine, in the other, simple as a vestal, appearing the good girl nature made you; which to me conveys an idea of more unaffected sweetness, than Mrs. Dr—p—r habited for

[57] Maureen Harkin, ed., introduction to *The Man of Feeling* by Henry Mackenzie (Orchard Park, NY: Broadview, 2005), 11.

> conquest in a birth day suit, with her countenance animated and "dimples visible." (*Yorick to Eliza*, 28)

In this quotation, Sterne locates the truth of Eliza's character in her appearance: the *picture* reveals her to be "the good girl nature made you" and "conveys an idea of unaffected sweetness." As we have seen, this kind of authenticity was traditionally associated with speech; but Sterne shifts the locus of Eliza's authentic self to her exterior and away from her interior and to the visual, in effect eliminating the need for the trope of the talking letter, since talk does not seem to have the same weight for Sterne as it does for many other eighteenth-century letter writers (especially when talking to objectified and silent women).

Sterne's objectification of Eliza becomes even more pronounced later in that same letter. The letter, rather than standing in for Eliza's voice or her self, seems little more than a proxy for her body. For instance,

> Was your husband in England, I wou'd freely give him 500l. (if money cou'd purchase the acquisition) to let you only sit by me two hours in the day, while I wrote my sentimental journey—I am sure the work wou'd sell so much the better for it, that I should be reimburs'd the sum more than seven times told. (*Yorick to Eliza*, 31)

This passage provides significant insight into how Sterne thinks of Eliza: as a commodifiable body, a physical presence, a "rent-a-muse," to borrow a phrase from Lynn Festa.[58] Sterne imagines using Eliza in much the same way that the sentimental novel deploys the abject: Eliza will be little more than a surface, a body to respond to, inspiring scenes of sentiment. As Festa writes when discussing Sterne's response to a small portrait of Eliza in his possession, "so

[58] Lynn Festa, *Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 104.

arrested is Sterne by the miniature that the woman behind or anterior to it becomes incidental."[59] Indeed, this letter gradually dehumanizes Eliza, as she becomes something more like an art object than a living being. Again, Sterne writes,

> I would not give nine-pence for the picture of you, that the Newnham's have got executed; it is the resemblance of a concerted, made up coquette—your eyes, and the shape of your face (the latter the most perfect oval I ever saw) which are perfections that must strike the most indifferent judge, because they are equal to any of God's works in a similar way, and finer than any I beheld in all my travels, are manifestly inspir'd by the affected leer of the one, and strange appearance of the other, owing to the attitude of the head, which is a proof of the artist's, or your friend's false taste. (*Yorick to Eliza*, 32)

In addition to the continued commodification of Eliza, this passage reads as an ekphrasis, a detailed description of the Newnham's "picture" of Eliza juxtaposed with a similarly detailed description of Sterne's recollection of the flesh-and-blood Eliza. But this Eliza is lifeless, a taxidermy version of herself who does not think or speak but rather sits, inanimate, to be observed by others. This vision of a correspondent could not be more different from what we see in Swift, whose interlocutors are always responding, reading, thinking, and speaking in his imagination of them. Indeed, so unimportant is Eliza's voice, that she need not even reply to Sterne: he can do it for her. Along these lines, he writes, "I hope you will answer in this letter; but if thou art debarr'd by the elements which hurry thee away, I will write one for thee, and knowing it is such an one as thou woudst have written, I will regard it as my Eliza's" (*Yorick to Eliza*, 40). Sterne has complete confidence that he can reproduce "such an one as [Eliza] woudst have written" with no input from Eliza whatsoever; and thus, Sterne's letters read less like a

[59] ibid.

conversation with a living person and more like an imagined relationship with an object of his own creation.

That said, we catch a brief glimpse of Eliza's voice in Sterne's very last letter to her, in which he praises her for her epistolary style. He writes,

> I have shew'd your letter to Mrs. B. and to half the literati in town: you shall not be angry with me for it, because I meant to do you honor by it— You cannot imagine how many admirers your epistolary productions have gain'd you, that never view'd your external merits. (*Yorick to Eliza*, 61)

Although Eliza is here commended for her writing, speech does not appear to factor into this calculation, and thus we might once again conclude that Sterne does not regard the letter as a proxy for voice. Sterne praises Eliza's letters for their "sense, natural ease, and spirit" (*Yorick to Eliza*, 60), but that is as close as we come to understanding what he found so commendable in Eliza's style. The only other access we have to Eliza's voice is the fabricated letters that were printed in 1775 and most likely written by the literary imitator William Combe (1742–1823).[60] These letters devote more attention to the material conditions of letter writing than Sterne does, but very little, if any, attention to speech. Like Swift, Eliza comments on the mechanics of writing: "My nerves are so weak, and my hand trembles so much, that I am afraid this scrawl will hardly be intelligible."[61] Additionally, she describes the physical experience of reading Sterne's letters, and how the tears she sheds in the process of reading modify the page itself: "I

[60] Combe published *Sterne's Letters to his Friends on Various Occasions* (1775) and *Letters Supposed to have been Written by Yorick and Eliza* (1779), which were a mix of fact and fiction, including some of Sterne's actual letters and some written by Combe himself. Additionally, Combe was a personal friend of Sterne's and claimed to have had an affair with Eliza prior to her association with Sterne. Vincent Carretta, "Combe, William (1742–1823)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6022, accessed 25 May 2015].

[61] William Combe, *Letters from Eliza to Yorick* (London, 1775), 24, hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

bedewed your pathetic pages with tears—but they were tears of pleasure—my heart flowed through my eyes" (*Eliza to Yorick*, 17). In this phrase, "my heart flowed through my eyes," we see echoes of the sentimental conviction that authentic emotion should be somatic rather than oral. Similarly, she observes traces of Sterne's own tears on his letters, writing, "I will say, Here my Bramin wept—when he penn'd this passage, he wept" (*Eliza to Yorick*, 34). As we can see from the frequent references to tears, Eliza's letters use the trappings of sentimental literature to bolster their relationship, shifting the locus of intimacy away from the voice and toward the body. Indeed, Eliza depicts these letters as sacred objects, almost like talismans, rather than vessels of voice: "I have put them [the letters] under a cover—I will wear them next my heart—they shall, indeed, be my refuge—my kind silent moniters [*sic*]—I will peruse them with reverence" (*Eliza to Yorick*, 43). Worst of all, these letters reinforce Sterne's fetishization of Eliza's image, as she writes, "I often look on my picture as finished by your hand—I am persuaded it is what I ought to be—I will strive to come up to the coloring, in order to be as perfect as my nature will admit" (*Eliza to Yorick*, 39–40). Here, as in Sterne, Eliza locates her authentic self in the picture: "it is what I ought to be." Yet even while she cites Sterne's picture as her ideal, she nonetheless acknowledges the extent to which it is divorced from reality: "I cannot merit his encomiums—they are not due to myself; but to my picture, as drawn by your brilliant imagination" (*Eliza to Yorick*, 22). Thus, in her elevation of images over words, and her interest in the tangible page of these letters—written in wobbly script, tear-stained, and kept close on her person—Eliza recapitulates Sterne's notion of material, textual intimacy.

To conclude this section, I turn briefly to the *Journal to Eliza*, or the *Bramine's Journal*, which Sterne envisioned as a kind of extended letter that he would send to Eliza upon its

completion (much as Swift imagined his letters as a journal).[62] Sterne writes, "I began a new journal this morning: you shall see it, for if I live not till your return to England, I will leave it you as a legacy" (*Yorick to Eliza*, 25). Sterne's primary modern editor, Melvyn New, says, "one needs to read *Bramine's Journal* both as correspondence and as a literary accompaniment to *Sentimental Journey*."[63] New includes the journal in his edition of *Sentimental Journey*; this chapter will read it as correspondence. Like the letters, the journal was not intended for publication, only as a record of Sterne's experience in Eliza's absence. Even more than the letters, the journal is characterized by excessive apostrophe; for example, "Eliza!— dark to me is all this world without thee!"[64] Such apostrophes strike the reader as poetic rather than conversational, an address to an absent and unresponsive beloved, rather than imagined exchange with a favorite interlocutor. Occasionally, Sterne transcribes a spoken exchange with some one or another, but he also makes curious remarks like, "I have to tell you a Conversation—I will not write it" ("Journal to Eliza," 136). Sterne's reluctance to put certain things in writing points to the limits of text as a vehicle for intimacy: Sterne may want to share private or secret details with Eliza, but such details are (to his mind) suitable only for face-to-face exchange. Interestingly, the journal is not the only place where this aversion to writing conversation appears; it surfaces elsewhere in his correspondence, as well. In a 1739 letter to John Dealtary, Sterne writes, "I have

[62] New prefers the name *Bramine's Journal* to *The Journal to Eliza* (given by Wilbur L. Cross in his *Works of Laurence Sterne*).

[63] Melvyn New, introduction to *The Letters of Laurence Sterne: Part One, 1739–1764* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), lii. New refers to two different ways of presenting the *Bramine's Journal*: "Curtis decided to interweave the journal entries with coincident correspondence in his edition of the letters, and certainly there are cogent reasons for doing so. There are, however, equally cogent reasons for reading the *Journal* alongside *Sentimental Journey*, and the *Florida Edition* has published the two together in one volume." New refers to *Letters of Laurence Sterne* edited by Lewis Perry Curtis in 1935 .

[64] Laurence Sterne, "The Journal to Eliza," in *A Sentimental Journey and Other Writings*, ed. Ian Jack and Tim Parnell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 107, hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

a thousand things I want to talk over with you, which are only fit for Conversation, & cannot well be committed to paper."[65]

Every so often, however, we catch a glimpse of the way that the journal evokes spoken language: "I have you ten times a day besides me—I talk to You Eliza, for hours together—I take your Council—I hear your reasons—I admire you for them!" ("Journal to Eliza," 130). Similarly, he writes, "Your Figure is every before my eyes—the sound of your voice vibrates with its sweetest tones the live long day in my ear—I can see and hear nothing but my Eliza" ("Journal to Eliza," 142). Thus, even though Sterne dwells on Eliza's image in the *Journal* almost as much as in the *Letters*—"I sit contemplating over thy passive picture," and "I kiss you Picture—your Shawl—and every trinket I exchanged with You" ("Journal to Eliza," 148 and 142)—*this* Eliza seems more fully embodied than the Eliza of the *Letters*, even if somewhat more idealized. For indeed, this journal, even more so than the letters, is the repository of Sterne's fantasy life, of what he hopes will come to pass and imagines in vivid detail, but which never does. Thus, although he "can see and hear nothing" but Eliza, it is as if Sterne has passed out of the realm of the real and into the ideal, and as such we must wonder if this is simply further evidence of the way that Sterne divorces the flesh-and-blood Eliza from the Eliza of the letters: the Eliza he sees and hears is one of his own creation.

In one of his final letters to Eliza, Sterne imagines a strange reunion scene (even stranger in that includes his long-suffering wife and daughter) in which this separation of voice and body is taken to an extreme: "We shall fish upon the banks of Arno, and lose ourselves in the sweet labyrinths of it's vallies, and then thou should'st warble to us, as I have once or twice heard thee 'I'm lost, I'm lost,' but we would find thee again, my Eliza" (*Yorick to Eliza*, 51). This passage epitomizes the peculiar status of the voice in Sterne's letters: no longer vested in the interlocutor

[65] Sterne, *The Letters of Laurence Sterne*, 1.

(or her pen), the voice becomes untethered from the body and, further, untethered from the concept of the authentic self. This separation of voice and body was evident in Sterne's attentiveness to Eliza's appearance without equal regard for her speech, as well as in his conviction that he could write Eliza's voice himself. No longer bounded by her body, Eliza's voice warbles above the riverbank like a bird and, in a striking turn of phrase, declares, "I am lost." Sterne assures her, "we would find thee again," but in light of his general lack of interest in her interiority, I am not so sure that he would. Eliza's voice is lost.

"The rogue told me nothing": Hester Lynch Piozzi and the intimacy of text

The final section of this chapter looks at a third set of intimate letters, those written by Hester Lynch Piozzi (1741–1821) to the young actor William Augustus Conway (1789–1828). I have chosen to look at this particular correspondence, first, because it nicely reverses the gender dynamics of the other two sets—Piozzi was seventy-eight at the time of writing and Conway was thirty—and second, because critics have paid comparatively little attention to their relationship (which, though brief, was one of the most significant of her later life). Like Swift's and Sterne's letters before, Piozzi's letters to Conway present a one-sided correspondence; indeed, Piozzi's letters are utterly preoccupied with the infrequency of Conway's communication. The letters to Conway, then, form a fitting capstone to this chapter: Swift, Sterne, and Piozzi all address an absent beloved, many years their junior, writing in a loose, conversational style.

Some readers might be surprised that I favor Piozzi's letters to Conway over her correspondence with Samuel Johnson, especially in light of the fact that both Johnson and Piozzi (then Thrale) sometimes imagine themselves as Swift and Stella, self-consciously observing echoes of Swift's letters to Stella in their own exchange. Johnson, for instance, compares himself

and his epistolary style to "Presto" (one of the names Swift used to refer to himself when writing to Stella): "Madam, Now I know you want to be forgetting me, but I do not want to be forgotten, and would rather send you letters like *Presto*'s, than suffer myself to slip out of your memory."[66] Piozzi broadens the scope of this comparison, including Alexander Pope and Martha Blount: "Pope & Swift, were softened by the Smiles of Patty Blount & Stella; & our stern Philosopher Johnson trusted me about the Years 1767 or 1768—I know not which just now—with a Secret far dearer to him than his Life."[67] What is more, in her marginalia to this passage, she adds Sterne and Eliza to this illustrious group of male/female pairings: "Sterne's Attachment to Mrs Draper was another of the odd Things of this kind—Their Letters printed under the Names of Yorick & Eliza are a proof of his strong Admiration.—I saw no Rarety in Eliza—She was a Woman *all as another in my Eyes*."[68] Even while Piozzi compares herself to Eliza, however, she also betrays unease about this comparison, dismissing Eliza as "a woman all as another." Piozzi is similarly underwhelmed by Stella, calling her writing "very paltry" and expressing surprise at "the moderate degree of Excellence with which Dr. Swift was contented." This same quotation, however, ends with Piozzi referring to Stella as "my Namesake Miss *Hester* Johnson," testifying to Piozzi's ambivalence about an analogy that necessarily aligns her with the (in her eyes) unremarkable female friends of two literary giants.[69]

To my mind, this is one of the most compelling reasons to write about the letters to Conway rather than the correspondence with Johnson. In her exchange with Johnson, Piozzi is

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[66] Johnson to Hester Thrale, 18 May 1769, in *The Letters of Samuel Johnson*, vol. 1, 225.

[67] *Thraliana: The Diary of Mrs. Hester Lynch Thrale (Later Mrs. Piozzi), 1776–1809*, vol. 1, ed. Katharine Balderston (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1942), 384.

[68] *Thraliana*, vol. 1, 384n3.

[69] See Felicity Nussbaum, "Managing Women," *Autobiographical Subject*; "Eighteenth-Century Women's Autobiographical Commonplaces," in *The Private Self*, ed. Shari Benstock (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

pushed into the lesser of two roles: playing the Stella to his Swift, she will always be the woman who allows us to glimpse the "private" or "domestic" Johnson, rather than a literary luminary in her own right. Indeed, in Redford's chapter about Johnson's correspondence with Piozzi—in which he compares this correspondence to Swift's *Journal to Stella*—this is very much the bent that his argument takes: "In their letters (to Hester, to Esther) these two men of public affairs [Johnson and Swift] discover an unsuspected private self and a language with which to define it."[70] The letters to Conway, by contrast, shift the poles of this binary, aligning Piozzi—in her verbosity, her old age, and her position of power—with Swift and Sterne rather than Stella and Eliza. Similarly, we might think of this correspondence (in which Piozzi's female voice is the dominant one) as finally allowing the silent Stella and Eliza to talk back.

Conway's name first appears in one of Piozzi's many diaries in 1815, but the two did not meet until three years later in Bath, which Piozzi made her home in the last years of her life (before her final displacement to Penzance) and where Conway was a regular on the stage. Conway—famously tall, of mysterious parentage and dubious talent—became a favorite of Piozzi's: she offered him her patronage and, together with her friend Penelope Pennington, took an interest in his unhappy love affair with a young woman in Bath. By the time of her acquaintance with Conway, Piozzi's relationship with her daughters and her adopted son Sir John Salusbury was increasingly strained; Conway, however, offset that loss to a certain extent, as Piozzi redirected her parental affection toward her young protégé. Piozzi and Conway corresponded from 1818 until her death in 1821, and judging from her diaries, scholars estimate that Piozzi may have written as many as seventy-five letters to Conway,[71] but the bulk of these

[70] Redford, 243.

[71] John Tearle, *Mrs. Piozzi's Tall Young Beau, William Augustus Conway* (Rutherford: Associated University Press, 1990), 88.

have been lost. Conway, by contrast, seems to have been a much less generous correspondent, and the few surviving letters from Conway to Piozzi suggest that in addition to being scarce his letters were also disappointingly brief.[72]

This section considers three sets of Piozzi's letters, which, taken together, offer a picture of Piozzi's concept of epistolary intimacy at the end of her life: the eighteen letters to Conway that are included in *The Piozzi Letters* (2002); selections from the letters to Penelope Pennington (in which Conway is a frequent topic of conversation); and, finally, the much-contested *Love Letters of Mrs. Piozzi, written when she was eighty, to William Augustus Conway* (1843). I include the often-dismissed *Love Letters* for two reasons: first, despite assertions to the contrary, all the evidence suggests that they are probably authentic; second, regardless of their authenticity, the *Preface* to these letters and the public reaction to their publication bring the gendered dimensions of epistolary intimacy to the fore. Unlike her male counterparts, whose intimate correspondence simply rounds out our larger understanding of them, Piozzi's letters to Conway threaten to eclipse her other work and jeopardize her legacy.

Since Piozzi's epistolary output was enormous, and the editorial attention to these letters is uneven, I begin by rehearsing the complicated history of these three sets of letters. Numbering somewhere between 2,650 and 3,175 letters overall,[73] Piozzi's correspondence is one of the most remarkable aspects of her written archive; indeed, Piozzi's biographer, William McCarthy, suggests that the letters are more valuable than any of her published books: "it is probably for her letters," he writes, "that she most deserves to be read."[74] Despite this high praise for her

[72] The John Ryland's Library in Manchester has eight letters from Conway to Piozzi in its collection (GB 133 Eng MS 596).

[73] James L. Clifford numbers the letters at 3,175 and Edward A. and Lillian D. Bloom count 2,650. See William McCarthy, "Review Essay: *The Piozzi Letters*," *Age of Johnson* 12 (2001), 400.

[74] McCarthy, "Review," 413.

correspondence, there is no single, authoritative edition of Piozzi's letters, and readers who wish to peruse the letters must approach this archive in a piecemeal fashion. Edward and Lillian Bloom's *The Piozzi Letters* (2002)—a carefully edited, six-volume edition of Piozzi's correspondence—goes a long way toward rectifying this problem; however, as suggested by its name, this collection includes only those letters written *after* Piozzi's marriage to Gabriel Piozzi in 1784 (at which point she was forty-three). For a similarly authoritative edition of letters written before 1784, readers may consult R. W. Chapman's *The Letters of Samuel Johnson, With Mrs. Thrale's Genuine Letters to Him* (1952), but, of course, this collection is limited to the correspondence with Johnson. Otherwise, the only letters in print are those included in nineteenth-century collections, which pose a variety a problems for modern critics: Abraham Hayward's *Autobiography Letters and Literary Remains of Mrs. Piozzi (Thrale)* (1861), for instance, is poorly edited, while Edward Mangin's *Piozziana; or, Recollections of the Late Mrs. Piozzi* (1833) includes only fragments and excerpts of Piozzi's voluminous correspondence.[75] According to the Blooms, Piozzi's adopted heir, Sir John Salusbury Piozzi Salusbury (1793–1858), is largely responsible for the uneven publication and editorial history of her correspondence. It is clear from the letters themselves and from her directives to her literary executor, Sir James Fellowes, that Piozzi intended her correspondence for publication; Sir John, however, continually interfered with Sir James's efforts, squirrelling away Piozzi's papers and threatening to bring suit against the Williams family of Bodylwyddan (who planned to publish the Piozzi letters in their possession).[76] As a result, many of the manuscripts did not surface until

[75] For a complete record of Piozzi's letters, see James L. Clifford, *Hester Lynch Piozzi (Mrs. Thrale)*, second edition, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), Appendix D, 466–67.

[76] Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom, eds., *The Piozzi Letters: Correspondence of Hester Lynch Piozzi, 1784–1821*, vol. 1, 24.

the twentieth century, when Sir John's grandson, Major E. P. Salusbury, and great-granddaughter, Rosamund V. Colman, began selling this material.

With regard to the three sets of letters considered here, the editorial history of the first two is relatively straightforward. The Blooms include nineteen letters from Piozzi to Conway, which are drawn from a variety of archives.[77] Portions of these same letters first appeared in John Tearle's *Mrs. Piozzi's Tall Young Beau* (1991), but these letters are frequently excerpted and are printed with minimal editorial apparatus. The letters to Penelope Pennington come from two sources: wherever possible, I consult the Blooms' edition, but sometimes the Blooms omit a letter (they note that they "do not intend total inclusiveness"[78]) and in those cases I cite Oswald G. Knapp's *The Intimate Letters of Hester Piozzi and Penelope Pennington 1788–1821* (1914) instead. The *Love Letters of Mrs. Piozzi*, however, poses the biggest problem: published in 1843 by an anonymous editor, these letters are taken from a collection that has subsequently been lost, and thus their legitimacy has long been considered dubious. It is well past time, however, to reconsider these letters, especially in light of the nineteen letters printed by the Blooms.

Love Letters of Mrs. Piozzi, a slim little volume, contains seven letters from Piozzi to Conway, ostensibly written between September 1819 and February 1820. Although they follow the same timeline, none of the seven "love letters" overlap with the nineteen to Conway in the Blooms' edition: these are seven *additional*, and unauthenticated, letters. Unsurprisingly, the fact of Piozzi's age, coupled with its sensational title, has given *Love Letters* a lurid appeal that exceeds that of *Journal to Stella* or *Letters to Eliza*: Swift's and Sterne's affinity for younger women may have raised some eyebrows, but Piozzi's romantic attachment to Conway (as alleged

[77] The majority of these nineteen letters reside at the Morgan Library in New York and the rest are found in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, the Library of Congress, the Princeton University Library, and the Tutt Library at Colorado College.

[78] Bloom and Bloom, vol. 1, 17.

by the preface to *Love Letters*) was regarded as shockingly transgressive. Absent the preface, the letters suggest a relationship more maternal than romantic, but the ghost of scandal continues to haunt Piozzi's legacy, despite many scholarly attempts to salvage her reputation.[79] Conway and Piozzi's relationship caused some murmurings at the time—in fact, the rumors surrounding their friendship at least partially accounted for Piozzi's removal to Penzance in 1820—but the most damning gossip emerged in response to the *Love Letters*'s titillating 1843 preface. The anonymous editor of the pamphlet frames the Piozzi-Conway correspondence in unequivocal terms of romantic attachment: "That Mrs. Piozzi was in love, and that she wished to be loved again by the object of her affection, is beyond doubt, if her own words have any meaning."[80]

The editor's salacious interpretation, however, is not fully borne out by the contents of the letters themselves, which read more like those of a concerned, perhaps overly-invested parent to her child; one, for instance, is signed, "love your anxious trembling tender Parent; your *more* than Mother, as you kindly call your affectionate H. L. PIOZZI" (*Love Letters*, 33). This particular quotation is apt in so far as it testifies to the maternal quality of Piozzi's affections, but also, in the phrase "*more* than Mother," points to complexity of her investment in Conway. In all three sets of letters, Piozzi routinely uses the language of motherhood to describe her affection for the young actor, and yet the extent of her devotion sometimes seems to exceed strictly maternal love. Critics have characterized their relationship in a variety of ways—"devoted attachment,"[81] "passionate friendship,"[82] "an anxious mother" and a "dearly loved son,"[83]

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[79] See especially Percival Merritt, *The True Story of the So-Called Love Letters of Mrs. Piozzi: "In Defence of an Elderly Lady"* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927); and Tearle, *Mrs. Piozzi's Tall Young Beau*.

[80] *Love Letters of Mrs. Piozzi, Written When She Was Eighty, to William Augustus Conway* (London, 1843), 15, hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

[81] Devoney Looser, *Women Writers and Old Age in Great Britain, 1750–1850* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 108.

"grandmother and grandson"[84]—and scholars have gone to great lengths to show that the anonymous editor's description of Piozzi's feelings as romantic is both groundless and fundamentally inaccurate. As Mangin, author of *Piozziana*, wrote in the margins of his own copy of the pamphlet,

> The Letters do not contain one syllable to authorise the miscreant's insinuation, being manifestly those of a warm-hearted, generous and enthusiastic woman, who boasts of having seen her 80th year, and wishes to be deemed the maternal friend of a poor young fellow—who has not another.[85]

The problem with the *Love Letters*, then, is not that they are fictional, but that they are "grotesquely misunderstood,"[86] and that despite numerous attempts to debunk any notion of romance between Piozzi and Conway, readers have often preferred the sensational misinterpretation of these letters to the more banal truth.

While I agree that the *Love Letters* hardly support the editor's characterization of Piozzi as a foolish old woman besotted with a handsome young man, I also think that Mangin, insisting that there is not even "one syllable" to support the idea of an amorous attachment, overstates his case. All three sets of letters suggest that some notion of romantic love—such as can exist between two people with nearly fifty years separating them—might comprise at least a portion of Piozzi's complex feelings for Conway. Indeed, the significant efforts of even modern critics to foreclose this possibility suggests an underlying prejudice in our treatment of Piozzi: Swift's and

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[82] Gay Brack, introduction to vol. 6 of *The Piozzi Letters*, 13.

[83] Oswald G. Knapp, ed., *The Intimate Letters of Hester Piozzi and Penelope Pennington, 1788–1821* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1914), 281.

[84] "Letters of Mrs. Piozzi to William Augustus Conway," *Athenaeum* (August 1862).

[85] As cited in Bloom and Bloom, vol. 6, 22. This copy is at the Huntington Library in San Marino, CA.

[86] Clifford, *Hester Lynch Piozzi*, 452.

Sterne's late-in-life attachments merely flesh out an already nuanced picture of two great men, while the suggestion of romantic attachment in Piozzi's old age threatens to discredit her altogether. Why should that be the case? Piozzi was an influential, well-connected, and charismatic old lady; is it so ludicrous that she should imagine herself loved?

At the same time, we must consider this critical outrage—as exemplified by Mangin—in context. The anonymous editor's treatment of Piozzi is grossly unjust, not only in his allegations regarding Conway, but also in his broader remarks on Piozzi's life and character. Commenting on *Letters to and from the Late Samuel Johnson* (1788), the editor accuses Piozzi of publishing these letters only to serve her vanity: "her subsequent publication of the Doctor's letters to her appears to have been intended rather to show how highly he *once* thought of her, than to increase his reputation" (*Love Letters*, 7). Similarly he observes that, aside from her friendship with Johnson, Piozzi's life "is generally uninteresting"; he shames her for being "*not quite* broken-hearted" after Mr. Thrale's death (*Love Letters*, 8); and he discredits her work in shockingly sexist terms:

> "Retrospection" . . . is *Ancient* History in dishabille, in a dimity morning gown, her slippers down in the heel, and her *front* awry; and *Modern* History in a cotton gown, and pattens, just returned from shopping, with a new cambric pocket-handkerchief, three yards of pink ribbon, a cake of Windsor soap, and an ounce of all-spice in her reticule. (*Love Letters*, 9)

Taken together, these aspersions might explain why even modern critics refer to the *Love Letters* as a "diabolical fabrication"[87] and are eager to invalidate the collection as a whole. My research, however, suggests that such scholars have been a bit hasty in rejecting the *Love Letters* and that there are good reasons to reconsider the longstanding critical position on this collection. This is

[87] Clifford, *Hester Lynch Piozzi*, 470.

not a matter of new evidence coming to light, but rather of shifting the emphasis away from the critical response to these letters and back to the primary material itself. As the subsequent section will make clear, the evidence in favor of these letters has long been available, but this evidence has been overshadowed by their bad reputation.

Since their first publication in 1843 there has been much debate about where the *Love Letters* originated, but it seems clear that (unlike the *Letters from Eliza to Yorick*, for instance) they cannot be considered complete fabrications. Collected and published anonymously, *Love Letters* supposedly draws on a trove of Piozzi's letters that was purchased by the American poet Elizabeth F. Ellet (though how Ellet came to purchase these letters remains uncertain) and has since been lost.[88] The compiler of the *Love Letters*—and author of the injurious preface—claims that the contents of Mrs. Ellet's collection

> were lent to a gentleman with permission to take copies, and use them as he might think fit. Of this permission he availed himself; and from his copies, which were sent to England about three months ago, this *editor princeps* of Mrs. Piozzi's love letters has been printed. (*Love Letters*, 14)

Nearly twenty years later, prompted by the recent publication of Hayward's *Autobiography, Letters, and Literary Remains of Mrs. Piozzi (Thrale)* and its "severe allusions" to Piozzi's relationship with Conway, Mrs. Ellet disputed the claim that she had given permission for the letters to be copied in a short article published by the *Athenaeum* in July 1862.[89] Writing out of concern for Piozzi's reputation, Ellet insisted that the editor's story (quoted above) was "entirely

[88] Merritt speculates "it is possible that Professor Ellet [Mrs. Ellet's husband] may have been the purchaser of the Piozzi-Conway correspondence at the sale in 1828," 82–83. He also recounts his (unsuccessful) efforts to recover these letters: "several ineffectual attempts were made to locate the original letters," 24.

[89] E. F. Ellet, "Mrs. Piozzi's Love Letters," *Athenaeum*, July 12, 1862.

untrue": "as soon as I knew of the existence of such a book, I wrote to the publisher, informing him of the fraud."[90]

Importantly, Ellet does not claim that the letters themselves are fraudulent, but merely that they are "so garbled and distorted as to change their character, for the apparent purpose of injuring the fair fame" of Piozzi.[91] The distortions appear to be limited to two passages only, as becomes evident in a subsequent article published by the *Athenaeum*. As Merritt writes in his 1927 summary of the changes, "there seem to have been no actual interpolations in the letters themselves."[92] After the controversy came to light, Ellet made the entirety of her collection available to the *Athenaeum* for review, and one month later the paper published an article authenticating Ellet's statement and further condemning the editor of the *Love Letters* for his "misrepresentations":

> The editor of the pretended "Love Letters of Mrs. Piozzi" assumes that this aged and respectable lady fell into an absurd passion for this woe-begone hero of the sock and buskin. On comparing the correspondence as Mrs. Piozzi wrote it with the correspondence as the editor published it, we find that the suggestion of sexual love is made by an abominable misrepresentation of two passages in her letters.[93]

This lengthy article is adamant that Piozzi's relationship to Conway was not romantic, even presenting side-by-side comparisons of passages in the *Love Letters* with their originals. The *Athenaeum* cites the following passage, for instance, as one of the altered passages: "Written at three, four, and five o'clock by an Octogenary pen; a heart (as Mrs. Lee says) twenty-six years

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[90] Ellet, *Athenaeum*.

[91] Ellet, *Athenaeum*.

[92] Merritt, 42.

[93] "Letters of Mrs. Piozzi," *Athenaeum*.

old, and, as H. L. P. feels it to be, ALL YOUR OWN" (*Love Letters*, 36). A comparison with the original reveals that the changes to this passage are rather minor (though still evocative): "The word *octogenary* is emphasized by Mrs. Piozzi, not by her editor; 'all your own' has no emphasis in the letter, and is put in capital letters by the printer."[94] The changes are similarly minor in the other modified passage, bearing out Merritt's claim that there were no additions to the letters, only small alterations. In essence, these amount to typographical differences—hardly the appalling forgery of which the editor is often accused. According to the evidence presented by the *Athenaeum*, then, the most problematic element of the *Love Letters* is its slanderous preface, not its actual epistolary content. (Despite its professed interest in defending Piozzi's reputation, the *Athenaeum* mounts this defense in questionable terms, including such statements as, "She moved for a time in the very best circles, and though she was herself, with all her wit and learning, a weak, fickle, foolish creature, she knew some of the great men, in whose lives the curiosity of mankind will never die."[95] Keen as the *Athenaeum* is to salvage Piozzi's good name, its investment in her reputation appears to extend no further than the fact that "she knew some of the great men.")

The *Athenaeum* article is crucial to the extent that it substantiates Ellet's claims about the letters; nonetheless, it does little to resolve the question of whether the letters that Ellet held in her possession were indeed authentic. When compared with the letters printed in the Blooms' edition, however, the *Love Letters* gain credibility. A basic comparison of the date and origin of each letter, for instance, reveals that the seven letters of the pamphlet could be inserted

[94] "Letters of Mrs. Piozzi," *Athenaeum*.

[95] "Letters of Mrs. Piozzi," *Athenaeum*.

seamlessly into the nineteen letters of the Blooms' edition.[96] The first of the *Love Letters*, written 1 September 1819 at Weston super Mare is suggestive: although there is no September 1st letter in the Blooms' edition, the letters on either side of this date (August 31st and September 4th) are also written from Weston super Mare, the seaside resort where Piozzi spent the summer of 1819. A comparison of content establishes further consistency between the two sets of letters: "Letter I" of the *Love Letters* and the August 31st letter to John Salusbury both include gossip about Piozzi's longtime friend, Thomas Sedgwick Whalley, and his recent abandonment by his wife.[97] "Letter II" of the *Love Letters*, dated 7 October 1819, falls between two letters to Conway in the Blooms' edition, dated October 1st and October 9th, respectively. This letter not only matches the Blooms' edition in date and place of origin, it also picks up where the October 1st letter leaves off: Piozzi closes her October 1st letter with "This Moment brings your Dear Dear Letter . . . Give my Love to Mrs. Rudd—how I rejoyce She is with you!,"[98] and "Letter II" opens with, "I write—like my dearest Friend—a brief Communication; *not* to beg letters; the last half broke my heart: but to tell you that having directed mine to Mrs. Rudd . . . I fear it will not be received safely" (*Love Letters*, 23). The comparisons could go on, but I hope I have begun to make my point: when placed side by side, the authentic letters to Conway and those in *Love Letters* appear as one almost seamless series.

The problem, then, is that the reputation of the *Love Letters* is largely the result of a book published before any of the authentic letters to Conway were known: Percival Merritt's *The True Story of the So-Called Love Letters of Mrs. Piozzi; In Defence of an Elderly Lady* (1927).

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[96] See Appendix for the dates and places of origin of all twenty-six letters (seven in *Love Letters* and nineteen in the Blooms' edition).

[97] *Love Letters*, 20; Bloom and Bloom, vol. 6, 317. The letters also both include a variation on the idea that summer is over: in Bloom and Bloom, "the summer has gone off beautifully" (318), and in *Love Letters*, "summer is gone" (20).

[98] Bloom and Bloom, vol. 6, 332.

Merritt's book attempts to reconstruct the history of the *Love Letters* in as much detail as possible, describing Merritt's own (fairly extensive) efforts to recover the letters, reprinting the *Athenaeum* article that compares the pamphlet with the originals, and providing information about their alleged owner, Elizabeth Ellet, as well as what little Merritt could discover about when and where the letters could have been purchased. He concludes his study by lamenting the fact that Ellet did not make her collection public when she had the chance:

> If, following her indignant protest to the publisher of the *Love Letters* when the pamphlet appeared, she had come out with all the correspondence, an injustice might have been rectified, and a malicious slander been forever dispelled. But now it is probably too late. The poison has been thoroughly disseminated.[99]

Merritt might not have been so demoralized, however, had he been able to access the nineteen letters to Conway that the Blooms include in their 2002 edition of the letters, which, although not the actual *Love Letters* themselves, provide ample context for the seven letters of the pamphlet, making them appear far less anomalous. These nineteen letters come from various collections sold at different points, but the bulk of the letters—now housed in the Morgan Library in New York—did not appear until 1978–79, when they were gifted to the library by a private donor (Edward Powis Jones).

I am not the first to read the *Love Letters* alongside the authentic letters to Conway; in *Mrs. Piozzi's Tall Young Beau, William Augustus Conway* (1991) John Tearle does just that. Tearle's effort to redeem the pamphlet, however, is secondary to his interest in Conway himself (to whom he is related[100]), and he tends to take the authenticity of *Love Letters* for granted rather

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[99] Merritt, 84–85.

[100] See John L. Tearle, *Tearle: a Bedfordshire surname* (Sherborne St. John, Hampshire: Lillydown House, 1996).

than carefully making the case for their validity. Tearle's book presents nearly all the letters to Conway included in the Blooms' edition (as well as some the Blooms omit), with the seven *Love Letters* inserted chronologically. Although he occasionally attempts to authenticate the seven letters by referring to Piozzi's diary, he most often introduces them with such bald statements as "there can be no doubt of its authenticity" and "it is indisputably authentic and unadulterated."[101] Curiously, although Tearle collaborated with the Blooms—they directed him to the extant letters from Conway—they, like many critics before them, sidestep the question of the *Love Letters*'s authenticity, saying only that it is a "vicious anonymous pamphlet."[102] Similarly, Devoney Looser, who wrote on Piozzi's relationship with Conway as recently as 2008, fell back on the old position about the letters, calling the pamphlet an "unsolved mystery."[103] Perhaps because he does not meticulously establish a case for the inclusion of the letters, Tearle's book seems to have had little impact on the critical field: it is cited by the Blooms and by Looser, but it is clear that they do not share his opinion regarding the "indisputable" authenticity of the *Love Letters*. Similarly, there are no reviews of Tearle's book in scholarly journals: it is as if literary critics took very little notice of this contribution.

Having made a case for the inclusion of the *Love Letters*, I now return to the trope of the talking letter and its status in Piozzi's correspondence with Conway. In the style of *Journal to Stella* and *Letters to Eliza*, Piozzi's letters to Conway are highly conversational: if ever a writer "talked on paper," it was Hester Lynch Piozzi. Replete with quotations, interjections, and colloquial expressions, Piozzi's letters epitomize the "loose," familiar style that Swift and Sterne

[101] Tearle, *Mrs. Piozzi's Tall Young Beau*, 113 and 119.

[102] Bloom and Bloom, vol. 6, 22.

[103] Looser, 106.

extol. One of the hallmarks of Piozzi's conversational style is her especially liberal use of the dash, as here, in a letter written to Conway when she was newly arrived in Penzance:

> *On this Day*, the Day You receive mine I fancy;—do I—dearest of all Dear Friends—begin a new Letter to you—saying Imprimis that we take Possession of our Nutshell, and sleep in it—To Night.—Oh Me! and what a Nutshell 'tis! but *clean*: with a full View of the Sea and of the Land's End.—You *said* it was a sheltered Bay, and so it proves.[104]

In this passage, dashes, italics, exclamation points, and casual expressions all conspire to create the impression of familiar chat. With its halting rhythms and loose syntax, Piozzi's style avoids the deliberate structure of formal writing and, instead, approaches the extemporaneity of an intimate face-to-face exchange. In manuscript this sense of immediacy is even stronger, as Piozzi's use of the dash is actually far more varied than standard type can accommodate.[105] As an example, the many iterations of Piozzi's dash are visible in a copy of *Observations and Reflections Made in the Course of a Journey Through France, Italy, and Germany* (1789) that she annotated extensively as a gift for Conway (fig. 5).[106] In the marginalia of this copy of *Observations*, Piozzi's varied dashes—at least four different lengths are distinguishable in the sample page—convey not only the rhythm of speech in general but also the idiosyncratic spontaneity of Piozzi's particular voice. Horace Walpole labeled this quality of Piozzi's writing her "colloquial smartness," snidely observing that her style conveys "impulsiveness, vivacity,

[104] Bloom and Bloom, vol. 6, 414.

[105] Incidentally, this is one of McCarthy's criticisms of the Blooms' edition of Piozzi's letters, "Review," 404. McCarthy writes, "Type normalizes partly by the force of its inherent regularity, but also by the force of economics: Piozzi's below-the-line semicolons and wavy rows of dots *could* be set in type, but the cost of so setting them would terrify a publisher. Moreover, in type they would probably alienate readers, for readers are, of course, used to the regularities of type."

[106] This copy of *Observations and Reflections* is held by the Houghton Library at Harvard University.

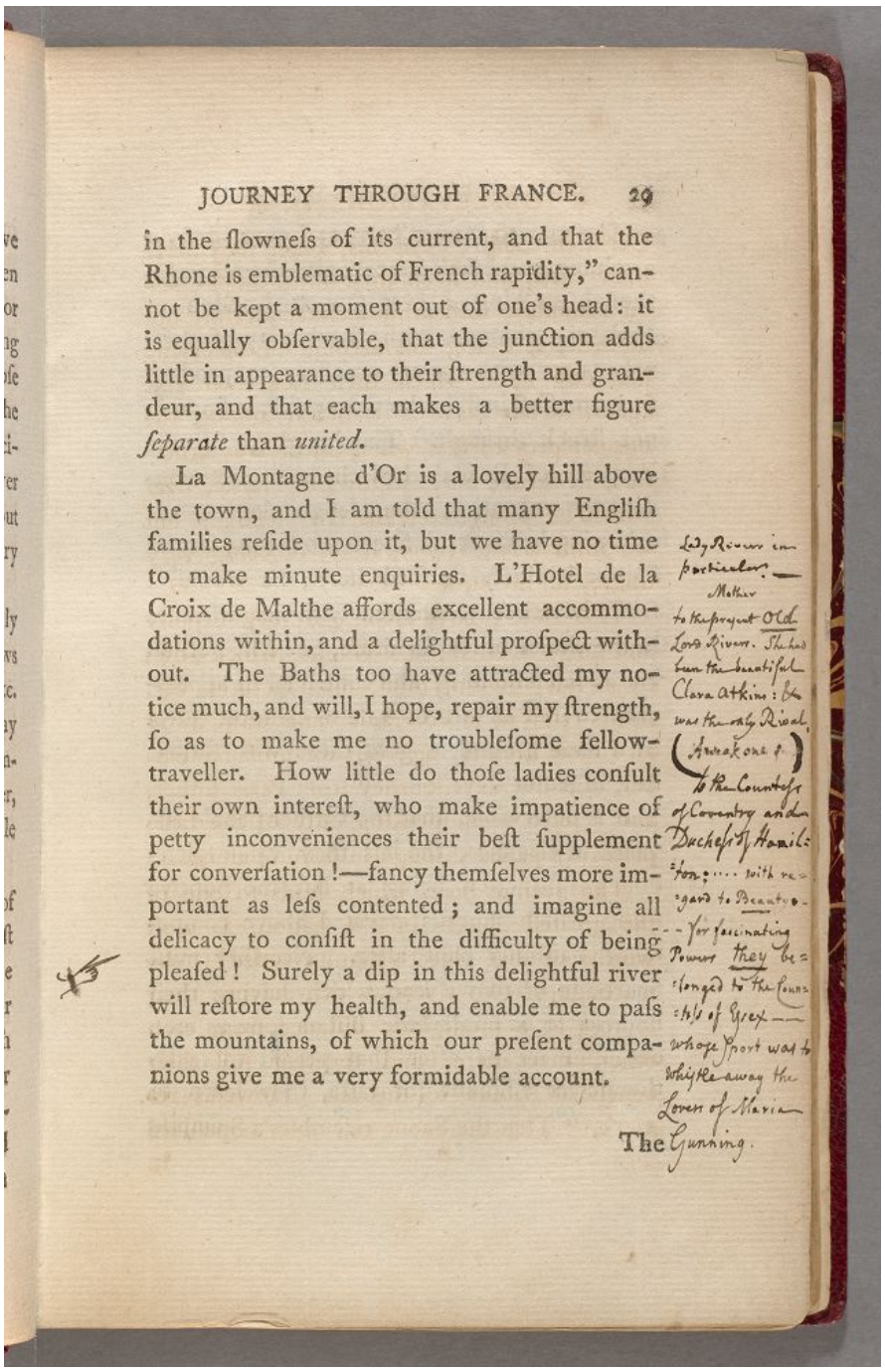

Figure 5. An annotated page from the copy of *Observations and Reflections* that Piozzi sent to Conway on 12 August 1819. The text reads, "Lady Rivers in particular. __ Mother to the present Old Lord Rivers. She had been the beautiful Clara Atkins: & was the only Rival (A weak one) to the Countess of Coventry and Duchess of Hamilton:- - - - with regard to Beauty - - - - for fascinating Powers they belonged to the Countess of Grey — — whose sport was to whistle away the Lovers of Maria Gunning." The Countess of Grey must have been fascinating indeed to lure lovers away from the famously beautiful Maria Gunning (Countess of Coventry).

and disingenuousness."[107] Though certainly meant to undercut Piozzi—whose splendid annotations threatened to eclipse his own—Walpole's comments draw our attention not only to the oral dimensions of Piozzi's writing but to the effortlessness with which she transposed her voice on the page.

Despite the highly conversational character of her writing—what Tearle calls her "light-hearted chat"[108]— Piozzi's letters do not dwell on the idea of the letter as a substitute for face-to-face exchange: the trope of the talking letter appears occasionally in these three sets of correspondence, but for the most part Piozzi relies on other methods in her effort to build rapport with Conway. While Swift uses conversation as one of the basic structural principles of his letters to Stella, Piozzi deploys the metaphor inconsistently, almost as a passing thought rather than a crucial thematic. In one early letter to Conway she writes, "Well! let us talk upon a light Topic,"[109] and a few months later she employs this phrasing again: "But Johnson says You know, that we must not talk seriously—except to *Intimates*. God knows I talk seriously enough to You, and never more so than now when seriously requesting a Letter."[110] In keeping with early modern notions of epistolary exchange, this quotation connects the oral quality of letters to intimacy, but Piozzi invokes the trope of the talking letter so haphazardly that its power to foster closeness seems much diminished.

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[107] As cited in Morris R. Brownell, "Hester Lynch Piozzi's Marginalia," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 3 (June 1977), 99. Brownell also comments on the conversational quality of Piozzi's annotations. Similarly, H. J. Jackson describes Piozzi as being in conversation with the books themselves, writing that she "talked back to the book" and "chats with books," *Romantic Readers: The Evidence of Marginalia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 180.

[108] Tearle, *Mrs. Piozzi's Tall Young Beau*, 89.

[109] Bloom and Bloom, vol. 6, 279.

[110] Bloom and Bloom, vol. 6, 338.

This movement away from the talking letter is surely connected to Piozzi's general lack of anxiety about whether letters are suitable for the expression of intimacy: where early-modern correspondents felt compelled to authenticate their epistles through comparisons to speech, Piozzi takes the legitimacy of her letters to Conway for granted and makes no effort to represent them as anything other than what they are. For example, where Swift repeatedly uses the word "conversation" to describe his epistles to Stella—even composing imaginary dialogues between them—Piozzi is explicit about the one-sidedness of her correspondence. Although she ardently wishes that Conway would write, she is not in the habit of speculating on his response or amusing herself with invented conversations. As such, her letters appear much more like monologues than dialogues, overwhelming the reader with Piozzi's voice while Conway remains conspicuously silent. Here, for instance, Piozzi apologizes for her manservant (James), who appears to have disturbed Conway's sleep when delivering one of her letters:

> I must go to bed. That Booby, James, not dreaming how things stood; waked my poor—perhaps unrefreshed correspondent yesterday; I was extremely sorry, and now beg your Pardon for helping to torment him whom I would die to serve — — and desire to *live* only that I *may* serve. (*Love Letters*, 36)

This passage is entirely typical of the letters to Conway in so far as Piozzi describes the incident from her point of view, while Conway's perspective remains opaque. Indeed, Conway's silence, constantly lamented by Piozzi in all three sets of letters, becomes an important theme in its own right:

> Cowper the Poet says, in reply to a Friend who begs pardon for writing so seldom; "Why, Sir, I infer nothing from the silence of a Correspondent but that he wishes me to be silent

too." I do not, you see, infer *that*: I keep on pelting you with Letters which tell you nothing you knew not long ago. (*Love Letters*, 20)

In emphasizing the one-sidedness of her correspondence, Piozzi tacitly rejects the language of conversation that saturates the *Journal to Stella*. This attitude seems to betray a certain pragmatism with regard to her letters: where Swift allows himself to suspend his disbelief, Piozzi does not. This pragmatism is also signaled by Piozzi's figurative language in her letters—here, for instance, she uses physical imagery, "pelting you with Letters"—which further displaces the trope of the talking letter through a consistent preference for the material and the textual over the oral.

Piozzi not only avoids conversation as a metaphor, she supplants it with its opposite, using a kind of textual metonymy in order to refer to Conway: in all three sets of letters, the beloved is no longer a voice, but a document. In the absence of a much-desired reply, Piozzi focuses on appearances of Conway's name in print, especially in newspapers. This use of text as a proxy for Conway sometimes consists of mere casual references, as "My Paper, the Courier, took notice of the burst in favor of Loyalty which your [Conway's] audience elicited," and, "Mrs. Stratton saw the horrid Paragraph inserted in the Courier" (*Love Letters*, 22 and 24).[111] In other places, however, the text more explicitly stands in for Piozzi's relationship with Conway:

> Three Sundays have now elapsed since James brought me dearest Mr. Conway's promise to write to me the very next—and were it not for the newspaper which came on Tuesday the 24 August . . . I should relapse into my former state of agonizing apprehension on your account. (*Love Letters*, 17)

[111] The "horrid Paragraph" refers to a notice in the Courier on 28 September 1819 that reads, "We regret to hear that Mr. Conway, the actor, is in a state of dangerous illness. He has been compelled to relinquish his engagement at Birmingham, after a long confinement there, and is now in London under the care of Mr. Astley Cooper."

Much as Swift's imagined conversations substitute for Stella, or Sterne's portrait of Eliza replaces the woman herself, Piozzi's newspaper stands in for Conway. We see another instance of this here:

> Good Night! and God bless my dearest and most valued Friend! for whose perfect Recovery and long continued Happiness I will pray till the Post comes in:—Yes; and till Life goes *out* from poor H. L. P.——I would keep up my Spirits — — — as you wish me — — — and your Spirits too. *But how can I?* Send a Newspaper at least. (*Love Letters*, 22)

This request—a letter at best, but "a newspaper at least"—signals a departure from earlier notions of the letter as voice and a growing attachment to the printed material itself.

Piozzi calls further attention to the textual nature of her relationship with Conway through repeated references to the material conditions of letter writing. For instance, she regularly comments on the letter as a physical document: "Did you get my long Letter sewed in blue Paper 13 Pages long? or did you and Bessy—forgetful of its Contents—fling it away? I should have written on the outside for fear of Chances."[112] So, too, Piozzi refers to her *pen*, not her voice: "This is Preaching — — — but remember how the Sermon is written at three, four, and five o'clock by an Octogenary pen" (*Love Letters*, 36).[113] Moreover, Piozzi makes much of Conway's handwriting, which she mentions on several occasions. The first instance is the most striking: "that darling little Autograph round the paper was written so steady, and so completely in the old way, — — whenever I look at it my spirits revive, and Hope, (*true Pulse of Life*,) ceases for a while at least, — — and bids me be assured we soon shall meet again" (*Love*

[112] Bloom and Bloom, vol. 6, 289.

[113] This is one of the passages that the *Athenaeum* flags as altered by the editor, but the phrase "octogenary pen" remains the same in both versions, "Letters of Mrs. Piozzi to William Augustus Conway," 102–3.

Letters, 17–18). Taken from the first paragraph of the first *Love Letter*, this reference to Conway's "Autograph" is one of the most intimate moments of the correspondence. More than simply a medium for information, Conway's handwriting seems to convey a sense of his person: although Piozzi does not explain *how*, she suggests that the mere sight of his "Autograph" is highly evocative of Conway himself. A lesser, but still relevant, instance occurs in the final letter of the pamphlet, which opens with the following sentence: "I was happy to see my Dear Friend's handwriting, as soon as I came home, and the Tickets" (*Love Letters*, 38). Similarly, in a particularly despondent moment in her correspondence with Conway she writes, "Shall I ever see You or Your hand-writing *again* I wonder!"[114] This phrasing not only places Conway's person and his writing on a par, but it also conspicuously neglects his voice (an irony, perhaps, given Conway's career on the stage). As with the newspapers, Conway's handwriting functions metonymically, standing in for her "Dear Friend" himself in Piozzi's mind and becoming a vehicle for the intimacy of their relationship.

The textual metonymy that defines Conway in the two sets of letters is further developed in Piozzi's letters to Penelope Pennington, a fellow admirer of Conway. Pennington was an old friend of Piozzi's: after quarreling in 1804, they reconnected in 1819, and their renewed friendship largely centered on a shared interest in Conway.[115] In many ways Piozzi's letters to Pennington merely repeat the contents of the other letters: Piozzi complains of never hearing from Conway ("I have a sad loss in dear Conway; and his steady resolution to write is such a bad

[114] Bloom and Bloom, vol. 6, 349.

[115] In a letter to Conway dated 18 September 1819, Piozzi describes the history of her relationship with Pennington: "She is a Lady who once lived much with me—chiefly on Account of Cecilia Mostyn then Thrale, to whom I thought—and thought wisely—She would be a very proper and advantageous *Companion*:——after her own Marriage however—and Cecy's;—She disobliged dear Mr. Piozzi by a hasty Expression, and we met no more till a few Weeks ago, just 16 Years."

trick"[116]); she refers to his name in the papers ("Our dear Conway's name at length appears in the *Morning Post*"[117]); and she continually calls attention to the material conditions of writing ("I hate such short letters, but *my* goose-quill,—poor old Goosey!—is *moulting* as it appears. The Pens and Paper are worse than ever I remember"[118]). Perhaps most interesting, Piozzi steadfastly avoids quoting Conway or speculating about what he might say. In one letter, for instance, Piozzi tells Pennington about an encounter with Conway ("when he dropped in among other morning callers"), but although she refers to his "all-expressing countenance" she does not quote any of his speech.[119] In another similar letter she describes "talking about *you* [Pennington] to Mr. Conway," but once again Conway's part in the conversation goes unmentioned.[120] Piozzi's summaries of Conway's conversation are the closest she comes to quoting him: "He says he is come to act Master *Slender*," or "Conway's account of Carlisle's tryal froze me with horror."[121]

The decision to omit Conway's speech is especially odd in light of the fact that Piozzi regularly quotes people in her letters, frequently transcribing full conversations for the entertainment or edification of her reader. For instance, in a letter written to Pennington on 6 November 1819 she records a lengthy exchange between the "long-dead" doctor, Demosthenes Taylor, and a young surgeon:

> "Doctor," exclaims old Taylor, "I have got the *Belly-ache* so bad, we won't above finish this game." "Right, Sir," was the reply, "take something very hot, and go to bed. If you

[116] Knapp, 315.

[117] Bloom and Bloom, vol. 6, 412.

[118] Knapp, 310.

[119] Bloom and Bloom, vol. 6, 352.

[120] Bloom and Bloom, vol. 6, 353.

[121] ibid.

are worse, call me. If not, I shan't come till Wednesday, for very good reasons." "Ay, ay, my lad; mind thy business," was the monitory answer.[122]

Nor is this feature limited to the Piozzi-Pennington letters; we also see such transcriptions in the *Love Letters*, as in this record of a conversation with her maid:

> "Lord, Ma'am," said She [Bessy], "why, if Mr. Conway was at Birmingham *you would send me;* and now he is only Three Streets off,—GO I WILL — — if I die upon the Road, rather than see you swallowing down Agony, and saying nothing but *how well you are*, to everybody, when I know you are wretched,—beyond telling." (*Love Letters*, 29)

When discussing her interactions with Conway, however, Piozzi sometimes avails herself of someone else's words rather than quoting their conversation directly, as in this letter to Pennington: "I *have* heard from him [Conway], thank God! The rogue told me nothing tho', except how charming you and I were, what admirable letters we wrote, etc. 'Yea, and all *that* did I know before,' as Juliet says."[123] Even in this rare instance of access (Piozzi has just received a letter from Conway), the recourse to literary language directs attention away from their exchange, further obscuring Conway's perspective and, moreover, diminishing the importance of speech in their correspondence. By my count, Piozzi quotes Conway only once in the Pennington letters, and only once in the *Love Letters*. In the Pennington letters she quotes him as saying, "Kind, charming Lady! she has bound me to her with ribs of steel,"[124] and in the *Love Letters*, "Oh if *your Lady* but retains her Friendship: Oh if I can but keep *her* Patronage — — — I care not for the rest" (*Love Letters*, 35). Piozzi's consistent obfuscations—both in the Pennington correspondence and the *Love Letters*—make Conway something of an unknown entity, even

[122] Bloom and Bloom, vol. 6, 345.

[123] Bloom and Bloom, vol. 6, 425.

[124] Knapp, 300.

while he is often the focal point of her letters. In the almost total absence of an interlocutor, it becomes increasingly difficult to conceptualize Piozzi's correspondence with Conway as conversation.

The absence of Conway's voice accentuates the textual metonymy that pervades her letters, imbuing Conway's textual manifestations with even more significance. Although we might say that this one-sidedness is endemic to the epistolary form, Piozzi's letters stand out among the three sets of love letters considered in this chapter for their inability (or unwillingness) to penetrate Conway's consciousness. While both Swift and Sterne compose imaginary responses from Stella and Eliza, Piozzi offers very little information—speculative or otherwise—about what Conway might be thinking. That said, the letters contain *far* more objective information about Conway—where he is, who he sees, what he does—than we ever receive about Stella or Eliza. We are relentlessly reminded of the fact that Conway, unlike his female predecessors, is a public figure; indeed, a large part of Piozzi's knowledge of Conway comes from what she hears from acquaintances or reads in the aforementioned newspapers. Consequently, while Swift and Sterne can weave uncontested fantasies about Stella and Eliza, Piozzi must balance the public Conway with the Conway of her letters: "you are *not* alone and desolate, as my distracted Imagination had depicted you—dying at an Inn upon the Road."[125] As this quotation suggests, Conway's status as a public figure keeps Piozzi's imagination in check, tethering their correspondence to reality and, thus, perhaps offering an explanation for why Piozzi does not contrive dialogues or scenarios to the same extent as Swift and Sterne.

While the trope of the talking letter attempts to overcome the materiality of epistolary exchange—a mere vessel of voice, in which the vessel itself is ideally rendered invisible, leaving only the voice—Piozzi treats letters (or newspapers) almost like amulets, material embodiments

[125] Bloom and Bloom, vol. 6, 330.

of a person, and in this conceptualization their status as *objects* is key to their significance. For example, in a letter dated 9 October 1819 Piozzi exhorts Conway to "Live long and happily, and love my Letters; I wonder when You will Be sick of them: but I shall release you soon."[126] This quotation nicely exemplifies the way that Piozzi replaces person with text, recasting her letters as the object of affection: rather than "love *me*" she writes "love my *Letters*," and rather than wondering "when You will Be sick of *me*" she wonders "when You will be sick of *them*." The significance that Piozzi attaches to objects is most evident in her almost fetishistic attention to the gifts she sends Conway and those she receives in return. The letters are full of details about the comings and goings of these gifts, including a miniature, a seal, a gold "repeating" watch, and countless books among the gifts she sent to Conway, and a portrait and "trinket" among those he sent to her. Piozzi fixates on these objects, calling the portrait "that best Ornament of my now—*only*—Mansion. No 8 Gay Street Bath," and ascribing mysterious powers to the trinket: "That too delicate trinket inclosing your fine hair has vexed my heart. One day I *saw* the *Platt oddly displaced;* ('twas when Your health was at its worst,) and into my female foolish Mind, a Thousand silly Superstitions crowded."[127] In addition to responding to these objects in the moment, she also imagines a future life for her gifts to Conway: "I wish You had a Son tho'—nevertheless;—You promised me to keep my Portrait for him, and I think you will never part with the *Repeater*, till *he* takes it with him to the University."[128] This quotation suggests that Piozzi thinks of her gifts as vehicles not only of intimacy but also of *legacy*; indeed, interspersed between her lively stories and plaintive requests for letters are many serious contemplations of mortality, a subject that in these last, ailing years never seems far from her thoughts. Quick as

[126] Bloom and Bloom, vol. 6, 333.

[127] ibid.

[128] Bloom and Bloom, vol. 6, 324.

her mind remains, Piozzi's body will not let her forget her age—"Oh I am grown so weary, it seems as if I was quite dead indeed"[129]—and she refers to her "temporal existence" as "such a *Shadowy Thing*."[130] Perhaps, then, as Piozzi's own living voice is threatened with extinction, she seeks a more permanent repository for her person and, thus, turns away from the oral in favor of the material.

Conclusion

In an era before the telephone or the internet—before any of our modern means of communication—the letter was the only way to maintain intimacy across distance. In their letters to Stella, Eliza, and Conway, these three eighteenth-century writers deploy a wide variety of techniques in an effort to conduct a relationship via text, and many of these techniques invoke speech in one way or another (writing in a conversational style, transcribing conversations, imagining conversations, and using conversation as a metaphor for epistolary exchange). Swift's letters demonstrate that the attempt to foster intimacy in letters by referring to or reproducing spoken language is still quite common at the beginning of the eighteenth century; for Sterne, however, the letter's legitimacy no longer rests on its association with spoken language. Sterne attempts to assert the legitimacy of his epistles through elaborately constructed images, as well as through the idea that his emotions might exceed language altogether, both spoken and written. Piozzi's letters betray an unusual attitude toward epistolary exchange: although, like Swift and Sterne before her, she treats the letter as a vehicle for intimacy, she does not attempt to force the letter to resemble in-person exchange. In other words, Piozzi's notion of intimacy is not bound up in speech and face-to-face conversation: where previous writers emphasize the letter's

[129] Bloom and Bloom, vol. 6, 330.

[130] Bloom and Bloom, vol. 6, 282.

similarity to a tête-à-tête, Piozzi appears perfectly comfortable with its difference. These three sets of letters suggest that even while the trope of the talking letter remained a powerful way of creating intimacy between correspondents, the letter as object began to signify intimacy as well. Traditional narratives of the eighteenth-century letter treat it as a mere container, a way of conveying voice across distance; as Swift's, Sterne's, and Piozzi's letters demonstrate, however, letters also enjoyed a privileged status as objects in their own right, conveying intimacy haptically as well as vocally. Far from signaling the decline of speech, this haptic intimacy points to an increased comfort with text in the eighteenth century: the need to justify writing's legitimacy gradually fell away, even while talk achieved new prominence in the highly sociable decades of the late eighteenth century.

Chapter Four

"All a dream": James Boswell, Oral Tradition, and the Ossian Question

In the course of a 1778 conversation with James Boswell, Samuel Johnson made the following remark on the subject of "antiquarian researches":

> All that is really *known* of the ancient state of Britain is contained in a few pages. We can know no more than what the old writers have told us; yet what large books have we upon it, the whole of which, excepting such parts as are taken from those old writers, is all a dream. (*Life*, vol. 3, 333)

In this reflection on British history, Johnson articulates one of the key elements of his epistemology: namely, that the past can only be known with certainty if it has been preserved in writing. Claiming that "we can know no more than what the old writers have told us," Johnson forecloses other historical modes—like oral tradition, for instance—and elevates writing over alternate forms of transmission.[1] Indeed, his comments establish a sharp distinction between knowledge derived from "old writers" and everything else: what is written is "really known," while the rest is "all a dream."

As I argue here and throughout this dissertation, Johnson's mistrust of orality only tells half the story. Oral tradition—or, at least, the perception of oral tradition—was very much in flux in the eighteenth century: even as writers like Defoe and Johnson expressed skepticism about

[1] Clifford Siskin, William Warner, and Paula McDowell use "mediation" as an umbrella term for different forms of transmission. Although my project contributes to this work by looking at two competing modes of conveying knowledge, I prefer the specificity of "speech" and "writing," or "oral tradition" and "manuscript," to the implied plurality of "mediation" (which might be better suited to the twenty-first century than the eighteenth). See especially McDowell, "Mediating Media Past and Present."

oral transmission,[2] Robert Wood boldly hypothesized that Homer was illiterate,[3] while Hugh Blair and Jean-Jacques Rousseau began to argue that preliterate societies could produce sophisticated poetry.[4] After more than two hundred years of folkloric studies, we now know that oral transmission cannot be dismissed as "all a dream," and yet Johnson's comments point to the epistemological challenge of orality: not always fully verifiable, oral history occupies an uncomfortable position between uncertainty and exactitude. No episode illustrates eighteenth-century anxieties about this liminality better than the Ossian controversy, in which Johnson was an active participant. Using the Ossian controversy as a focal point, this chapter will first examine eighteenth-century attitudes toward oral history and then turn to a consideration of affinities between Macpherson and Boswell. Although this might seem an unlikely pairing, both writers emerge out of the embattled Scottish intelligentsia and they share, I argue, a definitive interest in orality. What is more, in history of Ossian controversy Boswell is usually aligned with Johnson; I propose, however, that by realigning Boswell with Macpherson, the powerful influence of orality on the eighteenth-century (Scottish) imagination becomes visible. Looking at both Boswell's attitude toward oral tradition and his reliance on memory and spoken language in his own work, I suggest that Boswell's journalistic practice might be seen as a kind of oral history itself, albeit one stemming from and adapted to a literate society.

[2] In his "Essay upon Literature" (1726), Defoe argues that (non-Christian) oral tradition obscures truth and perpetuates falsehood. See especially McDowell, "Defoe's *Essay upon Literature* and Eighteenth-Century Histories of Mediation," *PMLA* 130 (May 2015): 566–83.

[3] Robert Wood, *An essay on the original genius and writings of Homer*. London, 1775.

[4] Hugh Blair, *A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian* (1765). Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Essay on the Origin of Languages* (written 1762–63).

History of the Ossian controversy

The Ossian controversy began inauspiciously, with a casual meeting and the translation of a single poem. In 1759 Macpherson was introduced to John Home, a fellow Scotsman who spoke no Gaelic but who expressed interest in Highland poetry.[5] At Home's behest, Macpherson translated a Gaelic poem into English, which so delighted Home that he encouraged Macpherson to translate more, and those subsequent translations became the first installment of Macpherson's three Ossianic texts, *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* (1760). Macpherson was originally exposed to Gaelic poetry in his youth: born and raised in a region of Scotland (Badenoch) that was still heavily Gaelic, Macpherson acquired a middling capacity for the language, hearing Gaelic poems and stories recited regularly throughout his childhood.[6] From 1752 to 1755 Macpherson attended university in Aberdeen (first at King's College and then at Marischal), where he studied with the classicist Thomas Blackwell, whose theory of epic informed Macpherson's understanding of the genre.[7] Macpherson's familiarity with classical tradition and interest in epic is visible not only in the publication of two Ossianic epics, but also his elaborate scholarly footnotes (which frequently draw comparisons to both Homer and Virgil), as well as in his 1773 translation of the *Iliad*.[8] After the great success of his *Fragments*, Macpherson was encouraged by several members of the Edinburgh literati (most notably, Hugh Blair) to undertake field research in the Highlands in order to gather more material, which he did in 1760 and 1761. The

[5] Home's account can be consulted in Dafydd Moore, ed., *Ossian and Ossianism*, vol. 3 (London: Routledge, 2004), 384.

[6] Fiona Stafford, "Macpherson's Childhood in the Scottish Highlands," *The Sublime Savage: James Macpherson and the Poems of Ossian* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), 6–23.

[7] Although Blackwell did not go so far as to propose that Homer was illiterate (as Wood later argued), he believed that Homer's "primitive" society was at least partly responsible for the high quality of his poetry. Thomas Blackwell, *Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer* (1735).

[8] These footnotes, Stafford notes, "brought Macpherson more abuse than praise. Without the pretentious notes, Macpherson's adversaries would have had less ground on which to base their criticisms and might have been more inclined to accept the poems as works of art," 166.

result of these trips was two more "translations": *Fingal, An Ancient Epic Poem* in 1761, and *Temora* (a sequel to *Fingal*) in 1763. The epic poems—*Fingal* and *Temora*—celebrate the heroism of Fingal and his Caledonian warriors, and are narrated by Fingal's son Ossian, a third-century bard who is both a character in the epics and the poet himself.

Like *Fragments*, the epic poems were an enormous success in Scotland, England, and beyond. Thomas Jefferson called Ossian "the greatest poet that ever existed," and Napoleon carried the epics with him on his campaigns. The poems have been credited with launching European Romanticism, and they influenced the work of British Romantic poets including Blake, Coleridge, and Byron. Additionally, from a folkloric perspective the poems have been identified as "key to the beginnings of interest in a collective cultural history and oral tradition,"[9] and Macpherson's efforts to recover this oral tradition on his information-gathering excursions have been similarly cited as "pioneer[ing] the field trip as we know it today."[10]

Soon after their publication, however, the authenticity of the Ossian poems began to be called into question. As early as 1763, David Hume wrote to Hugh Blair—a staunch supporter of Macpherson and author of the *Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian*—to urge him to provide evidence in favor of Macpherson:

> My present purpose therefore is, to apply to you, in the name of all the men of letters of this, and I may say of all other countries, to establish this capital point, and to give us

[9] James Porter, "'Bring Me the Head of James Macpherson': The Execution of Ossian and the Wellspring of Folkloristic Discourse," *The Journal of American Folklore* (Autumn 2001), 397.

[10] Thomas A. McKean, "The Fieldwork Legacy of James Macpherson," *The Journal of American Folklore* (Autumn 2001), 460.

> proofs that these poems are, I do not say so antient as the age of Severus, but that they were not forged within these five years by James Macpherson.[11]

Blair responded to Hume's entreaty by soliciting testimony from Highland ministers, which he then summarized in the form of an appendix to his *Critical Dissertation*. Blair's detailed appendix temporarily ameliorated suspicions of forgery, but the controversy was reignited with the publication of Samuel Johnson's *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* in 1775, and then again in 1781 with the publication of William Shaw's *An Enquiry into the Authenticity of the Poems ascribed to Ossian*.

The debate about the authenticity of Macpherson's poetry was compounded by national tensions that ran high on both sides. Scotsmen, proud that Macpherson had elevated their native literature, saw accusations of forgery as a way of undermining Scottish culture. As Hume wrote to Boswell in 1762, "The English were exceedingly fond of [*Fingal*] at first but hearing that it was Scotch, they became jealous and silent."[12] Likewise, prominent Scottish physician Sir John Pringle wrote in a letter to Hume that he hoped the publication of Blair's appendix would silence Macpherson's critics:

> But now Dr. Blair having adduced such a cloud of witnesses to prove Mr. Macpherson's honesty as to that particular, I do not apprehend that there can be any more objection made, unless by those [who] want to run down every thing that belongs to [Scotland].[13]

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[11] David Hume to Hugh Blair 19 September 1763 in Moore, vol. 3, 127. Hume also writes to Blair again, in a similar vein, on 6 October 1763.

[12] *Private Papers of James Boswell*, ed. G. Scott and F. A. Pottle (New York, 1928–34), 127–28.

[13] As cited in David Raynor, "Ossian and Hume," *Ossian Revisited*, ed. Howard Gaskill (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 151–52.

Similarly, in the appendix to his *Critical Dissertation* Blair notes that the authenticity of the poems "was never called into question" in Scotland: "The silence of a whole country in this case, and of a country, whose inhabitants are well known to be attached, in a remarkable degree, to all their own antiquities, is of as much weight as a thousand positive testimonies."[14] From the English perspective, however, Scottish pride in Ossian only created further cause for suspicion. On this very point, William Shaw—himself a Scotsman, but firmly in Johnson's camp—writes: "[Johnson] knew the poems were every where read, and that Caledonians, naturally partial to their country and its antiquities, were not 'sturdy enough moralists' to disown an honor politically done them by a politically cunning translator."[15] There is no doubt that Macpherson sought to claim cultural legitimacy for Scotland, and his native Highlands in particular, through the publication of a Highland epic tradition; indeed, Macpherson himself remarked that he translated the poetry with an English audience in mind. This motivation should not, however, invalidate Macpherson's work in and of itself.

Among twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholars, the ongoing relevance of the authenticity controversy is fairly controversial itself. Dafydd Moore, whose four-volume anthology aims to make primary texts about Ossian more readily available, argues that the authenticity controversy distracts from other, more important conversations about the poetry. Additionally, he disputes the very notion that the authenticity controversy dominated the discussion of Macpherson's poetry in the eighteenth century, referring to it as the "authenticity myth."[16] In stark contrast to Moore's position, Thomas Curley not only argues that the forgery question should be at the heart of our understanding of Ossian, but also maintains that the

[14] Blair, *Critical Dissertation*, in Moore, vol. 3, 191.

[15] William Shaw, *An Enquiry into the Authenticity of the Poems Ascribed to Ossian* (London, 1781), 3.

[16] Moore, vol. 1, lxiii.

forgery is certain beyond a doubt: Macpherson, Curley says, "perpetrat[ed] what arguably became the most successful literary falsehood in modern history."[17] Other scholars take more equivocal—or, perhaps we should say, more nuanced—positions. Fiona Stafford, for instance, suggests that the facts of the controversy could be interpreted in multiple ways: "The question of whether or not Macpherson was regarded as a forger has depended largely on the definition of forgery, since his practice of blending genuine material with his own creations has been known since the Highland Society's *Report* of 1805."[18]

Nick Groom and, more recently, Joseph Bristow and Rebecca Mitchell have made persuasive arguments about the artistic value of forgery. Discussing the much-maligned forgers of the eighteenth century (Macpherson and Chatterton chief among them), Groom questions "our current obsession with authenticity" and suggests that we reclassify forgery as "an inspirational craft."[19] Similarly, Bristow and Mitchell, looking at Chatterton through Oscar Wilde's eyes, suggest that the young poet's forgeries were indicative of his "remarkable genius": "Chatterton served as a stirring example of a gifted artistic maverick whose previous disrepute as a seemingly duplicitous faker of fifteenth-century poems signified his immense creativity rather than despicable criminality."[20] Chatterton's short-lived career (he died when he was only eighteen) runs parallel to Macpherson's: in addition to being noted forgers, both men wrote in the 1760s and are credited (along with Thomas Percy) with inaugurating key aspects of Romanticism. Despite these similarities, however, my argument about Macpherson's forgery is

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[17] Thomas M. Curley, *Samuel Johnson, the Ossian Fraud, and the Celtic Revival in Great Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1.

[18] Stafford, 170–71.

[19] Nick Groom, *The Forger's Shadow: How Forgery Changed the Course of Literature* (London: Picador, 2002), 15 and 18.

[20] Joseph Bristow and Rebecca N. Mitchell, *Oscar Wilde's Chatterton: Literary History, Romanticism, and the Art of Forgery* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 14 and 21.

not about its artistic value; rather, my interest lies in the way that oral tradition troubles the very idea of forgery, forcing a reconsideration of Johnson's seemingly-stable notions of historical authenticity and truth.

Some of Macpherson's most sympathetic modern critics are folklorists, who tend to be more comfortable with the slipperiness of oral tradition. James Porter, for instance, argues that "authenticity is an evanescent value where the creative uses of folklore are concerned."[21] This position is diametrically opposed to Curley's: while Porter suggests that "the residue of moral certainty" associated with the authenticity question leads critics astray, Curley insists that the moral aspect of Macpherson's work is at the heart of this debate. Reflecting on why the authenticity question must be resolved, he writes, "As to why the nagging question of Macpherson's falsehood refuses to go away, Johnson would have answered that truth in literature and life is a perennial human concern inextricably tied to the survival and fulfillment of the race."[22] The standard by which we measure "truth," however, is not so fixed as Curley makes it out to be; indeed, folklorists like Porter see truth in the very same material that Curley dismisses as falsehood.

Scholars have been attempting to determine the facts of the controversy from the initial appearance of Macpherson's poems, first with the publication of Blair's appendix and then, forty years later, with an investigation led by Henry Mackenzie for the Highland Society of Scotland in 1805. Although it is universally agreed that there was no single epic poem (oral or otherwise) on which Macpherson based Fingal, Celtic specialists have documented that the poem was

[21] Porter, 398.

[22] Curley, 3.

adapted from both Gaelic manuscripts and oral tradition.[23] The poems have a complicated provenance, but scholars think they emerged out of some combination of the following factors: first, Macpherson's youth in a strongly Gaelic region of the Scottish Highlands (Badenoch), where he not only learned Gaelic, but where the oral tradition was still very much alive[24]; second, the oral histories that Macpherson collected on his field trips of 1760 and 1761; third, fifteenth-century manuscripts that Macpherson came to possess[25]; and, finally, Macpherson's own arrangement of this material within an epic framework. Porter argues that, in light of this evidence, we should think of Macpherson's process as "recomposition" rather than "fabrication," thereby revealing his more accommodating notion of truth, which forgives inconsistencies and frees Macpherson from the appellation of "liar." In a similar vein, Howard Gaskill calls Macpherson's work "a synthetic epic whole which is in part a collage of genuine elements, and in part free invention."[26] In opting for a term like "recomposition," Porter liberates Macpherson's poetic process from the accusations of falsehood that "fabrication" implies and posits a notion of truth that diverges from Curley's exacting standards but allows for authenticity nonetheless. In so

[23] "His publications were not a close literal translation of third-century poems allegedly composed by Ossian (the bard among the warriors led by Fionn Mac Cumhaill) but rather a paraphrase of genuine Fenian orally transmitted lore that Macpherson knew from exposure, as a child, to older clansmen such as Finlay Macpherson of Lynaberack, who gave oral performances of it. It is also unwarranted when commentators assert that the poems of Ossian 'were not based on any performance at all' (Vansina 1985: 54). What Macpherson did—initially with reluctance and later with a growing sense of his own importance in the project as a creative artist—was to adapt genuine material, arranging it into a pattern that fitted current ideas of epic poetry, ideas that were all moving taste away from neoclassical models toward a sensibility of feeling," Porter, 399–400.

[24] According to one of Macpherson's contemporaries, collecting such material "was no difficult task in the then state of Badenoch, when a number of old men were still alive who had a great mass of poetry treasured up in their memory, which they used to recite to their countrymen when assembled beside a cheerful fire in the long winter nights," McKean, 449.

[25] "On the other hand, Macpherson had never asserted that such manuscripts as he had access to were roughly contemporary with the third-century bard known as Ossian. They were 'ancient' only in the sense of being a couple of hundred years old . . . For his part, rather than asserting the power and importance of oral tradition (against which there was some contemporary prejudice), he began to be persuaded that manuscript evidence was the only kind to assure 'authenticity,' thus playing into the hands of Johnson and other critics," Porter, 415.

[26] Gaskill, *Ossian Revisited*, 6.

doing, Porter exemplifies the very crux of the Macpherson controversy, which, at its heart, is less about the evidence itself than the interpretation of that evidence. Now, as in the eighteenth century, perception of the truth or falsehood of the Ossian poems depends largely on one's epistemological standpoint and, especially, one's willingness to accept oral tradition as a reliable means of transmission.

The epistemological schism: Eighteenth-century attitudes toward orality

Regardless of whether modern critics accept the authenticity of Macpherson's work or remain skeptical, the discussion of this controversy in the eighteenth century itself sheds light on both the status of orality at the time and the role that oral history could play in the tabulation of knowledge. As I have shown in my chapter on dictionaries and grammars, spoken language troubled the eighteenth century's linguistic custodians, especially the period's most ambitious systematizer, Samuel Johnson. Temporary and ever-changing, speech—or, at least, certain kinds of speech—outpaced lexicography, and for that reason it was sometimes deemed unworthy of preservation. Many of the same problems, as we will see, plague eighteenth-century perceptions of oral history: serious scholars and historians like David Hume, Hugh Blair, and Samuel Johnson struggle with the lack of precision in oral history, the absence of an "original," and the consequent difficulties in tracing a story's origins. Nonetheless, the Macpherson debate points to the fact that other ways of knowing—via memory, via testimony, via speech—continue to compete for dominance, even in the print-saturated and strongly empirical eighteenth century.

As Macpherson's most famous critic, Samuel Johnson looms large in the Ossian controversy. In 1773, Johnson's longstanding wish to visit the Hebrides finally came to fruition, thanks in part to the efforts of his friend and biographer, James Boswell. Both men documented

the 100-day trip—Johnson in *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775) and Boswell in *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (1785)—and even though it had been ten years since the publication of Macpherson's poems, Ossian still occupies a position of prominence in their accounts. Despite his interest in the Hebrides, however, Johnson harbors serious doubts about the authenticity of Macpherson's poetry:

> I believe they [the poems of Ossian] never existed in any other form than that which we have seen. The editor, or author, never could shew the original; nor can it be shewn by any other; to revenge reasonable incredulity, by refusing evidence, is a degree of insolence, with which the world is not yet acquainted; and stubborn audacity is the last refuge of guilt. It would be easy to shew it if he had it; but whence could it be had? It is too long to be remembered, and the language formerly had nothing written. He has doubtless inserted names that circulate in popular stories, and may have translated some wandering ballads, if any can be found; and the names, and some of the images being recollected, make an inaccurate auditor imagine, by the help of Caledonian bigotry, that he has formerly heard the whole. (*Western Islands*, 118)

Perfectly exemplifying the central conundrum of the Ossian debate, the very reasons that Johnson gives for doubting Macpherson are cited by other critics as evidence in Macpherson's favor: namely, Johnson acknowledges the possible influence of the "popular stories" and "wandering ballads," but does not consider these sources sufficient to remove suspicions of forgery. Unlike Macpherson's supporters, Johnson insists that the "translator" of Ossian should produce "an original," which he conceives of as a complete, third-century manuscript. This quotation illustrates the extent to which Johnson's notion of evidence is rooted in the textual and, thus, largely incompatible with oral tradition. Notice, for instance, the repetition of the word

"show" in this quotation: proof, according to Johnson, must be something tangible, something that can be *seen*. Here Johnson articulates the epistemological hierarchy that he will reiterate throughout his commentary on the Ossian controversy: visual evidence is superior to the oral.

The insufficiency of spoken language is a common theme in *Journey to the Western Islands*, not only in Johnson's assessment of Macpherson but also in his reflections on Highland culture in general. For example: "The traditions of an ignorant and savage people have been for ages negligently heard, and unskillfully related" (*Western Islands*, 51). As in the previous quotation, Johnson pairs words relating to hearing and speaking with negative epithets: "inaccurate auditor," "negligently heard," "unskillfully related." He goes on to say: "In nations, where there is hardly the use of letters, what is once out of sight is lost for ever. They think but little, and of their few thoughts, none are wasted on the past, in which they are neither interested by fear nor hope" (*Western Islands*, 65). These statements lay bare Johnson's prejudice against orality: spoken language is not only imprecise, but also a product of negligence, ignorance, a general lack of sophistication, and (surprisingly) a lack of interest in the past. Allied as it is with these cultural lacunae, orality comes to signify absence and lack. Writing, by contrast, augurs precisely the opposite:

> One generation of ignorance effaces the whole series of unwritten history. Books are faithful repositories, which may be a while neglected or forgotten; but when they are opened again, will again impart their instruction: memory, once interrupted, is not to be recalled. Written learning is a fixed luminary, which, after the cloud that had hidden it has past away, is again bright in its proper station. Tradition is but a meteor, which, if once it falls, cannot be rekindled. (*Western Islands*, 111)

While writing is "a fixed luminary" and a faithful "repository," memory, Johnson argues, is corruptible and thus unfit to serve as the basis of historical knowledge. The image of the meteor is particularly evocative of Johnson's concerns about the vulnerability and evanescence of a narrative (whether fact or fiction) that relies on human memory for transmission: brightly burning, but all too easily extinguished.

Part of Johnson's skepticism about the Ossian poems derives from their polish and sophistication. In direct contradiction to Blair, who argues that poetic eloquence is not incompatible with illiteracy, Johnson maintains that language cannot progress beyond barbarity without writing:

> When a language begins to teem with books, it is tending to refinement; as those who undertake to teach others must have undergone some labour in improving themselves, they set a proportionate value on their own thoughts and wish to enforce them by efficacious expressions; speech becomes embodied and permanent; different modes and phrases are compared, and the best obtains an establishment. By degrees one age improves upon another. Exactness is first obtained, and afterwards elegance. But diction, merely vocal, *is always in its childhood*. As no man leaves his eloquence behind him, the new generations have all to learn. There may possibly be books without a polished language, but *there can be no polished language without books*. (*Western Islands*, 115–16, emphasis mine)

This quotation elaborates the virtues of writing, according to Johnson: "embodied," "permanent," and "exact," writing rectifies the abstraction, transience, and imprecision that afflicts speech. In its anxieties about the impermanence and mutability of speech, the *Journey* echoes portions of Johnson's *Dictionary* and the selection criteria he develops therein: the language of merchants,

for instance, is deemed "unworthy of preservation" precisely because it is always changing or, in Johnson's language, "always in a state of increase or decay."[27] Permanence and fixedness of language are requisite for both cultural advancement and epistemological certainty; indeed, Johnson (like the stadial theorists of the Scottish Enlightenment) suggests that these two things are inextricably linked—society cannot progress without the erudition that writing alone allows.

Taken together, these quotations suggest that Johnson's criticism of the Ossian poems is not merely a repudiation of Macpherson and his work, but a questioning of oral tradition itself. Macpherson must produce an original manuscript, according to Johnson, because there is simply no other way that he could validate the existence of his Highland epic. Curley has argued that Johnson's support for Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) suggests a sympathy for and interest in folklore that the Macpherson controversy obscures.[28] Percy, however, was working almost entirely from manuscripts that he discovered in the form of a seventeenth-century commonplace book, and thus his project fulfills Johnson's insistence on textual material. By contrast Macpherson's accumulation of Gaelic narrative falls short of Johnson's criteria: primarily oral and dependent on human memory, Macpherson's material cannot meet the demands of Johnson's sight-based empiricism. Indeed, it is memory in particular that bears the brunt of much of Johnson's opprobrium. There is a certain trust involved in memory: absent meticulous documentation, we must rely on the faithfulness of another's recollection. Johnson's skepticism, then, extends beyond Macpherson to all of Macpherson's sources and their sources as well: if it has not been written, Johnson contends, then it cannot be adequately remembered. If it cannot be documented in writing, then it cannot be proven and it

[27] See Hudson, "'Oral Tradition': The Evolution of an Eighteenth-Century Concept," 170.

[28] Curley, "Johnson on Truth, Frauds, and Folklore: In the Company of Thomas Percy," 45–81.

cannot be true. This, I submit, is a notion of truth that is inseparable from objective, tangible, empirical evidence.

It is generally agreed that eighteenth-century thinkers met orality with skepticism and, thus, that Johnson's attitude toward oral tradition is largely consistent with the opinions of his contemporaries (though perhaps somewhat more extreme).[29] The Ossian controversy, however, complicates this commonplace, as many of the participants in the debate are surprisingly willing to entertain the legitimacy of oral evidence. David Hume, for instance, is among the more unexpected of Macpherson's sympathizers: although a member of the Edinburgh literati—and thus invested in the elevation of Scottish culture—he is also one of the century's most famous skeptics and, thus, he might seem likely to harbor doubts about the Ossian poems. In a section on miracles in *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748) Hume reflects on the reliability of oral testimony, arguing—much as he does elsewhere—that things can only be known in so far as they can be confirmed by first-hand experience: "it is experience only, which gives authority to human testimony."[30] Moreover, Hume also warns against the dangers of eloquence, which "leaves little room for reason or reflection; but addressing itself entirely to the fancy or the affections, captivates the willing hearers, and subdues their understanding."[31] In light of his faith in experiential evidence and wariness of eloquence, we might expect Hume to exhibit considerable skepticism about the alleged origin of Macpherson's poetry, which many readers (Johnson included) regarded as highly improbable.[32] In point of fact, however, it was not until the end of his life that Hume came to regard the Ossian poems as forgeries: throughout the early

[29] See McKean; Hudson, "'Oral Tradition': The Evolution of an Eighteenth-Century Concept."

[30] Hume, *Enquiry*, 92.

[31] Hume, *Enquiry*, 85.

[32] For more on Hume and the Ossian controversy, see Raynor.

years of the controversy (especially the 1760s), Hume demonstrated a cautious faith in the credibility of Macpherson's epics.

Hume's letters to his friend and compatriot Hugh Blair evince surprising comfort with the notion of oral testimony. Writing in 1763, Hume urges Blair to furnish "proof" that Macpherson did not forge the poems:

> These proofs must not be arguments, but testimonies. Now the testimonies may, in my opinion, be of two kinds. Macpherson pretends that there is an ancient manuscript of part of Fingal in the family I think of Claronald. Get that fact ascertained by more than one person of credit . . . But the chief point in which it will be necessary for you to exert yourself will be, to get positive testimony from many different hands, that such poems are vulgarly recited in the Highlands, and have there long been the entertainment of the people. This testimony must be as particular as it is positive.[33]

Citing the Clanronald manuscript as potentially persuasive, Hume acknowledges the value of textual evidence (although it is worth noting that he does not insist on Blair seeing it himself, but allows that he might "get that fact ascertained by more than one person of credit"). At the same time, however, he identifies "positive testimony" as "the chief point" in Blair's effort to quash doubts about Macpherson's Ossian. Such testimony (mostly statements from Highland clergy) was necessarily subjective, relying on both the integrity of the witness and the faithfulness of their memory. Blair collected this testimony via written correspondence and personal interviews,[34] but regardless of the form of the testimony (written or spoken), this approach to

[33] Moore, vol. 3, 127–28.

[34] In a 1763 letter to the bookseller Thomas Becket, Blair writes, "I have got several materials, and that I think convincing ones, for a preface on the authenticity of Ossian's poems. I have myself conversed with many Highland Gentlemen who know the originals of some of them; and I have letters from several others," as cited in Raynor, 150.

evidence implicitly validates oral tradition in so far as it does not depend on a longstanding written record (even if, in the process, it is creating one). Hume would later pen, though not publish, an essay that expressed serious doubts about Ossian, but in these letters, at least, Hume's advice to Blair suggests faith in collective memory as a way of knowing.[35]

Blair, however, shows unwavering support for Macpherson from the publication of the *Fragments* in 1760 to his testimony to the Highland Society in 1797. This support is most evident in his *Critical Dissertation* (1763), a scholarly essay on Macpherson's poems that both argues for Ossian's poetic beauty (including lengthy comparisons to Homer) and attempts to establish that such sophistication could have emerged from what the English perceived as a "rude" and "barbarous" third-century Celtic society. In 1765, Blair reissued his *Critical Dissertation* with an appendix that summarized the fruits of his search for proof of *Fingal*'s authenticity, including the testimony of "a multitude of living witnesses." Blair's emphasis on the living witness gives authority to the subjective, personal testimony that Johnson was loathe to believe; whereas Johnson refers to such witnesses as "inaccurate auditors," who merely "imagine" that they have heard the poetry, Blair credits the accounts of those same listeners. Blair further legitimizes oral history through his use of the term "oral edition" to refer to the varying iterations of the Ossianic poems throughout the Highlands:

> by comparing together the different oral editions of [the poems of Ossian] (if we may use that phrase) in different corners of the country, and by comparing these also with the manuscripts which he obtained, Mr. Macpherson had it in his power to ascertain, in a

[35] On the topic of Hume's change of heart, Raynor writes, "The fact that Hume later turned against Macpherson does not change the fact that as late as 1765 he was aiding the cause. It was Macpherson's historical writings and his translation of the *Iliad* that completed Hume's *volte face* in the last decade of his life," 159.

> great measure, the genuine original, to restore the parts to their proper order, and to give the whole to the publick in that degree of correctness, in which it now appears.[36]

Blair's use of the word "edition," as well as his suggestion that these oral versions might be "compared" with manuscripts, bestows a certain dignity on what Hume called "poems vulgarly recited," placing this oral tradition on a par with written histories. Furthermore, in his willingness to entertain multiple Ossianic sources, Blair anticipates modern folkloric defenses of Macpherson; indeed, Blair's concept of "restoration" is akin to Porter's "recomposition" or Gaskill's "collage."

At the same, time, however, Blair's defense of Macpherson continually emphasizes the "exactness" of the translation. This emphasis on exactness would seem to participate in a different epistemology from the one articulated above: exactness demands faithful adherence to a single source, whereas "restoration" allows Macpherson to consult his judgment and leaves many aspects of the epic to his discretion. Referring to the testimony of the Highland clergymen, Blair uses the word "exact" three times within the space of a single page: "They affirm that in many places what was rehearsed in their presence agreed literally and exactly with the translation," "the translation of which they assure me is exact," and "which agreed exactly with Mr. Macpherson's translation."[37] In his testimony to the Highland Society of Scotland in 1797, however, he is somewhat less insistent on exactness:

> After all the enquiries I have been at pains to make, I can find no ground to suspect that his deviations from the original text were at all considerable, or his interpolations any more than what were simply necessary to connect together pieces of one whole which he

[36] Moore, vol. 3, 192.

[37] Moore, vol. 3, 194.

found disjointed. That his work, as it stands, exhibits a genuine authentic view of ancient Gaelic poetry, I am as firmly persuaded, as I can be of anything.[38]

Blair's allowance for "interpolation" is echoed by other participants in Highland Society's investigation; Andrew Gallie, for instance, writes:

> It was, and I believe still is well known, that the broken poems of Ossian, handed down from one generation to another, got corrupted. In the state of the Highlands, and its language, this evil, I apprehend, could not be avoided; and I think great credit is due, in such a case, to him who restores a work of merit to its original purity.[39]

Interestingly, even Gallie—who is willing to admit that the poetry was unavoidably "corrupted"—still seeks recourse in the language of "purity," although it is difficult to imagine how the restored poetry could be truly "pure." As we have seen, Blair and Gallie struggle to adhere to a single epistemological perspective; indeed, Gallie's notion of "original purity" contains echoes of Johnson's insistence that Macpherson produce an original and, thus, would seem to point to the ongoing influence of Johnson's position.

All of this begs the question whether oral tradition is compatible with a concept of truth that relies on "purity" and "exactness." Put differently, perhaps oral tradition is problematic in the eighteenth century for the very reason that it violates a notion of truth that depends on a kind of scientific precision. This is certainly part of Thomas Curley's argument about why the Ossian controversy mattered to Johnson (and why it ought to matter today as well): "Because deception collided with historicity and had a potential for sowing confusion in the extra-literary world, Johnson had to condemn it, or everyday life and one's perception of everyday life threatened to

[38] Moore, vol. 3, 373.

[39] Moore, vol. 3, 380.

become meaningless."[40] Evidently, Curley's (and Johnson's) perception of "truth in literature" is fundamentally at odds with the imprecision and mutability of oral tradition. Robert Wood, one of the eighteenth century's champions of oral tradition and the first to make a sustained case that Homer was an oral poet,[41] avoids these categories of truth, instead defending orality on primarily aesthetic terms. Surprisingly, Wood's name never comes up in the Ossian controversy, nor does Wood discuss Ossian much beyond citing the Scottish epic as further evidence of oral tradition.[42] Sidestepping the question of exactness almost entirely, Wood argues that the increasingly artificial language of the eighteenth century is ill-suited to poetry and that, in fact, the simplicity allowed by a preliterate culture is hugely advantageous to the poet:

> If we examine the rise and progress of language, with a view to its application and use, we shall find that the several stages of its advancement are not equally favorable to ever display of genius; and that the useful Artist and the Philosopher will find their account in certain improvements, which rather impede than forward the Poet's views. His business is entirely with Nature; and the language, which belongs to imperfect arts, simple manners, and unlettered society, best suits his purpose.[43]

At the same time, however, Wood nods to eighteenth-century concerns about the faithfulness of human memory, suggesting that memory would have been more accurate before the advent of letters: "In a rude and unlettered state of society the memory is loaded with nothing that is either useless or unintelligible; whereas modern education employs us chiefly in getting by heart, while

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[40] Curley, 20.

[41] Technically Blackwell is the first to link Homer to oral tradition, but Wood makes this point more overtly. See Hudson, "'Oral Tradition': The Evolution of an Eighteenth-Century Concept," 167.

[42] See Hudson, "'Oral Tradition': The Evolution of an Eighteenth-Century Concept," 175.

[43] Wood, 280.

we are young, what we forget before we are old."[44] The eighteenth-century memory, Wood seems to suggest, is no longer equipped to recall the level of detail that an illiterate bard would have enjoyed.

Boswell as oral historian

And yet, one remarkable—and continually disputed—eighteenth-century memory leaps to mind: that of Macpherson's fellow Scotsman, and Johnson's good friend, James Boswell. Reading Boswell's *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*, I am struck by the fact that even as he debates the plausibility of Macpherson's oral tradition he insists on his own ability to recall and transcribe conversations exactly: "One of his [Johnson's] objections to the authenticity of Fingal, during the conversation at Ulinish, is omitted in my Journal, but I perfectly recollect it. 'Why is not the original deposited in some publick library, instead of exhibiting attestations of its existence?'" (*Life*, vol. 5, 389).[45] In this quotation Boswell reenacts almost the very thing for which Johnson censures Macpherson: though Boswell can produce no written evidence that Johnson uttered such words, he nonetheless emphasizes the fidelity of his memory.[46] Claims of this sort are common for Boswell: writing books whose interest derives largely from their record of conversation, Boswell consistently reminds his reader of the faithfulness of his transcription. Thus, much as Macpherson's work depends on interviewing Highlanders, so Boswell's work depends on the firsthand oral accounts he accrues from the London and Edinburgh literati with whom he associates. Importantly, Boswell's method did not usually involve taking notes in the

[44] Wood, 260.

[45] This passage is almost identical to the journal version, *Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson, LL.D., 1773*, edited from the original manuscript by Frederick A. Pottle and Charles H. Bennett (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 380, hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

[46] The difference, in this case, is that Boswell admits the absence of documentation, whereas Macpherson claimed to have a manuscript.

moment but, rather, relied heavily on memory after the fact. Boswell, in other words, conducts a version of oral history even while debating the merits of another: in an era before recording devices of any kind, Boswell's work is itself a kind of fieldwork, albeit in a very different sort of field. The second half of this chapter will look first at Boswell's *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* as oral history adapted to the modern age, subjecting this text to Johnson's own rigorous standards of evidence. I will then turn to a comparison of the *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* with the *Life of Johnson*, arguing that the *Life* is equally indebted to memory and orality as the *Journal*, but that Boswell goes to greater lengths to obscure this fact in his legacy-making biography.

Consistently interested in and persuaded by oral histories both ancient and modern, Boswell presents an alternative to Johnson's sight-based epistemology. Evidence of this sympathy for orality is visible in Boswell's own account of their storied trip to the Highlands, but it must be said that Boswell's interest in oral tradition does not translate to unequivocal support for Macpherson. Throughout *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* Boswell demonstrates an affinity for Macpherson and a willingness to suspend disbelief, but Boswell's tentative approval is nowhere near as insistent as Johnson's criticism, and his sympathy turns quickly to skepticism when the conflict between Macpherson and Johnson comes to a head in the 1770s. Nonetheless, Boswell's reluctance to accept Johnson's position on the Ossian question is worth exploring, not least because of the ways that Boswell's own journalistic practice relies on memory and orality. Boswell and Macpherson—both Scotsmen of a literary bent and roughly the same age—moved in the same circles in Edinburgh and London. When Boswell was living in London in the early 1760s, the two young men were friendly acquaintances who met on several occasions, and in his

journal from this period Boswell calls Macpherson "a man of great genius and an honest Scotch Highlander" (*London Journal*, 34).

By the time Boswell writes *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (about ten years later), this enthusiasm for Macpherson has waned somewhat. Even still, the *Tour* is notable for Boswell's clear resistance to Johnson's outright condemnation of Ossian and oral tradition. In general Boswell gives much greater credence to what he hears in the Scottish Highlands than Johnson does. For example, Boswell recounts an instance of Erse recitation:

> I could not perceive much poetical imagery in the translation. Yet all our company who understood the Erse, seemed charmed with the original. There may, perhaps, be some choice of expression, and some excellence of arrangement, that cannot be shewn in translation.[47] (*Life*, vol. 5, 314)

Johnson, by contrast, writes,

> Of the Earse language, as I understand nothing, I cannot say more than I have been told. It is the rude speech of a barbarous people, who had few thoughts to express, and were content, as they conceived grossly, to be grossly understood. After what has been lately talked of Highland Bards, and Highland genius, many will startle when they are told, that the Earse never was a written language; and that there is not in the world an Earse manuscript a hundred years old. (*Western Islands*, 114)

Whereas Boswell welcomes with interest the opportunities to hear Erse—and makes a generous allowance for the possible beauty of the language in the original—it is almost as if Johnson denies or ignores the oral evidence available to him: he hears plenty of Erse while in Scotland, yet his opinion of the language continues to rest on the question of whether or not it is written.

[47] This passage is almost identical to the journal version, Pottle and Bennett, 305.

Throughout his *Tour*, it is clear that Boswell is willing to admit evidence in Macpherson's favor that Johnson considers inadequate. For example:

> When Dr. Johnson came down, I told him that I had now obtained some evidence concerning Fingal; for that Mr M'Queen had repeated a passage in the original Erse, which Mr M'Pherson's translation was pretty like; and reminded him that he himself had once said, he did not require Mr M'Pherson's Ossian to be more like the original than Pope's Homer.[48] (*Life*, vol. 5, 242)

Note that Boswell uses some of the same language as Johnson—the language of evidence—but for Boswell this evidence is oral and anecdotal: Mr M'Queen's recitation of a passage in the original Erse satisfies Boswell as to the legitimacy of Macpherson's text. We might think of this, perhaps, a reinterpretation of the word "evidence," the root of which is the Latin word "videre," meaning "to see." Boswell, in contrast to his mentor, seems content to hear.

Interestingly, the word "evidence" was not added to this passage until Boswell's revisions of the journal in 1785. This is one of several instances in which Boswell's later revisions mitigate his criticism of Macpherson, creating the impression of a more favorable attitude toward the author of *Fingal* than he was willing to admit to Johnson. Boswell's Hebridean journal—which Pottle describes as "the best of all his journals, the most important single document among his recovered papers" (Pottle and Bennett, ix)—was prepared for publication with the assistance of Edmond Malone and finally published in 1785, twelve years after its composition and less than a year after Johnson's death. Boswell repeatedly mentions the fact that Johnson was reading his journal as he wrote: "He came to my room this morning before breakfast to read my Journal, which he has done all along" (Pottle and Bennett, 188). Indeed, John Radner goes so far as to call the journal "collaboratively constructed," giving significant

[48] Compare with Pottle and Bennett, 206.

weight to Johnson's influence on the content and structure of the journal.[49] In the published journal, Boswell is careful to emphasize that the published book is no different from the original version: "I have resolved that *the very Journal which Dr. Johnson read*, shall be presented to the publick" (*Life*, vol. 5, 78). Despite Boswell's adamancy, however, this statement is not strictly true; as Pottle reminds us, Boswell and Malone made significant changes to the journal in their efforts to prepare the manuscript for publication: "Matter was added, matter was transposed, whole paragraphs were recast, and every sentence was scanned for informal syntax and inelegant phraseology" (Pottle and Bennett, xxi). Among the various reasons for these changes is the issue of genre: Boswell was initially asked to write a biography of Johnson, and thus many of his revisions reflect an effort to minimize his own participation in the events of the narrative and bring Johnson to the fore (although these efforts are more successful in some places than in others).[50] In addition to the generic shift, however, Boswell also changes collaborators: although his original journal was composed under the close supervision of his mentor, Johnson had died by the time Boswell undertook his revisions. Certain changes, then, might be read in light of this new freedom from Johnson's scrutiny, and I would like to suggest that the published journal reflects subtle adjustments in Boswell's position on the Macpherson controversy in particular.

In one of his most notable revisions, Boswell carefully qualifies a description of Johnson's Ossianic misgivings, writing, "I desire not to be understood as agreeing *entirely* with the opinions of Dr Johnson [about Macpherson], which I relate without any remark" (*Life*, vol. 5, 388n1). Appearing only in the published version of the text, this sentence is remarkable for its

[49] John B. Radner, *Johnson and Boswell: A Biography of Friendship* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 7.

[50] Ian McGowan writes: "although the author is sometimes comically to the fore, Boswell does cut much personal material," "Boswell at Work: The Revision and Publication of *The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*," in *Tradition in Transition*, 136.

clear (if tentative) departure from Johnson's position. Boswell's interest in separating himself from his mentor becomes even more apparent when the final statement is compared with an earlier, more equivocal draft: "I desire not to be understood as either as agreeing or disagreeing with the opinions of Dr. Johnson, which I relate without any remark. I would not have my journal encumbered with commentary or contest, of which perhaps there will be found too much" (Pottle and Bennett, 448). The change from neither agreeing nor disagreeing to *not* agreeing entirely signals a certain sympathy for Macpherson—and a willingness to entertain the veracity of his texts—that Johnson does not share.

At the risk of attributing too much significance to a single remark, it is also worth noting that the inclusion of the above sentence violates Boswell's self-proclaimed principles of selection, as he inserts "commentary" despite his avowed effort to minimize his role in the journal. Moreover, this is not the only such instance: Boswell fails to abide by these same principles of selection in another discussion of Macpherson, in which he allows his opinion to appear in the published version rather than excising it as promised: "I do not think it incumbent on me to give any precise decided opinion upon this question [of Ossian], as to which I believe more than some, and less than others" (*Life*, vol. 5, 389).[51] As with the statement that he does not agree "entirely," this attestation of belief ("more than some, and less than others") is hardly a ringing endorsement of Macpherson's text. Nonetheless, Boswell consistently attempts to carve out a space for himself between the two poles of opinion on Ossian: he is neither Macpherson's staunchest advocate, but nor is he his fiercest critic. In keeping with this trend of favorable (or at least neutral) opinion, Boswell excises other passages that would put him more squarely in line with Johnson's views on Macpherson: "[Mr. Macqueen] always harped on this: 'Macpherson's translations are far inferior to Ossian's originals.' 'Yes,' I said, 'because they are not the same.

[51] Compare with Pottle and Bennett, 380–81.

They are inferior as a shilling is to a guinea, because they are not the same'" (Pottle and Bennett, 205).[52] This is not to say that Boswell removes all passages expressing doubt about Macpherson or oral tradition. In response to a discussion about "ancestors of the Celts," for instance, Boswell writes, "I confess Dr. Johnson has weakened my belief in remote tradition" (but here, too, note the use of the indeterminate "weakened" rather than a more forceful word like "destroyed") (*Life*, vol. 5, 224).[53] Even taking such instances into account, however, the cumulative effect of Boswell's revisions regarding Macpherson is to distance himself from the severity of Johnson's criticism, even if only marginally.

Laying aside Boswell's sympathies for Macpherson—and the question of whether he intentionally diminished his criticism of Ossian in the published *Tour*—Boswell's faith in orality is evident everywhere in his journal. Consider, for instance, the epigraph to the *Tour*, which reads, "his extemporal speeches were little inferior to his premeditated writings." This statement is not only a direct refutation of Johnson's hierarchy of language—in that it puts speech and writing on a par—it is also, ironically, a statement about Johnson himself. In addition to celebrating the speech of great men like Johnson, Boswell also records it, and often turns to his memory in order to do so. As Paul Korshin explains, "we know that Boswell did not habitually take notes while Johnson spoke, except for occasions when Johnson specifically dictated something to him."[54] In his heavy reliance on memory, Boswell's methodologies align him more closely with the "Homer of the Highlands" (Macpherson) than with his own mentor (Johnson). Indeed, recent studies of oral history describe a set of standard practices that closely resemble Boswell's approach to his subjects: "Oral history thrives on talking, largely by the interviewee.

[52] This passage is not included in the published version, *Life*, vol. 5, 241.

[53] This sentence is almost identical to Pottle and Bennett, 186.

[54] Paul J. Korshin, "Johnson's Conversation," in *New Light on Boswell*, 178.

The interviewer's job is to ask meaningful questions, listen carefully, and suppress the urge to talk."[55] Aside from an ongoing difficulty suppressing the urge to talk, Boswell largely meets the criteria of an oral historian. As Boswell himself observes, "I have also an admirable talent of leading the conversation; I do not mean leading as in an orchestra, by playing the first fiddle, but leading as one does in examining a witness: starting topics, and making the company pursue them" (Pottle and Bennett, 231).[56] To be sure, *modern* oral history requires recording devices of various kinds; but unlike the twenty-first-century historians whom Donald Ritchie advises in his manual, Boswell did not record notes in the moment. Thus, Boswell emerges as a kind of liminal oral historian, occupying a position somewhere between the oral tradition that Macpherson represents and the meticulous, note-taking historian that Johnson envisions.

I am not the first to observe the kinship between Boswell's process and oral tradition; Boswell is, rightly, mentioned in several texts about oral history,[57] but this aspect of his work has yet to be explored in any detail. This kinship is especially visible (and pertinent) throughout *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*, in which Boswell's reflections on his own process are often reminiscent of discussions about the composition of *Fingal*. Boswell makes frequent reference to the fact that he is not keeping his journal in real time, but rather recording events several days after they have occurred.[58] For instance, early on in the trip he admits, "I did not begin to keep a regular full journal till some days after we had set out from Edinburgh, but I have luckily preserved a good many fragments of his *Memorabilia* from his very first evening in Scotland"

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[55] Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), xiv.

[56] This passage is almost identical to *Life*, vol. 5, 264–65.

[57] See Ritchie, 3; Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

[58] For more on Boswell's style of composition in *Hebrides*, see especially Radner and Sherman.

(Pottle and Bennett, 12).[59] This sentence describes a method much like Macpherson's, in which a series of written "fragments" are supplemented by memory in order to create a coherent whole. What is more, the word "fragments" is especially evocative in this context, given that Macpherson's reliance on fragments (rather than a complete manuscript) was at the very heart of Johnson's criticism of his work. Boswell uses this language of fragments again much later in the journal, in the entry for 22 October:

> I am glad to find that I remember so many particulars after the lapse of almost seven years. My Journal cannot have the same freshness and fullness when written now as when written recently after the scenes recorded. But I hope I shall preserve some valuable remains or fragments.[60] (Pottle and Bennett, 346)

This passage adds further depth to our understanding of Boswell's attitude toward fragmentary evidence, as he suggests that his final product might still retain its value even if every word and detail cannot be traced to a manuscript. Put differently, the fact that Boswell relies on his memory in order to develop the narrative of the journal more fully does not (in his opinion) compromise its veracity: it may be less "fresh" or "full," but it is still "valuable." This aspect of Boswell's process—constructing a whole from a fragment—is again reiterated (albeit in different language) in his assertion that "a page of my Journal is like a cake of portable soup. A little may be diffused into a considerable portion" (Pottle and Bennett, 165). This sentence does not appear in the published version of the journal, but it aptly describes the entry from which it is drawn: in the book, the entry for 13 September 1773 has been greatly expanded from what is in the original journal (*Life*, vol. 5, 185–208). Although these passages suggest that Boswell is more transparent about his process than Macpherson, he is not scrupulous in identifying which details are recorded

[59] This passage is almost identical to *Life*, vol. 5, 23–24.

[60] This passage is omitted in the published version, *Life*, vol. 5, 342–44.

in manuscript and which drawn from his memory. These two kinds of evidence are therefore placed on a par with one another, as manuscript becomes indistinguishable from memory in the final version of the journal.

Boswell makes many admissions of unscrupulous documentation throughout his journal. In his entry for 9 September, for instance, he writes, "But before quitting the island in my Journal (as I am now far behind with it, for I am now writing on the 15 September), I shall put down all my observations upon it at once" (Pottle and Bennett, 135). This sentence once again reveals the extent to which Boswell's process depends upon his memory; and yet because it is removed during Boswell and Malone's revisions, the published version of the text obscures the potential inaccuracies of Boswell's observations.[61] To be sure, Boswell is remembering details in a much shorter timeframe than Macpherson (or Macpherson's sources), but that does not change the fact that both men lean heavily on their recollection in order to compose their respective texts. This aspect of Boswell's process comes up again and again throughout the journal: on 20 August, "I have not preserved in my Journal any of the conversation which passed between Dr. Johnson and Professor Shaw, but I recollect Dr. Johnson said to me afterwards, 'I took much to Shaw'"[62]; on 23 September, "I must here glean some of his [Johnson's] conversation at Ullinish, which I have omitted"[63]; on 14 October, "I must endeavour to recollect what I may have omitted on former occasions"[64]; and on 15 October, "Let me now go back and glean Johnsoniana" (Pottle and

[61] Korshin underestimates these gaps in Boswell's record: "His method in the *Tour to the Hebrides* had been uncomplicated. He had spent every day for nearly three successive months in Johnson's company and had taken careful notes in a small memorandum books which he later transcribed into the narrative form of his diary, much of which is preserved in the *Private Papers*. Since he had almost no distractions, either social or amorous, during the three months of the tour, he tended to make his records punctually," "Johnson's Conversation," 178.

[62] Compare with *Life*, vol. 5, 70.

[63] Compare with *Life*, vol. 5, 249.

[64] This sentence is omitted in the published version, *Life*, vol. 5, 308.

Bennett, 47, 211, 297, and 307).[65] Appearing in original journal itself, these four entries are recollected at a distance of mere days rather than years. Nonetheless, in the repetition of the words "omit," "glean," and "recollect," Boswell consistently reminds us that the content of his journal is as much (if not more so) a product of his memory than a literal transcription of events. Much as Macpherson is more than a translator, Boswell is more than a transcriber: both men participate in a form of history that is neither fiction nor strict fact but rather a reconstruction filtered through time and memory.

Just as Johnson impugned Macpherson's methods, Boswell's journalistic practice has also been the subject of much debate, with critics expressing reservations about the fidelity of Boswell's memory in particular.[66] Paul Korshin, for example, raises doubts about the reliability of Boswell's transcriptions:

> The vital link in the transmission of Johnson's conversations from drawing-room and tavern to the pages of Boswell's biography, then, must be Boswell's memory, which would appear to have been miraculous. Or at least, Boswell's admirers, when they have paused to consider this transmission, have generally decided that his memory was prodigious. Was it? We know, of course, that the trained memory of a professional actor or actress, a trained lecturer, or a poet like the bardic oral poets of primitive cultures can

[65] Compare with *Life*, vol. 5, 316.

[66] John J. Burke, Jr. writes, "Boswell's trustworthiness was once a given in literary studies, but like so many truths it now appears to lie in ruins. In recent years he has become the object of ever more pointed attempts to discredit him," "The Originality of Boswell's Version of Johnson's Quarrel with Lord Chesterfield," in *New Light on Boswell*, 143–44. For attempts to discredit Boswell, see Donald Greene, "'Tis a Pretty Book, Mr. Boswell, But—," *Boswell's Life of Johnson: New Questions, New Answers*, ed. John A. Vance (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985); Richard Schwartz, *Boswell's Johnson: A Preface to the "Life"* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978).

indeed be extraordinary. But the trained memorizer profits from repeating the same speeches many times.[67]

In this skepticism about whether Boswell's memory could be as "miraculous" or "prodigious" as it would have needed to be, Korshin sounds remarkably like Johnson criticizing Macpherson. And indeed, Boswell's journals also make us aware (intentionally or not) of the shortcomings of his methods. In addition to the fact that he was frequently remembering rather than transcribing, Boswell also sometimes records events and conversation out of order: "I often do not observe chronology, for fear of losing a thing by waiting till I can put it in its exact place" (Pottle and Bennett, 329).[68] Likewise, "I do not observe exact chronology in Mr. Johnson's sayings. There is no occasion" (Pottle and Bennett, 151). To be sure, there is a quality of broad applicability to Johnson's often aphoristic speech, yet Boswell's failure to "observe chronology" would seem to diverge from the strict notion of historical truth that Johnson embraces.[69]

Despite occasionally alerting the reader to inaccuracies, however, Boswell generally insists on the fidelity of his descriptions. For example, "I am most scrupulously exact in this Journal. Mr. Johnson said it was a very exact picture of his life" (Pottle and Bennett, 245).[70] Whereas previously Boswell casually departs from Johnsonian accuracy, here he appears anxious to meet Johnson's stringent demands. Not only does Boswell employ Johnson's language of exactness, but he also draws the reader's attention to Johnson's approval of the text. This

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[67] Korshin, "Johnson's Conversation," 179.

[68] This sentence is omitted in the published version, *Life*, vol. 5, 333.

[69] For more on Johnson's efforts to reform historical writing see Martine Watson Brownley, "Samuel Johnson and the Writing of History," *Johnson After Two Hundred Years*, ed. Paul J. Korshin (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986); John A. Vance, *Samuel Johnson and the Sense of History* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984).

[70] In the published version this is revised: "I must again and again apologize to fastidious readers, for recording such minute particulars. They prove the scrupulous fidelity of my *Journal*. Dr. Johnson said it was a very exact picture of a portion of his life," *Life*, vol. 5, 279.

scramble to prove that the *Tour* meets Johnson's standards is evident elsewhere, too; in yet another entry, Boswell highlights Johnson's participation in the writing and revision of the journal: "He helped me to supply blanks which I had left in first writing it, when I was not quite sure of what he had said; and he corrected any mistakes that I had made" (Pottle and Bennett, 294).[71] These attempts at scrupulousness, however, are at odds with the casual regard for historical accuracy that Boswell demonstrates elsewhere (as above). Some readers might interpret these contradictions as evidence of a paradox in Boswell's thinking, but I would argue that they say more about Boswell's awareness of Johnson (and the public's regard for Johnson) than Boswell's own concept of truth. Once again, Boswell appears comfortable occupying a position somewhere between Macpherson and Johnson: he is neither quite so loose with (or so distant from) the facts as Macpherson, nor quite so conscientious as Johnson.

Memory and orality in the Life of Johnson

The *Life of Johnson* (1791) opens with the first iteration of a refrain that will become all too common as the work progresses: Boswell's defense of his methods. As has been well-documented,[72] Boswell is keen to emphasize not only the faithfulness of his representation of Johnson but the thoroughness of his biographical practice:

> as I acquired a facility in recollecting, and was very assiduous in recording, his conversation . . . and as I have spared no pains in obtaining materials concerning him, from every quarter where I could discover that they were to be found, and have been favoured with the most liberal communications by his friends; I flatter myself that few

[71] This passage is almost identical to *Life*, vol. 5, 307.

[72] For more on the composition of the *Life*, see especially Radner; Adam Sisman, *Boswell's Presumptuous Task: The Making of the Life of Dr. Johnson* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000).

> biographers have entered upon such a work as this, with more advantages. (*Life*, vol. 1, 26)

This quotation makes visible the bricolage quality of Boswell's biography: one part hard, documentary evidence ("materials"), one part first-person testimony ("communications"), one part transcript ("recording"), and, finally, one part memory ("recollecting"). Although Boswell insists on the rigor of his methods and verifiability of his materials, his "facility in recollecting" (on which much of the *Life* depends) introduces an element of uncertainty into Boswell's history. In particular, the importance of memory to Boswell's composition stands at odds, I argue, with Johnson's ideas about what can be "really known." As I have noted, critics have long debated the fidelity of Boswell's memory, but I am more interested in the way that Boswell's self-proclaimed methods—what I call his "aesthetic of specificity"—obscures his reliance on memory and, thus, his commonality with oral historians like Macpherson.

Johnson's notion of history reverberates throughout the *Life*, as Boswell is careful to call the reader's attention to the "exactness" of his information. Midway through the *Life*, Boswell writes, "I must, again and again, intreat of my readers not to suppose that my imperfect record of conversation contains the whole of what was said by Johnson, or other eminent persons who lived with him. What I have preserved, however, has the value of the most perfect authenticity" (*Life*, vol. 2, 350). By modestly acknowledging that he is unable to supply "the whole" of Johnson's conversation, Boswell stakes a claim for the reliability of his written record, aligning himself with Johnson's preference for hard, documentary evidence. In another instance, recounting Johnson's role in selling Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield*, Boswell notes, "I shall give it [the story] authentically from Johnson's own exact narration" (*Life*, vol. 1, 416). Here Boswell not only invokes the exactness that is so central to Johnson's concept of history, he also yokes

the "exact" to the "authentic." The exactness of this transcription, however, is not verifiable in Boswell's written record: Marshall Waingrow's edition of the manuscript of the *Life* notes that "there is no prior record of this narration in the recovered journals or *Life* Materials."[73]

Boswell's notion of exactitude is also rooted firmly in historical and geographical specificity: Boswell not only anchors every entry with precise information about the date and location of the events recorded, he also provides abundant details about the people, places, and events that he describes. This forms stark contrast to other accounts of Johnson's life, especially Piozzi's *Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson* (1786). Although both biographies, the *Anecdotes* and the *Life* participate in different subgenres: Boswell wants to be seen as writing a historical record, while Piozzi aligns herself firmly with "ana" (collections of loosely related material). Like *Thraliana* (1776–1809)—a record of her life that Piozzi began while married to her first husband, Henry Thrale—the *Anecdotes* provides information about Johnson in a seemingly random aggregate, rather than within Boswell's carefully delineated chronology. For example, while Boswell's entries begin with a date ("On Tuesday the 5th of July," "on Wednesday, July 6"), Piozzi's entries begin with a statement of general remembrance: "I have heard him say," "I once heard him exclaim," "He once told me," and "Mr. Johnson often said."[74] This absence of historical detail becomes even more conspicuous when Piozzi refers to specific occasions; indeed, where Boswell would be quick to say "this happened on x day, with x people," Piozzi often omits such details: "I remember hearing it was at some tavern" or "I forget in what year it was that this extraordinary person lived and died at a house in Old-street"

[73] Marshall Waingrow, ed., *James Boswell's* Life of Johnson, *An Edition of the Original Manuscript*, vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 287.

[74] Hester Lynch Piozzi, *Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson, LL.D., during the Last Twenty Years of His Life*, ed. Arthur Sherbo (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 67, 96, 122, and 133, hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

(*Anecdotes*, 121 and 119). I would like to suggest, however, that Boswell's self-conscious framing of the *Life* as an historically accurate work conceals the many similarities between his biography of Johnson and Piozzi's, especially the ways in which Boswell also participates in the genre of "ana."

To some extent, this difference in biographical method reflects differences in Boswell's and Piozzi's style of record-keeping: Piozzi's *Thraliana* (from which much of the *Anecdotes* is drawn) is not as meticulously dated as Boswell's memoranda and journals. Even still, Piozzi stakes an important theoretical claim for her aesthetic of aggregation: "To recollect and to repeat the sayings of Dr. Johnson is almost all that can be done by the writers of his life; as his life, at least since my acquaintance with him, consisted in little else than talking" (*Anecdotes*, 67). Here Piozzi articulates a theory of biography *as collection*, as aggregation, arguing that a life might be adequately represented by an accumulation of "sayings" and thus need not be bound by a rigid chronology. Boswell, too, is sympathetic to this view of biography—as he says in the opening pages of the *Life*, "the conversation of a celebrated man, if his talents have been exerted in conversation, will best display his character" (*Life*, vol. 1, 31)—and yet, unlike Piozzi, he clearly feels compelled to "authenticate" Johnson's conversation by forcing his record to conform to a Johnsonian standard of history. Reflecting on the fact that scholars have traditionally struggled to accept Piozzi's *Anecdotes* on its own terms—often opting to insert it within a more Boswellian narrative structure—Lisa Berglund argues that Piozzi's writing "derive[s] much of [its] energy from the tension between the fugitive, fragmentary, and discursive genres she employed and the documented care with which she formatted her apparently random or unstructured texts."[75]

[75] Lisa Berglund, "Hester Lynch Piozzi's *Anecdotes* Versus the Editors," *The Age of Johnson* 18, 278. For more on the composition of the *Anecdotes*, see Felicity Nussbaum, "Sociability and Life Writing: Hester Lynch Thrale Piozzi," in *Women's Life Writing, 1700–1850: Gender, Genre, and Authorship*, ed. Daniel Cook and Amy Culley (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

Berglund's comments establish a distinction between Piozzi's "fragmentary" style and "a more conventional, Boswellian format"; this distinction, however, erases the strong commonality between Piozzi's and Boswell's methods. Indeed, both Piozzi and Boswell rely heavily on fragmentary material; for instance, Boswell's memoranda—the notes from which he would later construct his journal—resemble Piozzi's ana. But where Piozzi's *Anecdotes* embraces the aesthetic of the fragment, Boswell's *Life* goes to great lengths to mask his reliance on fragmentary—and especially oral—material.

As in the *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*, the word "fragments" appears several times throughout the *Life* in reference to Boswell's notes or Johnson's speech. The *Life* betrays Boswell's ambivalent relationship to the fragment: on the one hand, he bemoans the fragment's incompleteness, while on the other hand he insists on its utility. In some passages, the fragment runs counter to Boswell's aesthetic of specificity; for example, Boswell dismisses Thomas Tyers' biography of Johnson as too reliant on anecdote and, thus, too fragmentary: "I therefore cannot venture to avail myself much of a biographical sketch of Johnson which he published . . . The sketch is, however, an entertaining little collection of fragments" (*Life*, vol. 3, 308–9).[76] Here and elsewhere, Boswell contends that anecdotes and fragments might be entertaining, but they are inadequate without the larger historical and biographical context on which he prides himself in the *Life*. Thus Boswell attempts to distinguish himself from authors (like Tyers and Piozzi) whose biographical mode relies heavily on the fragment, a form that Boswell associates with insufficiency and lack. At other moments in the *Life*, however, Boswell seems to reconsider the value of the fragment: "I cannot allow any fragment whatever that floats in my memory

[76] Thomas Tyers was, in Boswell's language, "bred to the law," but "ran about the world in pleasant carelessness, amusing everybody by his desultory conversation" (*Life*, vol. 3, 308). Tyers' "A biographical sketch of Dr Samuel Johnson" was published in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in December 1784. It was revised and printed as a pamphlet in 1785.

concerning the great subject of this work to be lost. Though a small particular may appear trifling to some, it will be relished by others; while every spark adds something to the general blaze" (*Life*, vol. 3, 190). Here Boswell imbues the fragment with rich narrative potential, emphasizing its ability to enhance, in aggregate, the bigger picture or "general blaze." This notion of the fragment as rife with possibility is reminiscent of not only Piozzi's approach to biography in the *Anecdotes* and Macpherson's approach to Ossian in *Fingal* but also Boswell's journalistic style in *Tour to the Hebrides* (especially the comparison of a small section of his journal to a "cake of portable soup"). Thus the *Life* chronicles Boswell's oscillation between two theories of biography (and, I argue, of history): one in which the fragment's very incompleteness compromises its ability to reflect an authentic self, and another in which the fragment is a repository of meaning, just waiting to be excavated.

Despite their shared appreciation of fragments, Piozzi and Macpherson diverge sharply on the matter of conjecture. While Piozzi simply accrued and arranged fragmentary material, Macpherson, notoriously, filled in the blanks, presenting the illusion of a coherent whole. Although Boswell goes out of his way to disavow these methods (as we have seen with his dismissal of Tyers, for instance), he nonetheless employs both aggregation and conjecture at various places in the *Life*. In a style reminiscent of Piozzi, Boswell at one point announces, "Instead of giving with the circumstances of time and place, such fragments of his conversation as I preserved during this visit to Oxford, I shall throw them together in continuation" (*Life*, vol. 2, 47). Like Piozzi in the *Anecdotes*, Boswell omits "circumstances of time and place" in favor of "throw[ing]" these fragments together (although the extent to which Piozzi's *Anecdotes* are merely "thrown together" is a matter of debate, and worthy of further inquiry). At other points, however, Boswell follows Macpherson's lead; indeed, despite frequent claims about his

scrupulous adherence to his notes, Boswell will occasionally make assumptions that allow him to fill in the gaps:

> Thus I conjecture: for I have, upon innumerable occasions, observed him suddenly stop, and then seem to count his steps with a deep earnestness; and when he had neglected or gone wrong in this sort of magical movement, I have seen him go back again, put himself in a proper posture to begin the ceremony, and, having gone through it, break from his abstraction, walk briskly on, and join his companion. (*Life*, vol. 1, 484–85)

It is perhaps significant that Boswell's assumptions here are about Johnson's *movements*, not his speech (which would be more difficult to recall with accuracy); nonetheless, it is impossible to avoid the fact that Boswell's language of "conjecture" suggests a reliance on memory rather than notes.

Memory occupies a particularly vexed position in the *Life*: on the one hand, memory forms the basis of much of the material that Boswell includes; but on the other hand, memory—with all its distortions and imperfections—sits uncomfortably with Boswell's widely-touted claims about the verifiability of the text. For Boswell, the solution to this problem resides in his journal: a documentary record composed before too much time had elapsed, the journal contains a version of memory that can, he claims, be trusted. Equally important, the journal was a documentary method condoned by Johnson himself: "He recommended to me to keep a journal of my life, full and unreserved. He said it would be a very good exercise, and would yield me great satisfaction when the particulars were faded from my remembrance" (*Life*, vol. 1, 433). The crucial distinction, for Boswell as well as for Johnson, appears to be the distance of recollection: the sooner memories can be recorded, the better (and the more historically accurate). When Boswell's account of a particular conversation is challenged by Dr. Thomas Blackwell, Boswell

responds, “I am slow to believe that any man’s memory, at the distance of several years, can preserve facts or sayings with such fidelity as may be done by writing them down when they are recent: and I beg it may be remembered, that it is *not upon memory, but upon what was written at the time*, that the authenticity of my Journal rests” (*Life*, vol. 5, 419, italics added). This reliance on writing rather than memory is, I think, the central claim of Boswell’s *Life*, which he reiterates consistently in order to gloss over the messiness (meticulous though he was) that any biographical process entails. Boswell emphasizes his strict adherence to the journal’s record and, moreover, calls our attention to moments when he refrains from embellishing this record, even in places that are lacking in detail:

> And here I am to mention with much regret, that my record of what he said is miserably scanty. I recollect with admiration an animating blaze of eloquence, which routed every intellectual power in me to the highest pitch, but must have dazzled me so much that my memory could not preserve the substance of his discourse . . . The defect of my minutes will be fully supplied by a long letter upon the subject which he favoured me with. (*Life*, vol. 1, 460–61)

Here Boswell carefully constructs a narrative of his biographical practice: as in the exchange with Blackwell, Boswell tells the reader that documentary evidence supplants—or compensates for—memory. Where Boswell’s memory “could not preserve,” Johnson’s letter will “fully supply.”

As we have seen, however, Boswell’s work shares a reliance on many of the same kinds of problematic evidence that plague Macpherson’s Ossian poems: namely, memory, oral history, and fragmentary sources. In a noteworthy turn of phrase, Adam Sisman describes Boswell’s

method as "reconstruct[ing] Johnson's conversation from fragmentary records."[77] The similarities to descriptions of Macpherson's process when writing *Fingal*—especially in the words "reconstruct" and "fragment"—are striking. One episode in the *Life* makes this comparison especially visible: Boswell's reconstruction of Johnson's 1767 conversation with the King. In the body of the *Life*, this episode is recounted by a seemingly omniscient narrator; it spans several pages, but Boswell's narrative posture can be easily ascertained in a few lines:

> His Majesty began by observing, that he understood [Johnson] came sometimes to the library; and then mentioning his having heard that the Doctor had been lately at Oxford, asked him if he was not fond of going thither. To which Johnson answered, that he was indeed fond of going to Oxford sometimes, but was likewise glad to come back again. (*Life*, vol. 2, 35)

The footnote to this passage, however, belies the apparently continuous, uniform voice of Boswell's narration, laying Boswell's bricolage methods bare:

> The particulars of this conversation I have been at great pains to collect with the utmost authenticity from Dr. Johnson's own detail to myself; from Mr. Langton, who was present when he gave an account of it to Dr. Joseph Warton, and several other friends, at Sir Joshua Reynolds'; from Mr. Barnard; from the copy of a letter written by the late Mr. Strahan the printer, to Bishop Warburton; and from a minute, the original of which is among the papers of the late Sir James Caldwell. (*Life*, vol. 2, 34)

In this footnote, Boswell acknowledges at least three kinds of evidence: first-person testimony (Johnson's retelling of the event), second-hand testimony (Langton's retelling of Johnson's retelling), and written documentation (the letter and the minute). This collection of diverse materials is reminiscent, I argue, of Macpherson's attempt to unify his own fragmented sources,

[77] Sisman, xvi.

and Boswell's footnote is evocative of Blair's (and later Mackenzie's) attempt to document Macpherson's research. To be sure, Boswell's sources are recalling information that occurred within decades rather than centuries; nonetheless, Boswell's decision to opt for narrative unity over heteroglossia—in this particular instance, at least—strongly resembles Macpherson's compositional methods in *Fingal* and exposes the myth of the single authentic account on which so much of the Macpherson controversy was based.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted three things: first, to assess an important aspect of the status of oral history in eighteenth-century Britain, paying particular attention to the Macpherson controversy; second, to trace affinities between Macpherson's oral tradition and Boswell's journalistic practice; and third, to suggest that the distinction between oral tradition and authentic history is not as stable as many eighteenth century thinkers (including Boswell and Johnson) claim. In particular, I sought to demonstrate the role that speech and memory play in the construction of the written record, looking especially at how Boswell approaches his own written record in the *Hebrides* and the *Life*. Although Macpherson's reconstruction of a third-century poem faces many more challenges than Boswell's reconstruction of an eighteenth-century life, Boswell's journals nonetheless make plain the extent to which history is (unavoidably) indebted to memory. The precise extent of this indebtedness is, of course, difficult to determine: that is the problem with memory. Boswell inadvertently acknowledges this difficulty in the *Life*, when discussing his ability to recall Johnson's conversation:

> In the early part of my acquaintance with him, I was so wrapt in admiration of his extraordinary colloquial talents, and so little accustomed to his peculiar mode of

> expression, that I found it extremely difficult to recollect and record his conversation with its genuine vigour and vivacity. In progress of time, when my mind was, as it were, strongly impregnated with the Johnsonian aether, I could, with much more facility and exactness, carry in my memory and commit to paper the exuberant variety of his wisdom and wit. (*Life*, vol. 1, 421)

This passage epitomizes the fallacy of complete verifiability: in his attempt to defend the precision of his record, Boswell invokes terms that sound more mystical than scientific, more magical than empirical. What, exactly, does it mean for his mind to be "strongly impregnated with the Johnsonian aether" and how, exactly, does this happen? The key word, here, is "aether": an invisible, yet clearly powerful, substance that acts on Boswell without Boswell being able to articulate when or how this action occurs. In its powerful invisibility, this "aether" is, perhaps, like speech: a force that acts on the mind without leaving a tangible record of its activity.

Epilogue

Conversation in the Age of the iPhone

Throughout this project, I have been struck by the parallels between eighteenth-century attitudes toward speech and twenty-first-century anxieties about our shifting relationship to media. If eighteenth-century writers valued face-to-face conversation as a hallmark of intimacy, twenty-first century critics worry that our increasing reliance on digital devices will inhibit our very ability to experience such intimacy. Technology has changed dramatically in the past 250 years, but our attitude toward speech has remained much the same: even while we now conduct conversations via text message, Google Chat, Facebook, and many other digital platforms, we struggle to find a substitute for face-to-face exchange.

The growing anxiety about how digital devices are obstructing conversation has, paradoxically, resulted in a spate of books and articles that celebrate in-person conversation as the fundamental expression of our humanity. For instance, Sherry Turkle's recent book *Reclaiming Conversation* (2015) is reminiscent of Boswell's embrace of speech as the most natural, authentic, and intimate mode of communication:

> We have embarked upon a voyage of forgetting. It has several stations. *At a first, we speak through machines* and forget how essential face-to-face conversation is to our relationships, our creativity, and our capacity for empathy. *At a second, we take a further step and speak not just through machines but to machines*. This is a turning point. When we consider conversations with machines about our most human predicaments, we face a moment of reckoning that can bring us to the end of our forgetting. It is an opportunity to

reaffirm what makes us most human.[1]

As illustrated by this quotation, Turkle's books—*Reclaiming Conversation* and her earlier book, *Alone Together*—have an alarmist quality to them: we are choosing digital devices over in-person conversation! We would rather communicate with machines than humans! For me, however, the most compelling aspect of Turkle's work is her insistence—despite beginning her career studying social robots at MIT—that face-to-face converse is essential to the cultivation of empathy and to our general sense of well-being. What is more, the many interviews that comprise her books affirm this conviction; although digital devices may be changing the way we communicate with one another, people all across America, of all ages, lament this shift toward the device and long for in-person exchange.

Turkle's books and others like them tend to employ an "us versus them" rhetoric that pits today's adults against device-crazed young people. I am currently teaching a classroom full of these young people, however, and my small anecdotal sample suggests that there is far less of a gap between "adults" and "youths" than Turkle's studies presume. Our course is investigating the very questions that drive *Reclaiming Conversation*: are digital devices corroding our empathy? Are people avoiding face-to-face conversations? Have we forgotten how to talk to one another? Week after week, the answer to these questions seems to be overwhelmingly "no." Not only is our lively seminar itself a testament to the students' facility with conversation, but so too are the opinions they express: even while they enjoy their iPhones and laptops, the continue to value conversation. My experience in this course is suggestive, I think, of yet another similarity between the eighteenth century and the twenty-first: the dominant narrative about our preferred mode of communication is not necessarily accurate. Much as eighteenth-century writers tend to emphasize the ascendency of print over speech, twenty-first-century writers bemoan the

[1] Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, 16–17.

dominance of the digital device, but both narratives fail to account for the ongoing role and value of speech in our culture. Face-to-face conversation played a crucial role in eighteenth-century perceptions of the self, intimacy, and what it means to "know," and over 250 years later this remains true: even in the face of staggering technological advances, the voice has no substitute.

Appendix: Letters from Hester Lynch Piozzi to William Augustus Conway

Since the twenty-six letters that Hester Lynch Piozzi wrote to William Augustus Conway are not collected in any single edition of Piozzi's correspondence, I have listed them in chronological order here.

June 15–21, 1819 (Bloom and Bloom)
June 22–24, 1819, Bath (Bloom and Bloom)
August 18, 1819, Weston super Mare (Bloom and Bloom)
August 28, 1819, Weston super Mare (Bloom and Bloom)
September 1, 1819, Weston super Mare (*Love Letters*)
September 13, 1819, Weston super Mare (Bloom and Bloom)
September 18, 1819, Weston super Mare (Bloom and Bloom)
October 1–2, 1819, Weston super Mare (Bloom and Bloom)
October 7, 1819, Weston super Mare (*Love Letters*)
October 9–10, 1819, Weston super Mare (Bloom and Bloom)
October 22, 1819, Bath (Bloom and Bloom)
November 25, 1819 (Bloom and Bloom)
December 29, 1819 (*Love Letters*)
January 2, 1820, Bath (Bloom and Bloom)
January 29, 1820 (*Love Letters*)
January 29, 1820, "begun at Night" (Bloom and Bloom)
February 2–3, 1820, "Midnight of the 2d, and Early Morning of 3d" (*Love Letters*)
February 3, 1820, "Thursday Night" (*Love Letters*)
February 13, 1820 (Bloom and Bloom)
February 28, 1820, "Late o' Monday Night" (*Love Letters*)
June 9, 1820, Bath (Bloom and Bloom)
June 14, 1820, Clifton (Bloom and Bloom)
June 20–24, 1820, Exeter (Bloom and Bloom)
July 27 to August 3, 1820, "begun on Thursday Evening," Penzance (Bloom and Bloom)
January 13, 1821, Penzance (Bloom and Bloom)
February 6, 1821, Penzance (Bloom and Bloom)

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