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**The Ghost Writer:
English Essay Periodicals and the Materialization of the Public in the Eighteenth
Century**

Tedra Suzanne Osell

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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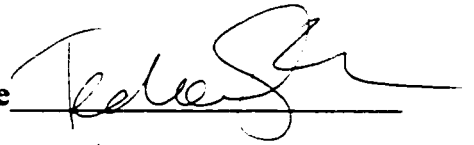
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Abstract

**The Ghost Writer:
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**Chair of the Supervisory Committee:
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This dissertation examines eighteenth-century English essay periodicals in the context of Jürgen Habermas' influential work, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. It has become generally accepted that journals like the Tatler and the Spectator were vital to the construction of the bourgeois public sphere; I investigate these journals' formal nature in order to understand why they, rather than another genre, played this constitutive role. Emphasizing the public sphere's textual and conceptual nature, I argue that essay periodicals themselves distinguish between the non-existent idealized public sphere and its very real ideological power, a power literally represented on the pages of these journals.

The introduction surveys these journals' history and critical reception; their simultaneous popularity and failure to survive into the next century indicate their pivotal historic role. Focusing on the figure of the essay periodical eidolon, the eponymous authorial persona that is the genre's most characteristic formal feature, the second chapter examines the Tatler's Isaac Bickerstaff in detail, finding that by printing letters and submissions and responding to readers'

suggestions for character development, Steele establishes the Tatler as a uniquely collective and public literary form, establishing a pattern that conditions readers' response to the Spectator and subsequent essay periodicals. The next chapter surveys a number of the Tatler's early imitators, discovering two leading devices for establishing generic identity: the "family metaphor" and "rhetorical femininity." In the context of shifting meanings of "family," authors who employed female persona enjoyed distinct advantages, including the ideological belief that women are never fully autonomous, a belief that in a rhetorical context has the advantage of reinforcing the importance of dialogue and exchange. Like my approach to the public sphere itself, this reading distinguishes between actual and rhetorical women, a separation that offers suggestive possibilities to feminist criticism of Habermas' work. The final chapter argues that the essay periodical eidolon helped authors professionalize by distinguishing between the writer's commercial interests and the author's literary ones, while at the same time demonstrating that the two were mutually supporting, just as writer and author were in reality one and the same person , though conceptually distinct.

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Preface

This project began when I came across an essay, published in 1734, that claimed to be the transcription of a speech by an escaped slave in an unnamed British colony.¹ In researching its authorship and reception history, I became increasingly interested in problems of attribution and the publishing history of the numerous forgotten and nearly forgotten imitators of the Tatler and Spectator. I came to realize that anonymity—or pseudonymity, as was, or has become, more often the case—represented an important theoretical problem for the essay periodical and the eighteenth century, when anonymous and pseudonymous publishing were commonplace. Indeed, pseudonymity is an integral part of the essay periodical's structure: the genre's most distinguishing feature is the eidolon, the authorial persona—"Mr. Spectator" and the like—who personifies these journals' titles and represents a kind of collective authorship, under which a number of known and unknown contributors cohere into a unified voice.

One of the eidolon's most important roles is to call attention to the essay periodical as an authored work, distinguishing it from other kinds of journalism and implicitly rendering it literary. For instance, one never discusses the genre's most prominent examples, the Tatler and Spectator, without reference to Richard Steele and Joseph Addison (and vice versa; one cannot discuss Steele or Addison

¹[Aaron Hill], The Prompter (1734-1736), 18. This essay is briefly discussed in chapter 4.

without discussing their periodicals); the strong authorial voice in both journals is one of their most noticeable features. Initially, it seemed to me that there was a clear distinction between these canonical essay periodicals, for which authorship is a central part of their critical history, and the crowd of their mostly anonymous contemporaries. But as I began focusing on the common figure of the eidolon, similarities emerged and the spectrum of generic possibilities and effects came into focus. Essay periodicals and their eidolons reveal the shifting understanding of human identity that took place throughout the eighteenth century; collectively canonical and non-canonical journals demonstrate a sense of identity-formation as ongoing and cumulative. Their ubiquity, like their periodicity, allows their eidolons to metamorphose along a historical and ideological continuum. For these journals, “anonymity” is best understood as a process of negotiating the forms and meaning of identity at a time when questions of individuality, character, and social roles were rapidly changing, rather than a simple question of known or unknown authorship.

This realization highlights another attribute of the eighteenth-century essay periodical, its connection to what we have taken to calling the public sphere. In The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, Jürgen Habermas mentions in passing that “The periodical articles [of the Tatler and Spectator] were not only made the object of discussion by the public of the coffee houses but were viewed as integral parts of this discussion; this was demonstrated by the flood of letters

from which the editor each week published a selection.”² Yet Habermas does not ask why the essay periodical, rather than another literary form, dominated coffee-house discussion. After all, the novel was emerging as a popular and eventually dominant genre, and newspapers, like essay periodicals, provided inexpensive reading material and new content several times a week, while the essay periodical was a short-lived phenomenon, expiring at the beginning of the next century.³ Rather than marking it as a minor literary genre, however, its short history indicates the essay periodical’s particular relevance to its moment. The issues of identity that the eidolon responds to and helps formulate are also central to the emergence of the public sphere as Habermas describes it, in which “The status of private man combined with the role of owner of commodities with that of head of the family, that of property owner with that of “human being” *per se*” so that “The doubling of the private sphere on the higher plane of the intimate sphere . . . furnished the foundation for an identification of these two roles under the common title of the “private”; ultimately, the political self-understanding of the bourgeois public originated there as well” (*Public Sphere* 28-29). The question, what is a

²Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 42.

³The issues of identification and temporal linearity, including serialization (eventually) apply to novels as well; one of the questions readers of this manuscript have most often asked is, what about the novel? Certainly the findings and methods of this study might be usefully considered with regard to novels, but as I am arguing, the essay periodical’s popularity and particular role in coffeehouse culture call for focused attention, the more so as the relative importance of the two genres was, in their day, the inverse of what it is now: in the eighteenth century, essay periodicals were perceived as broadly significant and influential, while novels were for much of the century viewed as popular entertainment of minor critical importance.

“human being per se”? is central to the public sphere as well as to the essay periodical, for which it also takes the form, “what is an author per se?”

Given the hundreds of essay periodicals published during the eighteenth century, I have had to be necessarily selective in choosing primary material. However, in order to avoid prejudicing my analysis, I have deliberately chosen journals from across the canonical spectrum. I have chosen to discuss the Tatler and Spectator, because these were perceived by their contemporaries as the foundation for the new genre. For the most part, however, this dissertation emphasizes obscure journals that have received little or no critical attention aside from being occasionally mentioned as imitators of Steele’s and Addison’s two great journals: the Gazette A-la-Mode, Titt for Tatt, the Tatling Harlot, the Whisperer, Parrots, an Old Maid, the Free-Holder, the Free-Thinker, the Plain-Dealer. A few of the journals I examine—the Female Tatler, the Prompter, the Mirror—have been considered of minor importance in either the nineteenth or twentieth centuries, but mine is fundamentally a study of neglected works. I have also chosen to focus primarily on journals written before Johnson’s Rambler began publication in 1750 (although there is a brief discussion of the essay periodical’s latter days at the end of chapter four), both because I wished to explore the genre’s emergence and because journals after the Rambler often paid less attention to characterizing their idols and seem to me, on the whole, less diverse and more settled in their approaches. By mid-century, the genre seems to

have settled into a pattern, and it is the development of this pattern that this study traces.

Chapter one presents an overview of the essay periodical's history and reception, placing the study in critical context. Chapter two concentrates primarily on Isaac Bickerstaff, the Tatler's eidolon, and secondarily on the Spectator, Steele's and Addison's follow-up to their first successful journal. I argue that Bickerstaff instituted three of the genre's most important features—correspondence with readers, an understanding of the eidolon as the characterization of authorial and by extension public reputation, and the idealization of the eidolon as a representative public man—and that as a consequence the Tatler developed a set of expectations that readers brought to all subsequent essay periodicals, providing Steele's followers with an ideological foundation on which to build the genre. The third chapter discusses a number of these early imitators, describing the methods they used to establish themselves as generic cousins to the successful Tatler. Much of the discussion in this section focuses on the development of what I call "rhetorical femininity," an approach to the eidolon that emphasizes the conceptual nature of authorship and the public sphere. This chapter highlights the importance of gender analysis to both the essay periodical, which represented itself as particularly appealing to women readers, and the public sphere, which constructed publicity in terms that are

distinctly gendered, as critics have pointed out.⁴ My final chapter focuses on the genre's commercial nature, arguing that the eidolon helps authors to create the category of the modern professional, a concept that reconciles profit-mindedness with public interest and enables the emergence of the modern author, who is at once commercial and literary.

I hope that this study encourages others to read, not only the Tatler and the Spectator, but the myriad other essay periodicals that circulated during the eighteenth century. Not only a window onto the concerns and fashions of their day, these journals also provide a forum in which one can still hear the echoes of the eighteenth-century reading and writing public. Listening to them can aid our investigation of the origins of the public sphere and further our understanding of our own relationship to that idea, which they helped create and we have inherited.

⁴See Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy" and Mary P. Ryan, "Gender and Public Access: Women's Politics in Nineteenth-Century America," both in Habermas and the Public Sphere, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 109-142, 259-288; Kathy Peiss, "Going Public: Women in Nineteenth-Century Cultural History," American Literary History 3 (1991): 817-828; Iris Marion Young, "Impartiality and the Civic Public: Some Implications of Feminist Critiques of Moral and Political Theory," Feminism as Critique, ed. Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 56-76; Johanna Meehan, ed., Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse (New York: Routledge, 1995); and Joan B. Landes, ed., Feminism, the Public and the Private (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

Acknowledgements

Taped to my computer is a quote from Samuel Johnson: “A man may write at any time, if he will set himself doggedly to it.” A woman too, presumably. At times, writing this dissertation has indeed required dogged determination; my thanks are therefore all the more heartfelt for all those who lent assistance and sustained me along the way.

Marshall Brown’s high standards and insightful readings have made the final product, whatever its merits, much better than it would have been without him; without his kindness and encouragement it might never have been finished at all. Srinivas Aravamudan, Barbara Fuchs, and Thomas Lockwood all offered valuable advice and emotional support at different stages of the project. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work with them.

This project was born in the microfilm room of the University of Washington and the north reading room of the old British Library; and thanks are due to the staff of both libraries, in particular to Glenda Pearson, and to the Public Records Office in London for helping me learn how to begin. Thanks also to the members of the C18-L discussion group, who answered occasional questions and provided intellectual community; David Radcliffe, whom I have never met, unknowingly provided me with an epigraph.

My dissertation reading group offered suggestions and comments in the early stages of drafting, and Colbey Emmerson in particular supplied ongoing questions and very helpful advice. I am also grateful to Marguerite Finnigan for the use of her library privileges—a minor, but invaluable form of assistance.

Finally I would like to acknowledge the teachers who encouraged me, especially James Stribley, Chris Scott, Gregory Maertz, and Sharon Harris, and my family and friends, whose unwavering support and encouragement sustained me. Special thanks are due to my husband, Thomas Bluhm, whose confidence in me is greater than my own, to my comadre, Gina Perez, whose love and example have long inspired me, and to my son Linus, whose timely birth forced me to get it done. I am also deeply grateful to all those whose faithful care of Linus improved our lives and gave me the time and peace of mind I needed to finish, especially Lena Firsova, Colbey Emmerson, Krista Baugham, Anni Bluhm, and Michael Bluhm.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my aunt,

Suzanne Tumblin,

in grateful appreciation of her example and friendship.

Epigraphs

In those days A was an Antiquary, and wrote articles upon Altars and Abbeys and Architecture. B made a blunder, which C corrected. D demonstrated that E was in error, and that F was wrong in Philology, and neither Philosopher nor Physician, though he affected to be both. G was a Genealogist: H was an Herald, who helped him. I was an inquisitive inquirer, who found reason for suspecting J to be a Jesuit. M was a mathematician. N noted the weather. O observed the stars. P was a poet, who piddled in pastorals, and prayed Mr. Urban to print them. Q came in the corner of the page with his query. R arrogated to himself the right of reprehending every one who differed from him. S sighed and sued in song. T told an old tale, and when he was wrong U used to set him right. V was a virtuoso. W warred against Warburton. X excelled in algebra. Y yearned for immortality in rhyme; and Z in his zeal was always in a puzzle.

– Robert Southey, The Doctor (1849)

By this means we materialize our ideas, and make them as lasting as the ink and paper.

– The Guardian, no. 172

Chapter 1

Introduction: Popular Opinion and the Essay Periodical

The Tatler of Richard Steele is almost impossible to read now but in his day it was exactly what was required.

- Michael Stapleton, The Cambridge Guide to English Literature

In 1709, Richard Steele launched the Tatler “for the Use of Politick Persons, who are so publick-spirited as to neglect their own Affairs to look into Transactions of State.”¹ His raillery identified the cultural shift that provided the conditions of his journal’s success: the political and social crisis of the previous century created lasting change that, in a time of greater stability, continued to resonate. The struggles between King and Parliament had been conducted, in part, through broadsides, newspapers, propaganda, satires, libels, and other print ephemera. The Civil War was preceded by a what can only be called a print revolution: in two years, from 1640 to 1642, the number of pamphlets published annually rose from twenty-two to 1,996.² As one critic puts it, “never before in English history had written and printed literature played such a predominant role

¹[Richard Steele], Tatler 1, in The Tatler, ed. Donald F. Bond, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 15. Subsequent references cite issue number along with volume and page of this edition.

²These are Asa Briggs’ figures in A Social History of England, 3rd ed. (London: Penguin, 1999), 146.

in public affairs.”³ Despite censorship during the rest of the century, pamphlets and other ephemera became important and influential: Grub Street anticipated the fourth estate. In the aftermath of the Revolution, the Restoration, and the Exclusion Crisis, and with the establishment of a stable Parliament, England was left with a permanent reading public: men and women who consciously recognized the power of print, wanted and needed to keep abreast of the latest publications, and conceived of themselves as part of a larger civil society whose collective opinion was both politically influential and influenced by what it read.⁴ Steele’s readers were self-conscious enough about this state of affairs to enjoy his jest, but they had no intention of giving up their new role: there was no danger that the Tatler would self-destruct by reforming its audience into non-readers.

Moreover, after decades of political upheaval, the nation was in a period of expansion and growing wealth. In broad terms, the English Revolution had created “a new and capitalist social order”⁵ that, at the turn of the century, was in the

³Nigel Smith, Literature and Revolution in England, 1640-1660 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 1. Quoted by Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth, eds., The English Civil Wars in the Literary Imagination (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 2. See also Joad Raymond, ed., Making the News: An Anthology of the Newsbooks of Revolutionary England, 1641-1660 (New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1993).

⁴See Geoff Baldwin, “The ‘Public’ As a Rhetorical Community in Early Modern England,” Communities in Early Modern England: Networks, Place, Rhetoric, eds. Alexandra Shepard and Phil Withington (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 199-215, which traces the increasing use of the word “public” during the seventeenth century, arguing that “it shifted from being used as an adjective to acquiring a meaning as a noun” (212).

⁵Christopher Hill, The English Revolution, 1640 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1941), 9. Quoted in David Hawkes, Idols of the Marketplace: Idolatry and Commodity Fetishism in English Literature, 1580-1680 (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 9.

process of consolidating its power.⁶ Between 1688 and 1701, the nation's wealth grew by twenty percent (Briggs, Social History, 175). The Bank of England was founded in 1694, both a literal and a symbolic demonstration of the increasing power of bankers and financiers. The founding of the South Sea Company in 1711 led to a speculative bubble that burst in 1720; but despite the crash, in 1727 "one foreign visitor observed" that London's "'merchant princes' . . . were 'far wealthier than many sovereign princes of Germany or Italy'" (Briggs, Social History, 190). The East India Company was provisionally united in 1702, a union cemented by the end of the decade. Population growth and increasing wealth created greater demand for goods which in turn supported manufacture and trade both domestically and in the colonies. Despite a number of foreign wars and speculative anxieties, England's prosperity increased (primarily though not exclusively) as a result of trade.

These two conditions—an established and growing reading public and an expanding mercantile economy—set the stage for the essay periodical's emergence. The genre was to take full advantage of the growth of commercial

⁶For debates on whether the events of the seventeenth century represent revolutionary change or continuity between the preceding and following eras, see Alan Macfarlane, The Culture of Capitalism (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987); Conrad Russell, Parliaments and English Politics 1621-1629 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979); Anthony Fletcher, The Outbreak of the English Civil War (New York: New York University Press, 1981); J. S. Morrill, Seventeenth-Century Britain, 1603-1714 (Folkestone, Archon, 1980); and J. C. D. Clark, English Society, 1688-1832: Ideology, Social Structure and Political Practice During the Ancien Regime, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Whichever model one prefers, it remains a fact that the century following the Restoration was characterized by a marked increase in individual and collective wealth in England.

society.⁷ People had the means to purchase inexpensive reading material, there were coffeehouses where they could discuss what they read, they had leisure enough to enjoy light reading on topical subjects and concern enough to feel compelled to keep up with foreign and domestic news. The essay periodical provided all of this in an appealing and accessible format. It was printed on one or both sides of a single folio half sheet,⁸ and was therefore inexpensive, simple to produce in bulk, large enough for legibility, and eminently portable. The text ran in double columns, while the title and perhaps a decorative element (such as the engraved portrait of “Mrs. Crackenthrope” between the title words of the Female Tatler) were printed at the top of the page, rather than, as a pamphlet, on a separate sheet. This conserved paper while still being readable from some distance so as to advertise the paper to those nearby. At the end of the essay there were usually a number of advertisements listed. Most journals were numbered at the top and dated below the title, while information as to where they were published and purchased was printed at the bottom of the first or second

⁷For historical research into the association of English periodicals with commerce and the middle class, see Stephen Botein, Jack R. Censer, and Harriet Ritvo, “The Periodical Press in Eighteenth-Century English and French Society: A Cross-Cultural Approach,” Comparative Studies in Society and History v. 23 (no. 3, July 1981), 464-90; Charles E. Clark, The Public Prints: The Newspaper in Anglo-American Culture, 1665-1740 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); and Jan Fergus, “Women, Class, and the Growth of Magazine Readership in the Provinces, 1746-1780,” Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture vol. 16, ed. O. M. Brack, Jr. (University of Wisconsin Press for ASECS, 1986), 41-56.

⁸Later essay periodicals were to expand to four or six pages, often set in a single column, “thus emphasizing typographically the importance of the single essay” (Walter Graham, English Literary Periodicals [New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1930], 119).

page.⁹ The price often accompanied the publication information, or was printed below the issue number or title. In effect, the text of each essay was framed by the signs of its commercial nature: beginning with self-advertisement and ending by advertising for others, each issue also indicated whether it was current, where one could buy it, and how much it cost.

Essay periodicals looked commercial because, like most journalism of their day, they were commercial. Aside from clearly partisan newspapers, which may have been profitable but were primarily intended as propaganda vehicles, journals of entertainment were effectively entrepreneurial ventures. Some suggestive examples of the interplay between journalism and commerce: Peter Motteux, the primary author of the monthly Gentleman's Journal (1692-1694), "would later . . . request a puff from Mr. Spectator for his new vocation as importer of rich silks and fine laces."¹⁰ Charles Lillie, a perfumer, began by asking Bickerstaff to recommend his goods in Tatler 92; later he sold the Tatler and Spectator, took in letters and advertisements for both journals, and finally became printer as well as perfumer by publishing the volume editions of the Tatler, the original folio sheets of the Spectator, and, in 1725, Original and Genuine Letters Sent to the Tatler and

⁹Many of these conventions were borrowed from existing newspaper practice. The London Gazette (1665) was the first to employ a format still in use by today's newspapers and magazines, printing its text in columns on both sides of the page and with a relatively succinct title. See Clark, The Public Prints, 27-28.

¹⁰Richmond P. Bond, Studies in the Early English Periodical (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957), 20.

Spectator. Meanwhile, John Morphew, the Tatler's original publisher, attempted to revive the journal after Steele gave it up, and took great offense at Lillie's early and prominent role in the Spectator, which of course now competed with the continuation of the Tatler.¹¹ Similarly, the writer of the Female Tatler, which began publication under Benjamin Bragge, switched publishers after only five weeks, and for the next two months the two journals competed over which was the genuine Female Tatler, a contest eventually won by the author (probably Thomas Baker) and his new publisher, Anne Baldwin. Aaron Hill, who among his other literary endeavors was a successful journalist—contributing to the British Apollo (1708-1709) and publishing three journals of his own, Essays for the Month of December 1716 and January 1717, the Plain Dealer (1724-1725), and the Prompter (1734-1735)—was also an “indefatigable projector” who combined economic speculation with journalism by frequently writing about his failed speculations or untried schemes.¹²

These anecdotes illustrate not only that some of the denizens of Grub Street actively pursued other trades as well, but that the fundamental nature of

¹¹Donald F. Bond, introduction to The Tatler, v. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), xxvi-xxix.

¹²In 1714 Hill published a pamphlet on his beech-oil scheme, a project the failure of which was to haunt him in later life; he also composed a poem, The Dedication of the Beech Tree on the subject. Each of his Essays describes a different money-making project, and sprinkled throughout his letters one finds various ideas for entrepreneurial ventures. He was also involved in a failed proposal to establish mining and manufacturing settlements south of Carolina, served as an agent for the York Buildings Company during its disastrous speculations in Scotland timber, and may have participated in some of the later schemes of the nefarious South Sea Company. See Dorothy Brewster, Aaron Hill: Poet, Dramatist, Projector. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1913), 28-75.

journalism itself was an open question: to what extent were journals literary texts whose quality depended on the artistry of their authors, and to what extent were they essentially commodities whose writers were merely skilled laborers? The first essay periodicals were essentially business speculations, and those involved with them did not necessarily distinguish between journalism and other business ventures. Most periodicals were started at the behest of a printer, rather than an author: writers were hired on to provide content. Unlike today, when publication is seen as merely the vehicle by which an authorial text is delivered to the audience, Grub Street authors—more properly called writers, because they did not own what they wrote—and the writing they produced for the ephemeral press were effectively a kind of raw material: printing manufactured the individual papers, and they, rather than the abstraction of “literary text,” were the product. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Grub Street wrote copy, not texts; the distinction between “writing [an article or essay] and copying one” was not yet clear in a journalistic context.¹³ For periodical essayists to become authors, they had to professionalize, and “before authors could become professionals . . . a certain level of production and consumption of printed materials had to be

¹³Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979; reprint, 2 vols. in 1, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 121. Eisenstein’s original statement is about books, not articles or essays for journalistic use.

attained, and this . . . did not occur until the eighteenth century.”¹⁴

The essay periodical played a key role in developing the idea of modern authorship. It was the first and most successful kind of journalism to depend for its success on the role of an individual author. It is significant that, of the two competing Female Tatlers, the one that triumphed was the one that claimed the name on the basis of the author’s rather than the publisher’s continuity. Even more significant is the fact that the pair of essay periodicals universally held up as first and best are both by the same authorial team: Richard Steele and Joseph Addison, who wrote the Tatler (1709-1711) and Spectator. The double pairing of Steele and Addison¹⁵ and the Tatler and Spectator is so overdetermined that the elements can be rearranged in multiple ways: one can talk about Steele and Addison, the Tatler and Spectator, or (as is commonly done) assign each journal to a primary author: Steele and the Tatler, Addison and the Spectator. The journals are indistinguishable from their authors, and vice-versa: one cannot discuss any one of the four without reference to the other three. These most representative of essay periodicals identify writer and text so closely that they transform their

¹⁴Mark Rose, Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 4. Nowadays the division between journalistic copy and authorial texts applies primarily to newspapers. But the advent of web publication has made even this lingering distinction increasingly problematic: recently the Supreme Court has ruled in favor of freelancers suing the New York Times for publishing their work online without permission. See New York Times Co. v. Tasini, 533 U.S. 483 (2001).

¹⁵More often, Addison and Steele: it is generally agreed that Addison’s contribution was the greater of the two in terms of stylistic, hence literary, development. As will become clear, however, my emphasis on the special nature of the essay periodical as a commercial art form places greater weight on the role of Richard Steele, who founded the Tatler and was more actively involved in the business aspects of the Spectator than his partner.

writer/speculators into authors: that is, they elevate journalism into literature.

This development lies behind statements like that of Richmond P. Bond, that “the reasons behind the magnificence of merit in the Tatler and Spectator would seem to lie less in periodical precedents or even in the circumstances of the age than in the keen enterprise of Steele and the elegant brilliance of Addison” (R. P. Bond, Studies, 17). But it should be remembered that it not only Steele’s enterprise and Addison’s brilliance, but also the circumstances of the age that transformed the Tatler’s and Spectator’s success into the basis for an entirely new literary genre—one highly esteemed in its day and so finely attuned to its time and place that it did not last into the next century.

Richard Steele started the Tatler in April, 1709, with two years of journalistic experience under his belt: he had edited the London Gazette, the government newspaper, for two years. He borrowed the character of Isaac Bickerstaff from Jonathan Swift’s Bickerstaff Papers, and Swift was originally involved with the journal to some degree, although his involvement waned over time and even in the beginning the primary voice was Steele’s. Swift, however, provided Steele with a publisher: John Nutt and John Morphew, the Tatler’s printer and publisher/bookseller, were Swift associates. Nutt had published the Tale of a Tub and Morphew was to become “well known in a very short time as publisher of Tory pamphlets, including several which attacked Steele” (Tatler, I:xiv-xv). This development, which may have contributed to Steele’s later

preference of Charles Lillie,¹⁶ reflects what was to become the Tatler's achilles heel, its perceived political partisanship. Steele's association with the Gazette did not help in this respect, nor did the fact of Bickerstaff's admiration for Marlborough, his satires on Louis XIV, and particularly his comments on the Sacheverell trial and the argument between Benjamin Hoadly and the Bishop of Exeter on the subject of divine right. There were other partisan hints as well, both overt and subtle. On the other hand, there is surprisingly little overlap between the news items in the Tatler and those in the Whig Gazette, and both Steele's introductory comment about "politick persons" and his overall tone throughout the Tatler's pages suggest a genuine desire for what he considered a moderate point of view. While anyone's definition of "moderate" depends, of course, on his or her own political bias, and Steele was a confirmed Whig, in comparison to its contemporaries the political content of the Tatler is extremely mild.¹⁷

¹⁶According to D. F. Bond, the Spectator's association with Lillie "signalled . . . a break with Morpew," the Tatler's original publisher. The break can be read as itself a politically partisan act, given Morpew's Tory associations. Also, as stated above, at the time of the Spectator's debut, Morpew had twice attempted to continue the Tatler under different authorship, giving Steele an additional reason to prefer Lillie's loyalty (Tatler 1:xxvi-xxvii).

¹⁷On Marlborough, see Tatlers 1, 3, 5-8, 14, 16, 18, 19, 23-25, 43, 46, 55, 62, 64, 65, 92, 137, 174, 187. Marlborough is also mentioned in Tatlers 27, 35-37, 49, 66 and 67, but these passages were omitted in the 1710 octavo edition sold by subscription. On Louis XIV, see Tatlers 2, 5, 11, 18, 19, 20, 23, 24, 26, 29, 39, 46, 47, 55, 56, 71, 77, 96, 190, 232. On Sacheverell, see Tatlers 140, 142, 157, 187, 232. On the Exeter/Hoadly debate, see Tatlers 44, 50, 51. Powell the Bath puppetmaster represents the Lord Bishop.

See R. P. Bond, Tatler, 44-70 for further examples of the Tatler's partisan content. Bond compares the Tatler's news coverage to the Gazette's on pp. 50-51. See Louis Milic, "Tone in Steele's 'Tatler,'" in Newsletters to Newspapers: Eighteenth-Century Journalism, eds. Donovan H. Bond and W. Reynolds McLeod (Morgantown: West Virginia University School of Journalism, 1977), 33-45 for a comparative analysis of Steele's tone and that of contemporary papers, demonstrating the Tatler's relative moderation and restraint.

Nonetheless, what political content there was seems clearly to have contributed to his decision to end the Tatler. At the beginning of the final Tatler, Steele declares that “this Work has indeed for some Time been disagreeable to me”—Donald F. Bond’s notes dryly remark, “it is not surprising that Steele found the work increasingly disagreeable in the face of violent Tory propaganda of the past few months” (Tatler, 3:362 n).¹⁸ But Steele’s statement that “what I find is the least excusable Part of all this Work is, That I have, in some Places in it, touched upon Matters which concern both the Church and State. . . . But Politicks apart, I must confess, it has been a most exquisite Pleasure to me” (Tatler 27, 3:324) seems genuinely sincere. Most tellingly, contemporaries and later critics alike agree that the Spectator, which began only two months after the Tatler ceased, was remarkably free from partisanship, a change that, given the short break between the two journals, seems unquestionably to indicate that Steele gave up the Tatler in order to continue the same plan under a new title, free from the Tatler’s perceived faults and capitalizing on its assets.

Despite its flaws, the Tatler had been an unprecedented success. The very energy of his enemies’ attacks on Steele’s journal indirectly demonstrates its

¹⁸For details of the “Tory propaganda” to which Bond refers, see his note and Edward A. and Lillian D. Bloom, Addison and Steele: The Critical Heritage (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 1-6 and 13-17. The Critical Heritage reprints several examples of partisan criticism of the Tatler: see especially the selections listed under the section headings “Steele the Man” and “The ‘Tatler’ 1709-1711.” See also Bond’s introduction to the Tatler, which states that “as for the openly hostile attacks against the Tatler, many of these came from political adversaries of Steele” (1:xxi).

influence. Even in the midst of a career in which “whatever praise [he] received . . . was usually partisan or muddled by controversy,” the Tatler’s “literary genius” was acknowledged as soon as it stopped appearing and ceased providing new fodder for his political opponents (Bloom and Bloom, Critical Heritage, 6, 15). Moreover, since the Tories gained control of the government in 1710, the immediate posthumous assessments of the Tatler’s worth and the popular acclaim granted the Spectator actually occurred when Steele’s party was out of power (although Steele himself remained in Parliament).¹⁹ This fact might well account in part for the difference between Isaac Bickerstaff’s worldly character and Mr. Spectator’s detachment, as well as for the later journal’s avoidance of overt partisanship.

The hard evidence is telling: at its height, the Tatler sold approximately three thousand papers per issue, requiring two press runs to meet demand (R. P. Bond, Tatler, 39). Since “a sale of five hundred copies of a half-sheet paper would pay its way if the author were not too dear” (R. P. Bond, Studies, 9), clearly sales alone generated remarkable profit. Moreover, direct sales to readers were not the only income-generating feature of essay periodicals, which also carried advertisements. The Tatler’s advertisements increased from forty-two in the second month of publication to over 150 per month in the second year. On average, the paper carried eight advertisements per issue; at the end of its run,

¹⁹[Richard Steele], The Spectator, ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 1:xvi-xvii.

some numbers carried twice that. Although the cost of advertising in the Tatler is uncertain, contemporary journals charged between one and three shillings for each advertisement.²⁰ Given the Tatler's success it is reasonable to assume it charged on the high end of that scale: if so, assuming a sale of three thousand papers each running ten advertisements at a cost of three shillings to advertisers and one penny to buyers, gross receipts toward the end of its run would have been approximately £30 per number—£90 or more per week.²¹ This figure, of course, does not include profits from sales of volume reprints, in both an octavo edition sold to subscribers and a duodecimo edition for the general public, nor does it acknowledge that Steele, Mophew and their associates were not the only ones to profit from the Tatler: the original hundred Tatler papers were pirated by the end of its first year, a threat that seems to have prompted or at least hastened Steele's and Mophew's announcement of their intent to republish their papers in volume form (Tatler, 1:xxiii-xxiv). Announcement of an intended subscription edition followed a month later. The Tatler was "the first [periodical] ever to be reprinted by subscription," and only the second to be reprinted at all.²² The combination of Steele's business acumen and his and Addison's literary talents were mutually

²⁰See Tatler, xx, and R. P. Bond, Tatler, 31.

²¹R. P. Bond guesses at a production cost of approximately £7 per week, based on comparison with the Gazette (Tatler, 39), making the profit £83 a week.

²²Albert Furtwangler, "The Making of Mr. Spectator," Modern Language Quarterly v. 38 (1977), 28. On the second point, Furtwangler cites Richmond P. Bond, "The Pirate and the Tatler," The Library, 5th ser., 18 (1963), 273.

reinforcing: its merit contributed to its success, and its profitability supported its development into literature.

Accordingly, Steele and Addison began the Spectator not only because they were committed to reform and literary excellence but also because they were committed to making money. By the end of its first month of publication, the Tatler's successor was available through four agents in addition to through subscription and street hawkers; by its eighth month, the number of distribution points had grown to twelve (Spectator, 1:xxiv). Like its predecessor, it required two printing houses to prepare the required print runs, which reached almost 4000.²³ By the paper's own estimate, sales fell to about half that after the August 1712 stamp tax, but the Spectator's complaint about its loss of circulation is offset by pride in its success²⁴ and a sly recognition that the new legislation in effect links patriotism to commerce: "the Tax on each half Sheet has brought into the Stamp-Office one Week with another [sic] above 20 *l.* a Week arising from this single Paper, notwithstanding it at first reduced it to less than half the number that was usually Printed before this Tax was laid" (Spectator 555, 4:494). A canny awareness that the Stamp Tax symbolizes the triumph of the Whig world view over that of the Tories underlies this boast: in order to generate tax revenue

²³See Spectator, 4:494 n. 3.

²⁴The drop in circulation would have been compensated for by the greater retail price that occasioned it, so that the difference in profits to Addison, Steele and company was presumably negligible.

regulation must foster, not suppress, trade. Seventeenth-century press regulation in general and the Licensing Act of 1662 in particular had limited new publications by controlling printing licenses, but in the eighteenth century, the government benefitted politically and economically from newspaper sales, and therefore legally countenanced the growth rather than the restriction of periodical publication.²⁵ In effect, “the party system required an active press” (R. P. Bond, Studies, 9) whether it realized this or not, and the number of party newspapers indicates that both Tories and Whigs did in fact realize the importance of the press despite both parties’ complaints that pamphlets and papers misrepresented the truth. Despite the Spectator’s deliberate avoidance of political content, its success in essence depended on a politically-charged context that enabled the growth of periodical publication in general.

The impact of these two journals was such that three centuries of criticism of the essay periodical has focused overwhelmingly on the Tatler and Spectator. Immediately following the Spectator’s appearance, John Gay published The Present State of Wit,²⁶ which offers an overview of the contemporary London journals, with commentary on their relative merit. Mostly, Gay praises Steele’s

²⁵The Licensing Act of 1662 attempted to control “seditious, treasonable, and unlicensed Books and Pamphlets”; it lapsed in 1679, leading to “a sudden proliferation of unlicensed newspapers.” Under Charles II and James II, most of the unlicensed newspapers were Whiggish; no Jacobite papers from this period seem to have survived. Jeremy Black, The English Press in the Eighteenth Century (London: Croom Helm, 1987), 2-7.

²⁶John Gay, The Present State of Wit, in Essays on Wit, introduction by Donald F. Bond (1711; reprint, n.p.: Augustan Reprint Society, 1947).

two journals; because his remarks demonstrate the immediate impact of the Tatler and Spectator more thoroughly than any historical evidence can, and because the specifics of his praise encapsulate so much of what has been said about these papers since their publication, I quote at length. Describing the Tatler, Gay writes:

at the beginning of the Winter, to the infinite surprize of all Men, Mr. Steele flung up his TATLER . . . most People judg'd the true cause to be, either that he was quite spent . . . or that he lay'd it down as a sort of Submission to, and Composition with the Government for some past Offences. . . .

. . . his disappearing seem'd to be bewailed as some general Calamity . . . and the Coffee-houses began to be sensible that the Esquire's Lucubrations alone, had brought them more Customers than all their other News Papers put together. . . .

. . . there is not a Lady at Court, nor a Banker in Lumbard-Street, who is not verily perswaded, that Captain Steele is the greatest Scholar, and best Casuist, of any Man in England.

Lastly, His Writings have set all our Wits and Men of Letters upon a new way of Thinking, of which they had little or no Notion before; and tho' we cannot yet say that any of them have come up to the Beauties of the Original, I think we may venture to affirm, that every one of them

Writes and Thinks much more justly than they did some time since. (2-4)

Gay emphasizes the Tatler's universal appeal and broad cultural impact: everyone read it, wondered why Steele would give it up, and regretted its loss. It contributed to the national economy by increasing the business of the coffee-houses—themselves symbolic of England's wealth, global reach, and shift to a market-based economy—therefore suggesting the concept of “cultural capital,” the mutually reinforcing “historical relations between aesthetic and economic discourses.”²⁷ Demonstrating this connection, the Tatler promoted what we now refer to as middle-class values to both women and men, aristocrats and merchants: it promoted “Morality, Criticism . . . Good Breeding” and “Good Sense,” “Vertue and Religion,” and “the value and advantages of Learning” (Gay, Wit, 4). It taught its readers to judge the quality of scholarship and rhetoric according to the concept of public utility, and as a result improved the general state of writing specifically and thought in general. Assessing writing according to its influence on the general population necessarily invokes popularity as a measure of worth; hence the content of Steele's paper was made all the more valuable by its overwhelming popularity. It sold well because it spoke the truth, and its view of the world

²⁷John Guillory, Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), xiii-xiv. Guillory's argument focuses primarily on the formation of a pedagogical canon; surely the long dominance of the Tatler and Spectator as pedagogical models supports his argument. See also Brian McCrea, Addison and Steele Are Dead: The English Department, Its Canon, and the Professionalization of Literary Criticism (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990), which argues that the twentieth century's neglect of Addison and Steele reflects a general shift in the field of English literature away from the study of literature's social impact to a focus on the nature of literary criticism itself.

became truth because it sold so well.

Gay also emphasizes the importance of the papers' authors, describing Addison as "that excellent Friend to whom Mr. Steele ow's so much, and who refuses to have his Name set before those Pieces, which the greatest Pens in England would be Proud to own" (Gay, Wit, 4). Like most critics after him, he sees Addison and the Spectator as essentially reproducing and magnifying the best features of the Tatler, to which it was immediately connected:

... The SPECTATOR ... is in every ones Hand, and a constant Topick for our Morning Conversation at Tea-Tables, and Coffee-Houses. . . . some of our best Judges seem to think that they have hitherto, in general, out-shone even the Esquires first TATLERS.

Most People Fancy, from their frequency, that they must be compos'd by a Society; I, with all, Assign the first places to Mr. Steele and His Friend. . . .

Mean time, all our unbyassed well-wishes to Learning, are in hopes, that the known Temper and Prudence of one of these Gentlemen, will hinder the other from ever lashing out into Party, and rend'ring that wit which is at present a Common Good, Odious and Ungrateful to the better part of the Nation. (Gay, Wit, 6)

Like later critics, Gay emphasizes the Spectator's style, implicitly asserting its literary worth and elevating it above other Grub-Street ephemera. He tentatively

anticipates three critical truisms about the later paper: it is better than the Tatler, Addison's role is more prominent, and it repudiates the partisanship that occasionally marred its predecessor. Since Gay, most critics have regarded the first point as the consequence of the others. Although Gay's assessment, which appears only two months after the Spectator, is necessarily based on less evidence than that of his successors, it is suggestive that he mentions the problem of party almost as an afterthought, and does not connect it specifically to the Tatler—all the more so, since Gay was not of Steele's party.²⁸ Gay's restraint may indicate that his political opinions were not yet finalized, or it may indicate that he was an unusually fair-minded critic—probably both—but, along with the Tatler's popularity, it also suggests that perhaps later critics have been more influenced by the propaganda of Steele's political opponents than his contemporaries actually were.

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then the best evidence of the reputations of both journals is the number of their imitators. Although most histories of the essay periodical (including this one) explain its origins in terms of the Tatler's and Spectator's innovative form and content, it is important to keep

²⁸Donald F. Bond explains this seemingly surprising fact by reminding readers that "in 1711 [Gay was] still in the somewhat uncertain position of a youngster willing to be courted by either" Tories or Whigs; indeed, "his earliest sympathies were if anything on the side of the Whigs" (introduction to The Present State of Wit, 1-2). The Blooms, whether more generously or more naively it remains to the reader to judge, credit Gay with being "remarkably fair-minded in his judgment of partisan writing" and consider The Present State of Wit the first "attempt to divorce [the Tatler's] Whiggism from the literary genius which informed it" (Critical Heritage, 25, 15).

in mind that the engine driving the genre's development was the desire to repeat the Tatler's financial success. The Tatler gave birth to the essay periodical, which grew and prospered on the proceeds of its parent's income. Had the Tatler been a financial failure, its progeny might not have survived its literary infancy; at least its growth would have been stunted, and its brilliance gone underdeveloped. Gay informs us that "the Expiration of Bickerstaff's Lucubrations . . . immediately produc'd whole Swarms of little Satyrical Scriblers" (Gay, Wit, 5): he names three, the Growler, the Whisperer, and the Tell-Tale, along with an unspecified number of other Tatlers. Following the Tatler's appearance, fifty-two new titles appeared by 1715, including these, the original Spectator, and Addison's continuation of the Spectator eighteen months after it originally ceased publication.²⁹ Over the course of the century, there were 321 separate essay periodicals.³⁰ The genre's popularity recalls the publication explosion of the previous century; but the specific nature of the essay periodical indicates a substantive shift in the public interest away from the political debates that had characterized seventeenth-century broadsheets. In this period of stability and

²⁹Addison wrote twenty-five of the revival's eighty papers, roughly one third; Bond notes that "the second series is generally regarded as inferior to the original" and particularly remarks "the absence of Steele" as a contributing factor (Spectator 1:lxxxii-bxxxiii), a comment that somewhat balances out the common tendency to credit Addison for the Spectator's perceived superiority to its predecessor.

³⁰See the Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature, v. 2 (New York: Macmillan, 1941), 660-66. Of the 321 titles listed, only five appeared before the Tatler. Only Defoe's "Advice from the Scandalous Club" lasted for more than a dozen issues, but unlike the Tatler it was not an independent essay periodical but rather a series of essays in the Review (1704-1711).

growth, readers embraced commercialism and cultural unity, turning to reading matter that celebrated and represented these values.

The last independent essay periodical to exceed one hundred issues is the Lounger (1785-1787). At the end of the century, the genre gave way to the magazine; the most successful essay journals from 1785 on were actually essay series in magazines or miscellanies. Of the last five titles listed in the category of essay periodicals in the Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature between the years 1798-1802, four are essay series in magazines, three of which appear in a single long-lived journal, the European Magazine (1782-1826). The only autonomous journal the CBEL lists as an essay periodical at the tail end of the eighteenth century anticipates the nineteenth-century literary magazine at least as much as it recalls the essay periodical: its title is Literary Leisure: or, the Recreations of Solomon Saunter (1799-1800), and it lasted for sixty issues. The essay periodical canon was fixed early in the nineteenth century when the publication of multi-volume collections of essays demonstrated that the genre's best works had been determined. The first volume of Harrison's British Classicks appeared in 1785; as the title of this eight-volume anthology indicates, the essay periodical was already beginning to be presented as a completed body of work. By 1730 the canon was already remarkably secure. The two collections of British Essayists edited by James Ferguson and A. Chalmers were both forty-five volumes long and their contents were virtually identical, while other, shorter

collections contained a smaller sample from the same set of works.³¹

Canonization indicated not only that new essay periodicals were no longer appearing, but that the important work they had done was now complete. The genre had “improve[d] the public morals and manners by . . . inculcating just and liberal sentiments on common topics,” and the role of nineteenth-century editors and critics was to demonstrate to the middle-class reader just how far the nation had come, thanks to the “eminently useful class” of periodical essayists. The essay periodical had taught the nation middle-class mores, not least among which was to value literature itself. Hence it was “from the perusal of these essays, that [the] large body of the people included in the middle class of society, first derived their capability of judging of the merits and the graces of a refined writer, and the nation at large gradually, from this epoch, became entitled to the distinguished appellations of literary and critical. . . .” The essay periodical had formed a taste for literature that enabled the middle class to appreciate the literary merit of the essay periodical: a circular argument, but an accurate one. To those who were the products of this transformation, the change seemed a clear improvement. So much so, that it was possible to disparage the essay periodical on the very grounds that it had helped pave. Jane Austen famously defined the novel—“in which the

³¹Harrison's British Classicks, 8 vols. (London, 1785-1797); A. Chalmers, ed., The British Essayists: With Prefaces. Historical and Biographical, 45 vols. (London: Nichols and Son, 1817); James Ferguson, ed., The British Essayists, 45 vols. (London: Thomas Tegg, 1819); Nathan Drake, ed., Gleaner: A Series of Periodical Essays, 4 vols. (London: Suttaby, Evance, and Fox, 1811); Robert Lynam, ed., The British Essayists: With Prefaces Biographical, Historical, and Critical, 30 vols. (London, 1827).

greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language”—in opposition to the Spectator, “of which either the matter or manner would not disgust a young person of taste: the substance of its papers so often consisting in the statement of improbable circumstances, unnatural characters, and topics of conversation, which no longer concern any one living, and their language, too, frequently so coarse as to give no very favourable idea of the age that could endure it.” Austen’s narrator judges the Spectator according to the very standards that it helped create, and finds it wanting.³²

Few nineteenth-century critics dismissed the essay periodical out of hand. Many, however, confessed the same misgivings that formed the basis of Austen’s judgment. Thackeray, who considered Steele a “favourite,” offers a typical assessment: both Tatler and author are “full of faults and careless blunders; and redeemed, like that, by his sweet and compassionate nature.” Even so, “most part of the company here present must take his amiability upon hear-say, and certainly cannot make his intimate acquaintance. Not that Steele was worse than his time; on the contrary. . . . But things were done in that society, and names were named,

³²Ferguson, British Essayists, 1:xxiii, xiv; Nathan Drake, Essays Biographical, Critical and Historical Illustrative of the Tatler, Spectator, and Guardian, 2nd ed. (London: Suttaby, Evance and Fox, 1814), 3:389; Jane Austen, Northanger Abbey, in The Complete Novels (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 1086. Published posthumously in 1818, Northanger Abbey was actually composed in 1797-98.

which would make you shudder now.”³³ Other critics managed to sound less apologetic, but only by confessing a frankly antiquarian sensibility. William Hazlitt declares that he has “always preferred the ‘Tatler’ to the ‘Spectator’ because it more thoroughly summons the spirit of a bygone era, while the Spectator contains “a much greater proportion of common-place matter.”³⁴

Hazlitt’s final remark reminds us that, Austen notwithstanding, most critics considered the Spectator the greatest example of its type precisely because it combined originality with contemporaneousness. Hence Macaulay dismissed later essay periodicals as merely imitative: “in the ‘World’, in the ‘Connoisseur’, in the ‘Mirror’, in the ‘Lounger’, there are numerous papers written in obvious imitation of his [Addison’s] ‘Tatlers’ and ‘Spectators’. Many of these papers have some merit . . . but there is not a single one which could be passed off as Addison’s on a critic of the smallest perspicacity.”³⁵ Interestingly, although Macaulay arrives at a different assessment of the Spectator’s worth than Austen, he also compares it to the novel:

The narrative . . . which connects together the ‘Spectator’s’ Essays, gave to our ancestors their first taste of an exquisite and untried pleasure. . . .

³³William Makepeace Thackeray, “The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century” (1853), in Bloom and Bloom, Critical Heritage, 448-49.

³⁴“Lectures on the English Comic Writers” (1819), in Bloom and Bloom, Critical Heritage 404.

³⁵Thomas Babington Macaulay, “Life and Writings of Addison,” in Bloom and Bloom, Critical Heritage, 416.

Such events can hardly be said to form a plot; yet they are related with such truth, such grace, such wit, such humour, such pathos, such knowledge of the human heart, such knowledge of the ways of the world, that they charm us on the hundredth perusal. We have not the least doubt that if Addison had written a novel . . . it would have been superior to any that we possess. As it is, he is entitled to be considered not only as the greatest of the English essayists, but as the forerunner of the great English novelists.

We say this of Addison alone; for Addison is the Spectator.

(Macaulay 420)

Like other nineteenth-century critics, Macaulay perceives the essay periodical as forward-looking, prefiguring middle-class expectations of literary function and form. But his argument's teleology is less important than its identification of one of the essay periodical's most important features: its sense of unity. Unlike his contemporaries, who often used "essay" and "essay periodical" interchangeably, he recognizes that one of the distinguishing features of the essay periodical is its ability to unify disparate elements into a harmonious whole.

Macaulay's assessment offers insight into the lasting identification of the Tatler and Spectator with their authors, an impulse that suggests that one aspect of canon formation is that it reifies not only works, but authors. By the twentieth century the canon had shrunk to include only those journals attributable to the

canonical authors. Essay periodicals in general had improved the tastes of the reading public, making the genre historically important; but the only journals still worth reading were those by Addison, Steele, Johnson, Defoe, Goldsmith and a few others, and the primary reason for reading those was to perceive the role they played as “the nursery of literary genius.” Like Macaulay’s argument that the Spectator anticipates the Victorian novel, the desire to read “the periodicals of the eighteenth century” as “the repositories of the early works of struggling authors”³⁶ continues to reflect the sense that the essay periodical prefigured what was to follow it. But Macaulay misidentifies the foundation of his perception of the Spectator’s unity, just as those who perceive the genre primarily as a proving-ground for developing writers misconstrue the meaning of the experience of strong authorial presence while reading most essay periodicals. It is not plot or authorship that unifies an essay periodical, but the presence of an editorial persona, or eidolon.

Curiously, in the early twentieth century the eidolon’s importance was implicitly recognized, not by mainstream literary critics, but by pedagogues. The essay periodical’s didacticism and apparent lack of stylistic complexity made it of little interest to the New Critics, and it was relegated to the lesser realms of

³⁶Walter Graham, English Literary Periodicals (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1930), 13-14.

literary history and composition instruction.³⁷ Studies that emphasized the importance of the essayist's point of view did so for the purposes of teaching writing to college students. Compilers of anthologies to be used as textbooks declared that students should study these essays to become acquainted with "the great stylists . . . those who lie at the center of English prose," and that like "Freshman English and other basic courses in composition," the primary purpose of this study should be "to teach correct and effective methods of marshalling thoughts on paper."³⁸ Hence the genre retained the utilitarian status praised by Gay and the nineteenth-century critics who considered that it had improved the taste of the reading public; but in an era when utility was devalued as a measure of literary worth, this association pushed it to the margins of scholarly interest.

In a telling indication of the essay periodical's low status at this time, the author of The English Essay and Essayists declares his subject "the literary form of the pococurante," although he notes somewhat defensively that "there are essays . . . in which we do detect a special literary form." But despite his lack of respect for his material, this critic achieves an insight that Macaulay's self-assured

³⁷See F. W. Bateson, "Addison, Steele and the Periodical Essay," in Dryden to Johnson, ed. Roger Lonsdale (London: Sphere Books, 1971; reprint, New York, Peter Bedrick Books, 1987) for a late New Critical argument that Addison's prose style qualifies him as the representative author of the English classical style, according to the criteria put forth by T. S. Eliot in What is a Classic? Even so, Bateson declares that "considered simply as subject-matter what the modern reader is most conscious of in Addison's essays is their triviality. Their author had an uninteresting mind" (122). Like Macaulay, Bateson dismisses everything between the Spectator and the Rambler as merely imitative (132-133).

³⁸Warner Taylor, introduction to Representative English Essays (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1923), x; Warner Taylor, introduction to Essays of the Past and Present (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1927), n. p.

appraisal misses, recognizing that the “figures” of the Spectator’s club “make of The Spectator a sort of unity, though a very imperfect one.”³⁹ The qualification undermines the importance of this realization; critics from Gay on had been remarkably impressed by the consistency and coherence of both Tatler and Spectator. Nonetheless, the recognition that the club unifies the later journal’s individual papers deserves notice. Despite the tendency of critics like Macaulay to assign the entire credit for the Spectator to Addison, the fact is that that journal, like the vast majority of essay periodicals, was written by more than one author. Indeed, critics of the essay periodical have always been interested in the problem of authorship, whether this interest has been expressed as curiosity (Gay), overstatement (Macaulay), inquiry, or frank uncertainty: in his introduction to the modern five-volume edition of the Spectator, Donald F. Bond spends fifteen pages on the question of authorship (xlili-lviii), while much of his introduction to the three-volume Tatler discusses the roles of Addison and Swift. In both editions, the authorship of each individual essay is footnoted even though Bond acknowledges that the two primary authors’ respective contributions have never been fully identified (Tatler 1:xviii-xix).⁴⁰ Other journals receive the same treatment: critical interest in recovering texts by women writers has resulted in modern editions of Selections From The Female Spectator and the Female Tatler.

³⁹Hugh Walker, The English Essay and Essayists (London: J. M. Dent, 1915), 2-3, 110.

⁴⁰Bond’s notes indicate when the authorship of a specific essay is unclear.

one of two editions of the latter attributes its authorship to Delariviere Manley. The other declares the journal “worth discussing and republishing” because some of its papers are “relevant to the development of Mandeville’s views”; accordingly, the editor reprints only those numbers he attributes to Mandeville.⁴¹

But attribution studies and scholarly editing, both indispensable to literary critics, are not the same as analytical criticism, and for most of the twentieth century there were few new readings of essay periodicals. In 1985, the author of a book on the Spectator’s form pointed out somewhat incredulously that although “the Spectator is commonly acknowledged to be among the most successful, polished, and influential essay periodicals of the eighteenth century . . . there has not been an extended commentary on it.”⁴² Until about 1970, scholarly work on Addison and Steele was biographical and historical; that on the Tatler, Spectator, and a very few other journals “bibliographical and editorial” in nature.⁴³ We have Bond’s invaluable modern editions of the Tatler and Spectator, useful editions of

⁴¹Eliza Haywood, Selections From The Female Spectator, ed. Patricia Meyer Spacks (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); The Female Tatler, ed. Fidelis Morgan (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Everyman’s Library, 1992); M. M. Goldsmith, introduction to By a Society of Ladies: Essays in The Female Tatler (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1999), 7.

⁴²Michael G. Ketcham, Transparent Designs: Reading, Performance, and Form in the Spectator Papers (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1985), vii.

⁴³Brian McCrea, “Addison and Steele after 1900,” in Addison and Steele Are Dead: The English Department, Its Canon, and the Professionalization of Literary Criticism (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990), 117-135. McCrea points out that while “the nine essays [on Addison or Steele] published in PMLA between 1948 and 1953 give no hint of Addison and Steele’s imminent demise. . . . none of the essays say much about the literary works of Addison and Steele” (121).

the Guardian, Female Tatler, Female Spectator, and Prompter,⁴⁴ and the Blooms' important collection of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century criticism of Addison, Steele and their works. Of the twentieth-century criticism in English before 1940 on the Spectator listed in one bibliography, most articles are either notes on minor questions of authorship, advertisements, or sources; a few compare brief passages in the journal to the work of other authors or discuss the Spectator's later influence or reception. No more than five are full-length analytical articles. Non-canonical journals received even less attention. In 1983 The Cambridge Guide to English Literature called the Tatler "almost impossible to read now," and in 1990 another book declared Addison and Steele dead. Three years later, Charles A. Knight predicted that "if the influential series of essays produced between 1709 and 1714 by Joseph Addison and Sir Richard Steele emerges from its present benign neglect, it may do so through the concept that periodicals create culture—that if art imitates life, life imitates art with equal significance."⁴⁵

⁴⁴Richard Steele and Joseph Addison, The Guardian, ed. John Calhoun Stephens (Lexington KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1982); Aaron Hill and William Popple, The Prompter: A Theatrical Paper (1734-1736), eds. William W. Appleton and Kalman A. Burnim (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1966). This edition reprints only papers and passages determined to illustrate the history of eighteenth-century theater.

⁴⁵Katherine Kirtley Weed and Richmond Pugh Bond, Studies of British Newspapers and Periodicals from Their Beginning to 1800: A Bibliography (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1946), 131-139; Michael Stapleton, The Cambridge Guide to English Literature (Cambridge, 1983), 836; Brian McCrea, Addison and Steele Are Dead: The English Department, Its Canon, and the Professionalization of Literary Criticism (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990); Charles A. Knight, "The Spectator's Moral Economy," Modern Philology 91, no. 2 (1993), 161.

Virtually all twentieth-century work on essay periodicals other than the Tatler and Spectator falls into one of four categories: Johnsonia, women's writing (with a special subcategory

Knight's prediction was accurate: within the last decade a number of new articles and books on the cultural influence of essay periodicals have appeared. This work has grown out of two new developments: a new interest in the Habermasian concept of the public sphere, as Knight anticipated, and a continuation of the work of feminist scholars, primarily in the 1980s and 1990s, who began uncovering a tradition of women's writing including a number of journals written by actual women or women eidolons. These two paths have been reciprocally beneficial, so that most of the books on essay periodicals in the last decade or so have emphasized cultural change with special attention to gender issues.⁴⁶ Inasmuch as this recent work reads the essay periodical as culturally constitutive, it tends to be highly self-conscious about the significance of the genre's changing fortunes in scholarly circles. Because essay periodicals "institutionalize what are still fairly central cultural standards," they are not formally "complex enough for the tastes of conventional literary critics" (Mackie, *Market*, 16): their middle style is so instrumental to the modern dominance of middle-class tastes and ethics as to render them formally unremarkable within our current cultural framework—which after all, they helped create. Moreover, in

on the journalism of Eliza Haywood), the rise of the novel, or political propaganda.

⁴⁶See Kathryn Shevelov, *Women and Print Culture: The Construction of Femininity in the Early Periodical* (London: Routledge, 1989); Erin Mackie, *Market à la Mode: Fashion, Commodity, and Gender in The Tatler and The Spectator* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Shawn Lisa Maurer, *Proposing Men: Dialectics of Gender and Class in the Eighteenth-Century English Periodical* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Paula McDowell, *The Women of Grub Street: Press, Politics, and Gender in the London Literary Marketplace 1678–1730* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998).

reforming the taste of the public, they must necessarily “devote so much space to the very ephemera and trivia they denounce . . . that they put a good deal of their own content outside the domain of exclusively literary and aesthetic analysis” (Mackie, Market, 17). Hence one critic frankly begins, “this is not the book I started out to write,” explaining that understanding these texts required her to change her own reading practices (Maurer, Proposing Men, 1). Modern critical developments have made it difficult if not impossible to study the essay periodical according to conventional definitions of the literary; nonetheless, the fact remains that for over two centuries they were considered central to the canon of English literature, suggesting that perhaps the difficulties of twentieth-century critics lay not in the eighteenth-century texts themselves but in the limitations of the analytical framework that was not brought to bear on them. Accordingly, recent criticism of essay periodicals demonstrates an acute awareness of challenging critical assumptions as a precondition to merely addressing the subject.

This reappraisal responds in large part to the work of Jürgen Habermas, particularly The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere.⁴⁷ In effect, critics returning to the eighteenth-century essay periodical do so for much the

⁴⁷See McDowell, Women, 7-10; Mackie, Market, 17-25; Maurer, Proposing Men, 15, 19-24; Dustin Griffin, “Fictions of Eighteenth Century Authorship,” Essays in Criticism 43, no. 3 (1993); and Knight, “Moral Economy.” Knight also predicted Habermas’ central role in the reemerging interest in essay periodicals: see “The Spectator’s Moral Economy” 161-2.

Habermas’ book appeared in German in 1962, and was translated into English in 1989. In The full English title is The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society, trans. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (reprint, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991). Citations throughout are to the reprint edition.

same reason that the New Critics abandoned it: it was popular to the point of conventionality. But this popularity is perhaps these journals' most significant feature, both historically and formally: they were in a real sense the first truly popular literary form, if by "literature" we refer to printed texts rather than dramatic performances. Habermas emphasizes this popularity when he explains that the new essay periodicals were "intimately interwoven with the life of the coffee houses" to the extent that they "transposed 'public spirit' from the lofty and sacrificial attitude of human individuals to that objective entity of the Zeitgeist" (42, 93). It was their very popularity that made them the instruments of public opinion in an ongoing dialectical process through which they defined popular culture even as popular culture gave them the power to do so.

But emphasizing the essay periodical's popularity again raises questions about its longevity: given its widespread appeal, why did it not last beyond the eighteenth century, and why was it specific to England? The answer to the first question is that the genre's cultural significance is so well-tailored to its particular historical niche that it outgrows its formal specificity: it does not so much die out as change into the literary magazine and the general interest magazine. Its nineteenth-century descendants include journals such as Bentley's Miscellany (1837-1868), edited first by Charles Dickens; in the twentieth century, one thinks

of the New Yorker (1925-present).⁴⁸ Improvements in printing and distribution, along with growing wealth, allowed the single-sheet essay to grow into the modern magazine without becoming prohibitively expensive; at the same time, longer magazines and expanding urban areas probably made monthly publication and distribution more feasible. The result was that the periodical essayist became either the editor or one of a number of contributors as the length of magazines grew beyond what was manageable for one or a few primary authors. With regards to the genre's specificity to England, the facile and somewhat misleading answer is that it is not: there were French and American essay periodicals, and apparently Spanish ones as well.⁴⁹ But the genre never developed in other countries to the extent that it did in England, and for the most part non-English essay periodicals clearly imitate their English counterparts. The conditions that gave rise to the essay periodical appear to have been unique to England in the eighteenth century: a parliamentary system that depended on the trade interest and public political debate, and a large urban center with a growing middle class. In short, the eighteenth-century essay periodical as a discrete genre is thoroughly

⁴⁸In the last few years, underground zines and web logs, or "blogs," have become quite popular. These short journals contain essays, fiction or poems usually by a single author or small group of friends and are self-published regularly or irregularly, usually with desktop publishing software; while most are distributed on a very limited basis, some have found their way to newsstands, whether locally or through national or even international alternative distribution methods. The parallels between zines and the essay periodical are extremely intriguing and merit investigation. See Emily Eakin, "The Ancient Art of Haranguing Has Moved to the Internet, Belligerent as Ever," in New York Times, 10 August 2002, A15, National edition.

⁴⁹Elsa Garcia-Pandavenes, "El Censor (1781-1787): A Study of An Essay Periodical of the Spanish Enlightenment," (Ph.D. diss., University of California, 1971).

linked to a specific time and place. Hence any critical engagement with it must necessarily consider its historical context.

This fact is that the primary problem for literary critics, particularly those interested in form exclusive of historical investigation. Whether because essay periodicals seem “not exclusively literary enough,” because “so much of what they say addresses extratextual social practices that the papers cannot be fully accounted for within the conventional domains of literary studies or intellectual history” (Mackie, Market, 16),⁵⁰ or because the public sphere they supposedly helped create never actually existed, therefore calling into question the very foundation of their importance, they seem to require a kind of justification of their literary status that other genres do not.⁵¹ The first of these criticisms, it seems to me, overstates the distinction between history and literary criticism; the second fails to make the distinction at all. Part of what needs to be explained when studying popular literature is the very basis for its popularity; and yet, recognizing that the basis for that popularity is fictional should not present a problem for literary critics. In fact, none of the critics who challenge the validity of the public sphere directly say that essay periodicals should be ignored

⁵⁰Mackie’s argument challenges the very distinction between fashionable ephemera and literary imperishability that her statement invokes.

⁵¹For arguments debating the historical existence of the public sphere, see Griffin, “Fictions,” 181-194; Craig Calhoun, ed., Habermas and the Public Sphere (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), especially the essays by Nancy Fraser, Michael Schudson, and Mary P. Ryan; Bruce Robbins, “The Public as Phantom,” introduction to The Phantom Public Sphere, Cultural Politics vol. 5 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), vii-xxv; and McDowell, Women, 6-9. Nancy Fraser’s essay also appears in The Phantom Public Sphere.

(although Dustin Griffin marginalizes the Spectator's importance to those who discuss it in Habermasian terms by declaring it "in some respects atypical in its day" [Griffin, "Fictions," 189]—true enough in one sense, but highly problematic given its popularity and influence). Nonetheless, as Paula McDowell points out, Habermas acknowledges the distinction between theoretical openness and actual historical conditions: "The fully developed bourgeois public sphere was based on the fictitious identity of the two roles assumed by the privatized individuals who came together to form a public: the role of property owners and the role of human beings pure and simple" (Habermas, Structural Transformation, 56).⁵² The present study places great weight on this distinction, according to which the public sphere itself can be understood as a kind of fiction. In this case, the question becomes not whether it ever existed in practice, nor whom did it exclude—the two predominant concerns of recent responses to Habermas—but instead how did it come to exist as an operative belief? What are the meanings of the construct, "the public sphere"? And what are the consequences of its dominance as an ideological construct? These questions reframe the relationship between essay periodicals and the public sphere, making the skills of literary analysis central to any critical engagement with either. When viewing the problem of the public sphere through the lens of literary criticism, the extra-literary

⁵²McDowell quotes this passage in full on p. 8, going on to point out that Habermas acknowledges class exclusions but not exclusions based on gender. He later acknowledges the problem of gender in "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere," in Habermas and the Public Sphere, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 427-430.

features of the essay periodical become not extra-literary at all: instead, the role of the essay periodical as text suddenly becomes central to an understanding of the larger fiction of the public sphere, a fiction built out of texts.

This approach reveals an unasked question. Habermas refers to the essay periodical's role in providing material for the reading public to read and discuss; but he does not explain or even ask what it was about journalism in general or the essay periodical in particular that made it—rather than another literary form, perhaps the novel—the particular occasion of this transformation. Why were essay periodicals the primary occasion for the kind of reading and discussion that gave rise to the public sphere? Some of the answers are clear: cheapness, ease of distribution, and above all topicality and periodicity: their ability to provide fresh discussion material on an ongoing basis. But these attributes are generalizable to all journalism. The essay periodical achieves not only topicality, but literariness. It keeps its readers up to date, but it also instructs and improves them, and thereby also benefits the public at large, becoming a constitutive part of its cultural milieu. The specific attribute of the essay periodical that makes it, more than other generic forms, central to the construction of the modern public sphere is its ability to be both timely and timeless, to make the contingent details of daily life important to a general audience, and as a consequence to emphasize a sense of community and fellowship based on prosaic circumstances and therefore all the more powerful.

Chapter 2

“For the Use of Politick Persons” Isaac Bickerstaff’s Public Reading

The most characteristic feature of the eighteenth-century essay periodical is its authorial persona: the Tatler’s “Isaac Bickerstaff,” the Spectator’s “Mr. Spectator,” and so on.¹ The eidolon unifies individual essays—often written by different authors and always published separately over an extended period of weeks, months, or years—into a coherent whole. Most essay journals reflect the genre’s dependence on this device in their titles: almost all the titles listed in the “Periodical Essays” section of the Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature are essentially personified verbs. Often, like the Spectator, these titles are eponymous; occasionally the title and the narrative character are different—the Female Tatler is “written” by “Mrs. Crackenthorpe,” for instance—and sometimes titles are not personified, although the authorial voice is: in Have At You All, Bonnell Thornton styles himself “Madame Roxana Termagant.” An occasional essay periodical uses a personalized title without a distinct persona: the Rambler’s title fits the pattern but there is no “Mr. Rambler,” only an authorial “I.” Together, these variations foreground the essay periodical’s emphasis on human agency as a condition of textual production while at the same time disguising individual writers’ actual identities. As a result, essay periodicals

¹ The genre’s other primary characteristic, a single essay published at regular intervals, is more definition than feature.

“speak” with distinct voices that synthesize disparate viewpoints, suggesting that conflicting private perspectives can be transformed into a unified public opinion. This transformation is made possible through the medium of print publication, which distances writer from text: the eidolon represents this distancing and also transforms it, replacing the absent writer with a fictionalized persona who humanizes the disembodied text. The eidolon, which owes its existence to publication and personifies public opinion, is therefore doubly public in nature. Hence the essay periodical’s role in the emergence of the modern public sphere is more than simply a matter of providing subject matter for coffeehouse discussions or promoting middle class standards of behavior. The genre itself, as a formal system, encodes the public sphere. By writing and reading essay journals, discussing them, and corresponding with their authors, men and women in eighteenth-century England comprehend the public sphere as popular belief. Whether or not this belief becomes reality is a question beyond the scope of this study: at stake here is the public sphere as concept and its textual expression by the essay periodical and its eidolon.

The convention of the authorial persona in the essay periodical is introduced by Richard Steele in the Tatler. “Isaac Bickerstaff” is an elderly unmarried gentleman of modest means and sometime astrologer whose primary characteristics are good humor and a fundamental sense of decency. Although occasionally foolish, satirical, or partisan, Bickerstaff acknowledges his own

shortcomings and even turns them to his advantage by using them to demonstrate his humanity. His strengths and his weaknesses are presented as representative of the beliefs and behaviors of his audience and, by extension, of the nation:

Bickerstaff literally represents the national average. Paradoxically, his naturalness as a character derives from his obvious fictionality; his thoroughgoing normalcy results from his connection to all parts of London and his familiarity with all classes of readers.

Steele refers to Bickerstaff as “a Mask,”² and in discussing the Tatler specifically and essay periodicals in general, critics have variously used this term along with persona, eidolon, or simply pseudonym. Along with the simple desire for variation, these multiple terms reflect the journals’ diverse approaches to this recurring device, while also indicating a central problem of the essay periodical persona, its incomplete nature. Bickerstaff is one of the most developed of these implied authors, but even so he is rather transparent; Steele’s identity was generally known not long after the Tatler began publication, and his use and characterization of Bickerstaff vary throughout the journal’s run. Still, this first eidolon is better developed than most; in general, essay periodical eidolons are somewhat insubstantial, and the distinction between their opinions and those of their authors is often incomplete. Sometimes they are simply pseudonyms, at

²Tatler 271, in The Tatler, ed. Donald F. Bond, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 3:363. Subsequent references cite issue number along with volume and page of this edition.

others almost characters in their own right. Whether because the term—which means “shadowy image” or “phantom”—connotes insubstantiality and incompleteness, or because many of these figures are incompletely personified, critics have generally used the term “eidolon” rather than “persona” or “mask” when discussing the essay periodical. Importantly, this choice suggests both distinction and continuity between writer and narrator: the eidolon is a kind of authorial shadow rather than a clearly distinct persona. Supposed to represent an author’s viewpoint more or less directly, but also to foreground the distinction between writer and text, the eidolon points to the author’s presence without quite replacing the author himself.³ Moreover, the eidolon’s transparency makes readers aware of their role in constructing textual meaning: not only does the eidolon represent averageness, it also incorporates reader’s suggestions and submissions into its very characterization.

As authorial ghost and public representative, the eidolon is a public role, a fact that emphasizes the public nature of authorship: texts are innately public in nature, since they depend on readers, and essay periodicals are particularly so

³The problem of the persona in eighteenth-century literature is well-established: see especially Robert C. Elliott, *The Literary Persona* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Howard Weinbrot, “Masked Men and Satire and Pope: Towards an Historical Basis for the Eighteenth-Century Persona” in *Eighteenth-Century Satire: Essays on Text and Context from Dryden to Peter Pindar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 34-49; Irvin Ehrenpreis, “Personae,” in *Literary Meaning and Augustan Values* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1974), 49-60; Leon Guilhamet, *The Sincere Ideal: Studies on Sincerity in Eighteenth-Century English Literature* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1974), 136-151; Richmond P. Bond, “Isaac Bickerstaff, Esq.,” in *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Literature*, 103-24; and Robert Donald Spector, “The Connoisseur: A Study of the Function of a Persona,” in *English Writers of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. John H. Muddendorf (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 109-121.

since they are circulated and distributed widely and through public venues like coffeehouses. Hence the eidolon both depends on and emphasizes the distinction between the physically absent writer and the public author whose “presence” is not only entirely textual, and therefore disembodied, but also dependent on the reading public’s active participation. Moreover, by calling attention to the nature of the relationship between embodied private writers and readers and disembodied public identities, the essay periodical eidolon conditions the reading public to similarly distinguish between private identities and public roles while nonetheless recognizing them as linked. These complex interactions between private and public, which take place in the public medium of print, help establish certain fundamental conditions of the emerging public sphere: private identity, public reputation, and the role of texts in mediating between the two.

The Tatler’s Bickerstaff originates with Jonathan Swift’s Bickerstaff Papers, which introduces the fundamental problems of private and public identity, the meaning of authorship, and the textual consequences of authorial transparency or opacity.⁴ Swift’s satire provides Bickerstaff with a history, thereby making him both more “real” and more obviously textual, since that history itself

⁴The hugely popular Bickerstaff Papers spawned numerous imitations, from further predictions by both “Bickerstaff” and “Partridge” to speculations on the authorship of the original series; the Tatler was only one among the many who capitalized on Bickerstaff’s fame by borrowing his name. Steele’s claim to the name was superior to most, however, since Swift assisted with the Tatler during its early stages. After the Tatler ceased publication, Swift helped William Harrison attempt to revive it, his assistance presumably requested in part because of his claim to Bickerstaff’s name (Elliott, Persona 141). For photographic reproductions of a number of Bickerstaff offshoots, see Bickerstaffiana and Other Early Materials on Swift 1708-1715 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1975).

emphasizes his fictionality. The original Bickerstaff was created as a satirical attack on the living almanac-maker and astrologer Joseph Partridge, in order to prove that Partridge's predictions and by extension astrology in general are utter nonsense. In the course of the satire, Bickerstaff also predicts Partridge's "death," which he later asserts as accomplished fact. Responding in part to Partridge's challenges to other astrologers to cast "Nativities"—to predict when people would die—with more skill than himself, the first of the Bickerstaff Papers, Predictions for the Year 1708, casts as Bickerstaff's "first Prediction . . . a Trifle," the death of Partridge "upon the 29th of March next, about eleven at Night, of a raging Fever."⁵ The prediction has roots in classical and celtic mythology: both ancient Greece and pre-Christian Ireland held the belief that satire literally possessed the ability to kill. It seems highly probable that the Predictions consciously alludes to these traditions, thereby addressing both the classically educated and the general population, who had inherited the Irish belief in satire's fatal powers in the form of a superstition that "Irish satirists could rhyme rats and mice to death."⁶ The humor of the Predictions links popular belief with literary tradition in order to assert the greater power of the latter: astrology is ludicrous

⁵Jonathan Swift, Prose Works of Jonathan Swift, ed. Herbert Davis, vol. 2 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1939-1968), xi-xii, 145. Subsequent citations of Swift refer to this volume.

⁶Robert C. Elliot, The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960), 3-48, 277. According to Elliot, this power was specifically attributed to Irish poets—an association that also hints at Swift's identity as author. The implication that Partridge is a rat no doubt added to the Predictions' humor for contemporary readers.

and meaningless, so that the true threat is not to Partridge's body but to his literal—that is, his written—existence. The prediction is made against Partridge the astrologer, not Partridge the man; whether or not a man named John Partridge dies on March 29, the reputation of the “John Partridge” whose name sells almanacs is effectively dead. If the man Partridge dies, Bickersatff is the better astrologer; if not, astrology is nonsense, and Partridge the almanac-maker is effectively “dead” anyway. But the parallel between folk and classical traditions indirectly suggests another possibility, that the literary and the popular might coexist, somehow connected in the figure of Partridge's ghost, foreshadowing the realization that authorship is itself immaterial, a public construct.

Swift's subsequent publication of The Accomplishment of the First of Mr. Bickerstaff's Predictions confirms Partridge's death, but rather than Bickerstaff himself declaring his prophecy fulfilled, the Accomplishment is reported in the form of a letter from a curious gentleman “to a Person of Honour.” The gentleman reports Partridge's demise and deathbed repudiation of “all Pretenses of foretelling by Astrology,” but notes that “Mr. Bickerstaff was mistaken almost four Hours in his Calculation” of the time of Partridge's death (Swift, Works, 153-155).⁷ By replacing Bickerstaff with the gentleman correspondent, Swift offers (ironically transparent) external confirmation of

⁷Bickerstaff takes mocking offense at this “criticism” in the subsequent Vindication.

Bickerstaff's triumph; the letter writer functions as audience surrogate.⁸

Moreover, the gentleman is a more reliable reporter than Bickerstaff, not only because he provides external "evidence" of Partridge's death but also because as an astrologer, Bickerstaff is himself effectively "killed" by the fulfillment of his prediction—the more so since his prediction was imperfectly accurate. The Accomplishment suggests a strong Platonic suspicion of authors and fiction; private letters by eyewitnesses are reliable, and public authorship is far too mutable.

But the curious gentleman's letter is not the final word on the subject. The Bickerstaff Papers achieve their crowning glory by virtue of the unforeseeable and fortuitous indiscretion of the actual John Partridge, who laughably denies his own death and attacks Swift's Bickerstaff in his almanac for 1709. By seeming to take Bickerstaff's irony at face value, Partridge transforms Swift's satire from a straightforward, if witty, demonstration of the foolishness of astrology into proof of Partridge's own personal folly, thereby falling on Bickerstaff's sword. Swift could hardly be expected to pass up such an easy opportunity, and in the Vindication of Isaac Bickerstaff he delivers the final stroke by citing Partridge's claim "That he is not only now alive, but was likewise alive upon that very 29th of March, when I had foretold he should die." Bickerstaff points out that

⁸This second persona also enables the Accomplishment's tone of surprise and wonder, since the letter-writer's social position insulates him from both the classical and vulgar traditions of fatal satires.

Partridge's statement implies "that a Man may be alive now, who was not alive a Twelve-month ago," an absurdity that in combination with the disrepute cast on astrology by the earlier Bickerstaff Papers causes the public to "lift up their Eyes, and cry out . . . They were sure no Man alive ever writ such damned Stuff as this . . . So that," Bickerstaff asserts smugly, "Mr. Partridge lies under a Dilemma, either of disowning his Almanack, or allowing himself to be no Man alive" (Swift, Works 162). Partridge's self-sacrifice brings Bickerstaff back to life, not as astrologer but as author. In his triumph, Swift blurs the line between himself and his creation by attributing to Bickerstaff his own pride in his work, so that the consistency of Bickerstaff's personification suffers, but the shift highlights the attack on Partridge by differentiating between the foolishness of dead astrologers and the wit of deathless authors.

Throughout the Bickerstaff Papers, and especially in this final sally, the joke relies on a distinction between two uses of the word "life." Partridge's response transfers Bickerstaff's suspicion of the reality of fiction onto Partridge himself, so that the Vindication's Bickerstaff becomes Swift's eidolon—a transparent representation of Swift himself—rather than his persona. Partridge, who believes in the transparency of texts, perceives words only as denotation; hence, for him, "life" refers only to the life of the body, the "uninformed Carcass" (Swift, Works, 162) which even Bickerstaff allows that Partridge still possesses. But the secondary meaning, which the eidolon Bickerstaff implies is more

important—“life” in the sense of social action and public reputation—is both referential and self-reflective: print takes on a life of its own, through which authors achieve immortality. To writers especially, this second sense of the word matters more than the first, since the very concept of authorship is, literally, textually-determined. Hence Bickerstaff can justly assert that while “it is the Privilege of . . . Authors, to live after their Deaths; Almanack-makers are alone excluded” (Swift, Works, 163-164) because both almanacs and their writers refer only to an external physical reality. Their existence is thoroughly time- and place-dependent. In contrast, an author’s reputation—his public life, with the associated connotations of both “publication” and “public opinion”—relies on his work’s reputation and very existence. Author’s lives are therefore identified with the lives of their texts. In attempting to resurrect himself, Partridge gives Bickerstaff new life, and the fictional creation becomes more substantive than the living man it attacks.

Hence, while the Bickerstaff Papers’ attack on Partridge focuses primarily on projecting this identification between writer and text onto Partridge and his almanac (and, by extension, onto astrologers and almanacs in general), Swift’s satire also contains a more subtle irony: its own author’s reputation also originates in the success of his text. In the first paper, the Predictions, this irony is consistent with the astrology satire inasmuch as Bickerstaff, himself an astrologer, undermines Partridge’s reputation by proxy, exaggerating his own predictions to

the point of ridicule. His ludicrous nonsense demonstrates that all astrology is nonsense. In the Vindication, however, Bickerstaff presents himself not as astrologer, but as author. The final paragraph hardly mentions Partridge or astrology, engaging instead in a burlesque protestation that Bickerstaff's reputation has been compromised by impostors and doubters:

I should not have given the Publick or my self the Trouble of this Vindication, if my Name had not been made use of by several Persons, to whom I never lent it I think these are Things too serious to be trifled with. It grieved me to the Heart, when I saw my Labours, which had cost me so much Thought and Watching, bawled about by common Hawkers, which I only intended for the weighty Consideration of the gravest Persons. . . . But it is the Talent of our Age and Nation, to turn Things of the greatest Importance into Ridicule. (Swift, Works, 164)

With his closing shot, the obviously fictional Bickerstaff points out that his literary reputation (unlike Partridge's) transcends the insignificance of his subject matter. His talent clearly distinguishes his own writings from those of his imitators, whose counterfeits merely demonstrate his inimitability.⁹ The focus

⁹In his analysis of Swift's unpublished Answer to Bickerstaff, Irvin Ehrenpreis comments that "whoever writes with such flutters between self-concealment and self-revelation yearns for the credit of his pseudonymity" (Swift, The Man, His Works, and the Age, vol. 2 [Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1967], 203). Ehrenpreis' suspicions are probably correct; however, my interest here is less on Swift's psychological motivations than on the effect of oscillations between concealment and exposure on contemporary understandings of the relationship between authors and texts. The Answer is a rich and intriguing document in this respect; however, publication is a necessary element if exposure is to be an actual possibility. For this reason my analysis confines itself to the three Bickerstaff Papers published during Swift's lifetime.

here is on transcendence: although Bickerstaff's claim that his work is not intended for vulgar consumption is clearly ironic, it also serves as a criticism of the reading public's gullibility and interest in pamphlet wars like the Bickerstaff Papers. Swift introduces a paradox here which he never fully acknowledges, as this is his final word in the Partridge controversy: Bickerstaff the persona demonstrates his own foolishness in his role as astrologer, but as Swift's pseudonym, he is author, not astrologer, and therefore superior to both his material and his audience. In the end, both Partridge and Bickerstaff converge on this central point, print's ability to create the reality of authorship and the consequent implication that public reputation constitutes a real and enduring form of identity.¹⁰

In borrowing Bickerstaff, therefore, the Tatler embraces the paradoxes implicit in the Bickerstaff Papers,¹¹ but Steele also benefits from having these issues present from the beginning. Initially, the Tatler is true to its Swiftian origins, attacking the transience and novelty which periodical publication embraces. It begins as a satire on newspapers and other Grub-Street ephemera, "intended for the Use of . . . [the] Persons of strong Zeal and weak Intellects" who generally read these journals. Instead, the Tatler will "offer something, whereby such worthy and well-affected Members of the Commonwealth may be

¹⁰In fact, John Partridge died in 1715 but continued to publish almanacs through 1800.

¹¹Claude Rawson has also noted the irony inherent in the Swift / Tatler connection: see Satire and Sentiment 1660-1830 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 201-203.

instructed, after their Reading, what to think: Which shall be the End and Purpose of this my Paper” (Tatler 1, 1:15). This claim, Swiftian in tone and emphasis, emphasizes the author’s primacy over (and fundamental disdain for) his audience and stresses the power of authority over common beliefs and behaviors.

But by the seventh paper, Steele has realized that this irony is too limited to sustain for long, and declares that like Partridge, he “cannot hold out with any tolerable Wit” unless readers supply him with more material (Tatler 7, 1:63). Just as the original Bickerstaff morphed from astrologer to author, the realities of periodical publication transform the Tatler’s initial lampoon of popular journalism into a self-conscious reassessment of Steele’s own position: journals, though ephemeral, can sustain a writer’s reputation if he is capable of continually producing good work. Moreover, an author’s public life is more durable than the fate of any single production. Bickerstaff’s lack of ideas is lightly compared to the occasional fear of “The Greatest Heroes” and the sometime dullness of “the Spriteliest Wits” (Tatler 7, 1:62), a comparison that emphasizes the Tatler’s potential demise as a pause rather than an actual ending: neither fear nor dullness negates the hero or the wit. If the Tatler ceases publication, Bickerstaff may “die” because he is merely a feature of one specific text (although in surviving beyond the end of the Bickerstaff Papers he has already shown signs of immortality); but Steele can treat the event lightly because he is in no danger. Bickerstaff’s potential death represents merely an interruption to Steele’s ongoing creation of authorial

reputation, a realization that emphasizes the fictionality and transparency of the eidolon, whose non-existence can be treated as a joke between author and audience.

This foregrounding of the eidolon's fictionality becomes a standard feature of the essay periodical eidolon. Rather than assuming an opaque (if obvious) persona, Steele emphasizes Bickerstaff's textual nature by drawing attention to the existence of a writer behind the character and stressing the eidolon's transparency: Bickerstaff draws attention to his non-existence by ludicrously answering "those who dispute, whether there is any such Real Person as Isaac Bickerstaff or not?" with the mocking promise to "excuse all Persons who appear what they really are, from coming to my Funeral." This application of the Partridge joke to his readers as well as himself introduces a new idea, that all readers are in a sense "Persons assum'd" (Tatler 7, 1:65). Hence, his request for reader submissions amounts to more than an admission of failure, offering to readers the opportunity to become authors themselves, and thereby allowing them to enter public life through the medium of publication.¹²

¹²Generally critics have seen the Tatler's and Spectator's move away from news and satire towards gentler humor as either an improvement on the viciousness of the satirical tradition or the enervation of a great tradition by encroaching bourgeois tastes. For the former, see Louis Milic, "Tone in Steele's 'Tatler'", in Newsletters to Newspapers: Eighteenth-Century Journalism, ed. Donovan H. Bond, and W. Reynolds McLeod (Morgantown: West Virginia University School of Journalism, 1977), 33-45; F. W. Bateson, "Addison, Steele and the Periodical Essay" in Dryden to Johnson, ed. Roger Lonsdale, New History of Literature, vol. 4 (New York: Peter Bedrick Books, 1987); Edward Bloom and Lillian Bloom, Joseph Addison's Sociable Animal: In the Market Place, on the Hustings, in the Pulpit (Providence: Brown University Press, 1971); and Richmond P. Bond, The Tatler: The Making of a Literary Journal, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971). For the latter viewpoint, see Claude Rawson, Satire and Sentiment 1660-1830 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Historically, criticism that reflects a belief in the progression of literary taste has tended to view Steele, and especially Addison,

In asking for help, Bickerstaff changes from an assertion of authorial superiority to a transparent but enabling fiction that invites readers to reimagine themselves as constitutive members of an emerging public sphere. What is remarkable about his request for contributions is not whether it signals that Steele was running out of ideas, but that it necessarily places him on an equal footing with his readers. “It is so just an Observation,” Bickerstaff begins, “That Mocking is Catching, that I am become an unhappy Instance of it, and am (in the same Manner that I have represented Mr. Partridge) my self a dying Man” (Tatler 7, 1:62). Beginning with a common proverb,¹³ presented as “just” rather than as banal, this statement implicitly renounces the original satire of the Bickerstaff Papers: popular beliefs are axiomatic rather than occasions for ridicule. Bickerstaff explicitly likens himself to Partridge, even, with the word “represented,” seeming to curtail his judgment somewhat by diminishing Partridge’s death sentence to a form of ritualized mummery. Both as persona and pseudonym, Swift’s Bickerstaff presents himself as superior to the objects of his satire; Steele’s echoes colloquial speech and acknowledges the wisdom of the commonplace. His very language implies a fundamental identification with his audience, employing the eidolon’s obvious fictionality to bridge the gap between

favorably, while later suspicion of what has come to be called the “Whig view of history” has resulted in a more condemnatory tone.

¹³According to D. F. Bond, the first record of this expression dates from 1670. See Tatler 1:62 n.

author and reader and placing them on an equal footing.

The adage Bickerstaff cites therefore warns against assuming the exact position of superiority—“mocking”—that, by invoking it, he abrogates. The shift emphasizes popular opinion as a productive force rather than a vulgarizing one. Reform becomes an ongoing collective process rather than an indictment of existing practices, a reconceptualization of the meanings of popularity and reform that can be discerned in the contrast between the Tatler’s first papers and its later developments. The first numbers are gossipy: in Tatler 1, Bickerstaff reports on “The deplorable Condition of a very pretty Gentleman,” who is in love with a young woman who rejects him (Tatler 1, 1: 17). In a later paper he admonishes the same “Young Nobleman, who came fluster’d into the Box last Night” (Tatler 3, 1:31); Bond’s note to Tatler 5, which returns to the story of the rejected “Cynthio,” informs us that Abigail Harley wrote to her aunt that the Tatler’s author “put in the story of Lord Hinchinbrooke coming Thursday night drunk to the playhouse, in a sad pickle, and there railed against marriage in a strange manner. His title was not put in but there were spectators enow to tell everybody who it was.”¹⁴ In the next paper Bickerstaff describes how “a Great Critick fell into Fits in the Gallery” (Tatler 4, 1:39)¹⁵ at Saturday’s opera. These early

¹⁴Tatler 5, 1:46 n, quoting HMC Portland MSS, iv (1897), 522-3. The note also reports that the young lady who Lord Hinchinbrooke loved was “Elizabeth Popham, daughter of Alexander Popham of Littlecote Wilts,” and that the couple did eventually marry.

¹⁵A note reports that “the allusion is unmistakably to Dennis.”

papers, which merely print what the town is already saying—Bickerstaff notes that Lord Hinchinbrooke’s story “is very much lamented” (Tatler 1, 1: 17)—are populist in a sense: gossip is certainly a popular pastime, and the stories told are represented as public knowledge. But Bickerstaff’s goal is to reproach the subjects of the town’s gossip for their public behavior, so that he represents publicity as an occasion for shame rather than a positive good. Although the Tatler continues to include coded references to real people and events, later allusions are used to illustrate general truths or in reference to subjects of national interest, rather than merely to shame private individuals for unseemly public behavior. For instance, Martin Powell, the Bath puppeteer,¹⁶ is initially offered only as an example of the public’s poor taste in entertainment and later becomes a coded reference to a quarrel between “Steele’s friend Benjamin Hoadly” (Tatler 44, 1:316 n) and the Bishop of Exeter over the doctrine of passive obedience. Bickerstaff represents the controversy as a subject of public interest; as the journal evolves, the Tatler’s pseudonymous references to living persons, like the eidolon himself, evolve from simple masks to broader and more significant references to the subjects and nature of the public sphere.

The real problem behind Bickerstaff’s call for submissions is therefore less a simple lack of content—news and gossip being eternal—than of striving for a sustainable tone and appropriate content that would interest readers and promote

¹⁶See Tatlers 16, 44, 45, 50, and 77 (1:134, 316, 322, 363-364, 356-359, 528).

public welfare. Hence, in calling for assistance, Bickerstaff requests submissions of “any . . . Subject within the Rules by which I have proposed to walk” (Tatler 7, 1:63). If understood as a reference to the first Tatler’s articulated intent to put some ideas into the news-reading public’s head, this request can only be read ironically: the superior, Swiftian Bickerstaff would hardly appeal in earnest to readers’ advice. The more moderate Tatler Bickerstaff, however, is clearly in earnest. Having acknowledged that he finds it impossible to maintain his original mocking tone, admitted the wisdom of common men, and even offered a partial apology to Partridge, this Bickerstaff presents himself on the whole as more sincere and less combative than his original.

As the Tatler’s subsequent history amply demonstrates, readers took Bickerstaff’s appeal for material at face value. Letters became one of the journal’s most important features, so much so that collections of unprinted letters to the Tatler were published as separate volumes in 1725 and, over two hundred years later, in 1959.¹⁷ Readers’ letters were printed alongside Steele’s own material, or as prompts to essays composed in response to them, and occasionally as stand-alone papers. The inclusion of (unsigned) letters by known authors like Eustace Budgell, Alexander Pope, and Swift blurs the line between correspondents and contributors, as does the fact that Steele often heavily edited or even rewrote

¹⁷ Charles Lillie, ed., Original and Genuine Letters Sent to the Tatler and Spectator During the Time those Works were Publishing. None of which have been before Printed (London, 1725); Richmond P. Bond, ed., New Letters to the Tatler and Spectator (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1959).

letters as well as inventing them, so that it is sometimes impossible to tell if a given “letter” is real or simply a device. By soliciting letters, including reader submissions as substantive contributions, and inserting his own fictionalized correspondence, Steele inaugurates a qualitatively different kind of relationship between author and reader than is promised by the tone of the first Tatler. Over time, Bickerstaff presents himself as his readers’ companion rather than their judge, and involves his audience in the Tatler’s production.

Indeed, Bickerstaff not only includes and responds to letters; he actively shapes his journal and persona in conformity to reader suggestions and complaints. The correspondence between Bickerstaff and a reader signing himself “A. J.,” published five months into the Tatler’s term, results in a conscious shift of the Tatler’s tone and method. A. J.’s first letter protests that its author is the undeserving object of an earlier allusion in the paper, and warns Bickerstaff that the damage done by injuring a man’s reputation compares to (social) murder:

. . . What Caution is necessary in handling the Reputation of a Man, whose well-being in this Life perhaps entirely depends on preserving it from any Wound, which once there receiv’d, too often becomes fatal and incurable? . . . this is from your having very lately glanc’d at a Man, under a Character, that were he conscious to deserve, he would be the first to rid the World of himself; and would be more justifiable in it to all Sorts of Men, than you in your committing such a Violence on his reputation. . . . (Tatler 71, 1:490-

491)

Although Bickerstaff protests that he does not know who A. J. is, and certainly intends no slander against him, he agrees that “there is something very terrible in unjustly attacking Men in a Way that may prejudice their Honour or Fortune. . . . giving Disturbance,” he continues, “to Men of virtuous Characters, has so sincerely troubled me, that I will break from this Satyrical Vein” (Tatler 71, 1:491-492). To A. J.’s query, “what Reputation [reparation?] you think ought to be made the Person so injur’d, admitting you stood in his Place,” Steele promises, that if A. J. can explain how Bickerstaff has inadvertently wounded “any good Man,” he will “acknowledge the Offense in as open a Manner as the Press can do it, and lay down this Paper for ever” (Tatler 71, 1:491) Though clearly rhetorical, the offer is also sincere; the Tatler’s relationship with its readers requires their trust. Bickerstaff’s character, the social code he promotes and, above all, the journal’s reliance on readers and their letters require openness and candor, in both the modern senses of the word: Bickerstaff’s mind must be unbiased, and his paper must represent a conversational volubility. A. J.’s complaint implies that Bickerstaff has violated an emerging social code, the operating presumption of the public sphere that public individuals engage with one another openly and according to the dictates of reasoned debate. Bickerstaff’s response evidences his desire to conform to this code in a double sense: he expresses concern at having violated it, even as his printing of A. J.’s letter and his response demonstrates his

journal's ability to formally embody it.

The difficulties inherent in traditional pseudonymous satire lie behind this entire exchange. Masking a subject's name enables deniability, while generalizing the target—as contemporary theories claimed satire properly should do—broadens a satire into a form of social criticism. But satire that effectively masks its subject contains the potential for innocent readers to attribute the satire to themselves. For popular journals, the publicity and wide circulation of printed accusations (or implications) carries the potential to injure a mistaken object's reputation beyond his ability to recover it, while the material facts of periodical publication require a broad public audience that includes readers who are unlikely to be familiar with or much care about the gossip of “the town.” This danger is all the more acute if the readers (and mistaken subjects) of the journal are private citizens whose public invisibility makes it all the more difficult to counteract slanderous rumors—as they must be in order for a thrice-weekly publication to succeed. A. J. points out to Steele that he is wielding a powerful tool against which his readers have inadequate defenses. The *Tatler* requires a wide circulation supported by a sense of the journal as socially important, but it cannot afford to alienate its readers. Lamenting the fact that, “when the Modesty of some is as excessive as the Vanity of others,” there is no “Defence . . . against Misinterpretation,” Bickerstaff proposes as a solution the goal of “raising Merit from its Obscurity, celebrating Virtue in its Distress, and attacking Vice by no

other Method, but setting Innocence in a proper Light” (Tatler 71, 1:492). Given a choice between maintaining the tradition of pseudonymous satire and retaining a broad and more truly public audience that includes readers who might not automatically recognize the intended target of satire or gossip, the Tatler embraces publicness, promising to raise the both the tone and the profile of a generalized and meritorious public. Publishing readers’ letters attains a significance beyond merely providing material for a day’s lucubrations: it provides a forum for the obscure to attain public notice, and implicitly associates modesty with meritoriousness.

One week later, the Tatler overtly acknowledges the power of readers to shape the published work, implicitly demonstrating the collective nature of the public sphere. Introducing A. J.’s response to his remarks on the earlier letter, Bickerstaff announces that “the following Letter has given me a new Sense of the Nature of my Writings” (Tatler 74, 1:508). A. J. and Bickerstaff exchange politenesses in the manner of equals: Steele declares that he “shall always have Respect for [A. J.’s] Admonition, and desire the Continuance of it,” while A. J. thanks Bickerstaff “for the Compliment made me of my seeming Sense and Worth” (Tatler 74, 1:509). The journal provides a textual space where strangers can engage one another with goodwill and respect: A. J.’s identity is still unknown to Steele, who does “not yet understand what good Man he thinks I have injur’d” (Tatler 74, 1:508), while A. J. distinguishes between Steele’s person and his

persona Bickerstaff by declaring that “were you the only Person would suffer by the Tatler’s discontinuance, I have Malice enough to punish you in the Manner you prescribe; but I am not so great an Enemy to the Town or my own Pleasures, as to wish it. . . . supposing you mean all your Lucubrations should tend to the Good of Mankind” (Tatler 74, 1:509). Steele the writer has offended, and privately deserves punishment; but Bickerstaff the eidolon benefits the public, and should be spared. The distinction offers Steele a new understanding of the essay periodical’s role, the realization that it can serve as a space in which authors and readers can collectively create a more civil society and reform the public that they themselves make up. Print allows the goal of educating readers to be extended to allow readers to educate the writer, because through their disembodied correspondence they meet on a relatively equal footing, as authors.

A. J.’s second letter presents the Tatler and, through publication, other readers with a thoughtful analysis of the power of that publication and its consequences for both individual men and society as a whole. He explains that using the power of social disapproval to enforce social norms contains the potential to frustrate the goal of reforming society because exposing a man to “publick Detection” may place him beyond hope of redemption. Citing “that celebrated Author of The whole Duty of Man,” he summarizes his argument thus: “When [a man] is fallen under that Infamy he [naturally] fear’d, he will then be apt to discard all Caution, and to think he owes himself the utmost Pleasures of

Vice; as the Price of his Reputation” (Tatler 74, 1:509-510). For this reason, a public forum will better serve the public interest “by setting Innocence in a proper Light” than by compromising people’s reputations and thereby “putting Mankind beyond the Power of retrieving themselves” (Tatler 74, 1:510). By taking the Tatler’s stated goal of reforming society at face value, A. J. grants the journal a more important role than it has heretofore realized: Steele’s originally ironic claim to teach his readers what to think becomes a serious possibility. In Swift’s Bickerstaff Papers, the reader who takes the work seriously (Partridge) is exposed as a gullible fool; in contrast, the serious-minded reader of the Tatler is granted the power to improve the text itself, and through it the public. By taking the Tatler seriously, A. J. identifies the basis of the essay periodical’s cultural significance, its constitutive public role.

A final consequence of the A. J. correspondence is that, by becoming aware of the problem of readers taking satire upon themselves, the Tatler becomes even more aware of the need to generalize its audience, to attack abstractions rather than individuals. Invoking the commonplace that satire lashes the vice, not the individual, A. J. reminds Bickerstaff to “keep to the true Spirit of Satyr, without descending to rake into Characters,” and presents himself not only as the individual who has mistakenly taken offense at an earlier paper, but also as the spokesperson for the abstracted audience, conflating “the Town” with “my own Pleasures” (Tatler 74, 1:509). A. J. clearly distinguishes between private identity

and the abstraction of public reputation—which is nonetheless real, and connected to the private individual closely enough that damaging the one harms the other. Like Bickerstaff himself, the public reader is a kind of eidolon, the shadow of a living person: A. J.'s particular clarity comes in part from his recognition that his own personal complaint contains general truths about the Tatler's relation to its audience, that he represents the average public reader, a realization that Bickerstaff also arrives at.

The particulars of the A. J. correspondence illuminate the significance of Bickerstaff's own character. Just as A. J.'s anonymity allows both Bickerstaff and A. J. himself to transform the Tatler's pages into a formal representation of the public sphere by representing A. J. as a typical reader who can, through print, engage in reasoned, equal debate with Steele and become himself an author, Bickerstaff's eidolonic malleability allows Steele to transform him from an astrologer into the abstract representation of the early eighteenth-century Englishman. Bickerstaff's self-portrait, as gradually drawn in the journal's pages, presents the reader with the image of a gentleman of modest but respectable means, actively engaged with the social life of middle-class London. In many respects, he is an idealized version of his creator: like Steele, Bickerstaff is university educated, has seen military service, frequents the major London coffee-shops, possesses personal connections to the London theater, disapproves of

gambling and duelling, and lives at a respectable but not fashionable address.¹⁸

Unlike Steele, Bickerstaff enjoys freedom from the pressures of marriage and debt; though “of a Complexion truly amorous” (Tatler 10, 1:88),¹⁹ he is by his own account “past [his] Grand Climacterick, being 64 Years of Age” (Tatler 59, 1:410) and therefore “is of no Sex” with regard to women (Tatler 83, 2:30). Where Steele’s appetite for luxuries he could not afford contributed to his problems with debt, Bickerstaff’s tastes conform themselves to his situation. At home, he “daily live[s] in a very comfortable Affluence of Wine, Stale Beer, Hungary Water, Beef, Books and Marrow-Bones” sent to him by readers and advertisers (Tatler 162, 2:402). While Steele upset his wife by dining out often with friends (Connely, Sir Richard Steele, 130-131), Bickerstaff, horrified by the gluttony he sees around him at a friend’s luxurious table, reports that “I took my Leave, that I might finish my Dinner at my own House: For as I in every Thing love what is simple and natural,

¹⁸Bickerstaff’s university and military careers are described in Tatler 89 (2:61); he discusses the state of London theater in Tatlers 1, 15, 99, 184 and 193 (1:18-20, 129-130; 2:108-109; 3:6, 41-42) and mentions his “Friend Mr. Thomas D’Urfey” in Tatlers 1 and 11 (1:20, 97) and his “Friend, Mr. Hart” in Tatlers 99 and 138 (2:108, 293); on gambling, see Tatlers 12, 13, 15, 56, 57, 59, 60, 62, 65, 66, 68, 70, 71, 73, and 76 (1: 104, 115, 128-129, 390-393, 396-398, 406, 412-415, 426-428, 450-452, 461, 470-475, 488-489, 490, 495, 503-504, 522); on duelling, Tatlers 25-29, 31, 39, 45, 78, 93, 253, and 265 (1:192-195, 203-205, 205-206, 211-216, 217-219, 229-231, 281-287, 323, 529-533; 2: 82-83; 3:285-286, 341-342). Bickerstaff lives in Sheer Lane (Tatler 86, 2:45); a note reports that “according to Strype’s Survey of London (book iv) the upper part ‘hath good old buildings, well inhabited; but the lower part is very narrow and more ordinary.’” Steele himself lived in Bond Street, which he considered “plaguey dear” (Willard Connely, Sir Richard Steele [New York: Scribner, 1934], 140).

¹⁹As a young man, Steele famously fathered a natural daughter by Elizabeth Tonson, the niece and sister, respectively, of Jacob Tonson the elder, who later published Steele’s The Christian Hero, and Jacob Tonson the younger, his uncle’s partner who eventually took over the role of Steele’s main publisher (Connely 50). See also Calhoun Winton, Captain Steele: The Early Career of Richard Steele (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1964), 49, 56.

so particularly in my Food” (Tatler 148, 2:339). Bickerstaff is able to live comfortably and cheerfully from the proceeds of his journal, while Steele’s debts grew much faster than his profits.²⁰ In short, Bickerstaff reflects Steele’s more admirable qualities while shedding those weaknesses that were most vulnerable to public disapproval.

But Bickerstaff is not merely a flattering self-portrait. He reflects not only Steele’s personality but a sort of national average, exemplifying a particular set of contemporary standards and stereotypes and therefore implicitly promoting the ideological framework that helped shape Steele himself. In characterizing Bickerstaff, Steele uses those aspects of his character that he perceives as most representative and improves the areas of his life that fail to live up to his ideals; the Tatler was successful and influential because Steele’s vision of the world reflected popular beliefs as well as helping to shape them. Bickerstaff’s age, gender, and unmarried state represent wisdom and a certain distance from worldly cares; his enjoyment of coffeehouses and plays involves him in the daily life of fashionable London but his tastes in food and entertainment mark him as not too fashionable; and his modest income and tastes make him independent without elevating him into the realm of the powerful. As representative everyman, he is the head of a family with roots in nearly every division of national life. His lineage stems from a “Family, which, for its Antiquity and Number, may challenge

²⁰For details of Steele’s money problems during the Tatler’s duration, see Connely, Sir Richard Steele, 151, 159-63, 169-74, and 178.

any in Great-Britain,” with branches that spread across the various professions and categories of British society from “Prize-fighters [and] Deer-stealers” to “Courtiers,” “Lawyers, Attorneys, Serjeants, and Baliffs,” as well as poets, merchants, soldiers, a “Chimney-Sweeper” and “a Wine-Cooper.” The “Staffs” populate Britain from Wales to Kent, and are linked with British history from “the murder of Thomas a Becket” to, in an inspired and memorable stroke, “Harry IV’s Time” in the person of Shakespeare’s Falstaff, claimed as a relative (Tatler 11, 1:99-102). His family tree is both representative and, again, transparently fictional; Bickerstaff is descended not only from Englishmen of all walks of life but also from a national literary tradition. The combination invites readers to imagine the Tatler as a textual realization of the nation itself, placing it at the center of national discourse and emphasizing the communal and rhetorical nature of the public sphere. Steele’s presentation of this genealogy highlights the cooperative process of constructing textual meaning: he points out that Bickerstaff’s pedigree was submitted by a reader and presents it unaltered, announcing, “I shall give you my Genealogy, as a Kinsman of ours has sent it me. . . . to avoid Mistakes, I shall give you my Cousin’s Letter verbatim, without altering a Syllable” (Tatler 11, 1:98-99).²¹ It is not Steele who defines Bickerstaff as representative, but the English public itself. As head of a family that includes

²¹The genealogy’s author was Heneage Twysden, who tragically died at Malplaquet some months after it was published (Tatler 11, 1:99 n). His pedigree of Bickerstaff therefore demonstrates the eidolon’s power to transform physical life into textual immortality in a particularly poignant way.

his audience, Bickerstaff represents the accumulated cultural capital not only of his extensive relations but also of the Tatler's readers: he is both an idealized private citizen and the prototypical public man.

The essay periodical's ability to represent pluralism by blending authorial innovation with audience response eventually enables the genre to overcome the Tatler's primary flaw, Steele's tendency to violate his eidolon's representative transparency with his own politics. His partisanship was frequently objected to, but significantly, even Tory journals objected not only to the content of the Tatler's political papers but also to the dissonance between these pieces and Bickerstaff's characteristic role. When Steele was briefly imprisoned for debt in 1710, A Condoling Letter to the Tatler concluded, "I . . . must humbly recommend it to him, [Bickerstaff] as he is Censor of Great-Britain, whether justly or assum'd, to give us some of the Reproaches due to that Man, who . . . goes to Jail for Debt";²² by calling on Bickerstaff to censure Steele, the unknown critic implicitly acknowledges the eidolon's mandate and reputation for impartiality. Similarly, the Examiner's objection to the Tatler's political content praises Bickerstaff while impugning Steele. Beginning by noting the similarity of the Tatler's and the Gazette's news, the paper complains that the Tatler colors its news with partisanship; but goes on to allow that

After all, Isaac . . . I wou'd not have you take me for your Enemy. . . . I

²²Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom, eds. Addison and Steele: The Critical Heritage. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 221.

assure you, I have been very well entertain'd with several of your papers; and have given them their just Commendation to many of my Ingenious and Learned, but I must own, Monarchical Friends. . . . My advice to you is only this, That you wou'd still appear in your proper Sphere; and not quit a Character which has giv'n you some Credit. . . . you mistake your Talent, whenever you meddle with Matters of State. (Bloom and Bloom, Critical Heritage, 211)

By specifically referring to the Gazette in order to criticize the Tatler's political content, the Examiner tacitly attributes the partisanship to Steele rather than Bickerstaff, a distinction reinforced by the subsequent advice to retain Bickerstaff's character. The Examiner's acknowledgment that he enjoys the Tatler and praises it to his Tory friends calls attention to the Tatler's inclusive appeal; like A. J., he does not wish for the journal to end, but only that it would live up to the expectations it has engendered. Politics in the Tatler are perceived as a problem because readers expect Bickerstaff, not Steele, to represent collectivity.²³

The Tatler's political content violates Bickerstaff's own statement of his intentions and aims and the nature of the essay periodical itself. Shortly before the Examiner paper appears, Bickerstaff reports that he has "of late received many Epistles, wherein the Writers treat me as a mercenary Person, for some late

²³Like Steele's c contemporaries, modern critics perceive the Tatler's political content as a flaw. See for example Winton, Captain Steele, 122; R. P. Bond, Tatler, 70; Milic, "Tone in Steele's Tatler," 33-45; and Claude Rawson, Satire and Sentiment 1660-1830 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 201.

Hints concerning Matters which they think I should not have touch'd upon but for sordid Considerations"; he denies the charge, but promises that, "the Stage and State-Affairs being so much canvassed by Parties and Factions, I shall for some time hereafter take Leave of Subjects which relate to either of them" (Tatler 193, 3: 41-43), and in the final Tatler Steele confesses that "what I find is the least excusable Part of all this Work is, That I have, in some Places in it, touched upon Matters which concern both the Church and State. . . . But Politicks apart, I must confess, it has been a most exquisite Pleasure to me" (Tatler 272, 3:364). By acknowledging the letters of complaint he has received and promising to forego politics, and by concluding in the end that the Tatler's political content mars the work as a whole, Steele acknowledges the validity of the Examiner's criticism. The proper goal of the Tatler specifically and essay periodicals in general is to "recommend Truth, Innocence, Honour, and Virtue, as the chief Ornaments of Life," not to engage in political debate. Indeed, the Tatler generally represents political arguments as divisive, inimical to public spirit: in addition to the opening satire against the public-mindedness of coffeehouse politicians, other numbers invite "all Persons who are willing to encourage so publick-spirited a Project . . . to apprehend forthwith any Politician whom they shall catch raving in a Coffee-house" (Tatler 125, 2:237) or announce that "the Model of the intended Bedlam is now finished. . . . Young politicians . . . are received without Fees or Examination" (Tatler 138, 2:297). Partisanship undermines the goal of promoting collective

virtue and public-mindedness, and Steele's occasional inability to moderate his political opinions undermines Bickerstaff's character as a paradigmatic public figure.

And yet, the standard of neutrality that Bickerstaff promotes is not in fact politically neutral. In acknowledging that his partisanship is a blot on the Tatler, Steele explains "That the Points I alluded to are such as concerned every Christian and Freeholder in England; and I could not be cold enough to conceal my Opinion on Subjects which related to either of those Characters" (Tatler 272, 3:364). He frames his political opinions as a matter, not of partisanship, but of patriotism, implying that these topics concern everyone, or ought to, and that voicing one's opinion connotes manly rather than excessive warmth. In fact, the Tatler's political content, including especially Steele's acknowledgment of the objections to it, institutes the ideological presupposition that public discussion is vital to a healthy political system. By including "readers in literary production," the Tatler makes "them jointly responsible for literary meaning," becoming "a literary manifestation of the public sphere," a position that successfully articulates "political issues at a level of generality higher than would identify them as political."²⁴ Bickerstaff's characterization effectively normalizes certain

²⁴Charles A. Knight, "The Spectator's Generalizing Discourse," Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism 16, no. 1 (1993): 55, 52-53. Knight's comments refer to the Spectator, not the Tatler, and he believes that "the indirection of The Spectator seems more a matter of conscious political strategy than of Addison's moderate personality" (55); I concur. One consequence of my argument, that Steele's realization that the Tatler's partisanship undermined Bickerstaff's ability to "occupy a centrist position" (52) was a primary reason why the Tatler ceased publication, is the conclusion that this lesson deeply influenced the Spectator's more moderate tone. In effect, the

ideological premises as national verities: most importantly, the belief in public debate as a constitutive part of a healthy society and the corollary opinion that participation in public discussion—not least by becoming an active reader of newspapers and magazines—is a public duty.

Hence the formal elements enabled by periodicity, including reader's letters, solicited contributions, and multiple authorship, are not merely incidental to the Tatler; they are vital aspects of its material success and cultural influence. While individual essays promote certain beliefs and behaviors, collectively they advance a complex ideology that “binds together a particular model of social life which includes a notion of economics, a notion of manners, and a notion of social bonds.” The world is represented as a place of exchange in which the “individual's social value . . . fluctuates according to the value imposed on him by others.”²⁵ The eidolon's transparent fictionality and flexibility, which allow it to respond to and be shaped by author and audience over time, introduce a new concept of authorship, one uniquely suited to the emerging public sphere.

Nonetheless, the Tatler's partisanship and the criticism it evoked contributed to the journal's demise, and Steele's next project, the Spectator, reflects the lessons learned in writing the Tatler. Far less obviously partisan, the Spectator also achieves a more accomplished unity and sense of authorial control.

experience of writing the Tatler taught Steele and Addison that they did not need to be overtly partisan, since their political ideology was implicit in the genre's form.

²⁵Michael G. Ketcham, Transparent Designs: Reading, Performance, and Form in the Spectator Papers (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1985), 169.

Steele's and Addison's second journal represents the public sphere with a club of characters, rather than inviting the public to help shape its central figure, and the eidolon himself silently observes, rather than actively participating in, the public sphere. Where Bickerstaff reflected his audience and was "cast in their image, Mr. Spectator, by contrast depicts himself . . . as different from his audience in one central respect. He is preternaturally private. . . . With the shift in eidolon . . . the" journal's conception of its "audience alters too," from representing it as "a collective" to addressing them as separate "individuals."²⁶ Although these changes problematize the Tatler's achievements, when read (as it must be) in the context of the earlier journal, the Spectator's more controlled aspect does not undermine the fundamental characteristics of publicity and author/audience exchange: instead, the Spectator takes those qualities for granted.

The general belief that the Spectator is the better paper depends in part on the later journal's "self-containment" (Sherman, Telling Time, 134), a shift that demonstrates Steele's and Addison's successful internalization of the lessons learned from the earlier journal. So, for instance, instead of Bickerstaff's contributed family tree, Mr. Spectator offers his own interpretation of his origins: "There runs a Story in the Family, that when my Mother was gone with Child of

²⁶Stuart Sherman, Telling Time: Clocks, Diaries, and English Diurnal Form, 1660-1785 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 113. See also Knight, "Generalizing Discourse," 44-57; Albert Furtwangler, "The Making of Mr. Spectator," Modern Language Quarterly 38 (1977): 211-39; Ralph A. Nablow, The Addisonian Tradition in France: Passions and Objectivity in Social Observation (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990), 44-74; and Michael G. Ketcham, Transparent Designs: Reading, Performance, and Form in the Spectator Papers (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1985), 12-17.

me about three Months, she dreamt that she was brought to Bed of a Judge . . . I am not so vain as to think it presaged any Dignity that I should arrive at in my future Life, though that was the Interpretation which the Neighbourhood put upon it.”²⁷ The symbolic difference between the public record of a family tree and the privacy of a mother’s dream marks Mr. Spectator as removed from the public sphere rather than actively engaged in it, as does his repudiation of the neighborhood’s interpretation of the dream. But the reader is expected to recognize that in this case the neighbors judged correctly, implicitly reasserting the power of public opinion to transform private experience into reality. As an adult, Mr. Spectator is “frequently seen in most publick Places,” but believes “there are not above half a dozen of my select Friends that know me. . . . Thus I live in the World, rather as a Spectator of Mankind, than as one of the Species.” Unlike Bickerstaff, Mr. Spectator keeps his own counsel, and his project in publication is not to engage with the public but rather to communicate the “useful Discoveries which I have made . . . for the Benefit of my Contemporaries” (Spectator 1, 1:3-5). Readers are conceived of as passive auditors, rather than active participants in the paper’s construction: unlike Bickerstaff, Mr. Spectator does not depend on them to keep him alive.

Nonetheless, the Spectator does solicit letters, though as a matter of course rather than a necessary contribution to its survival: “those who have a mind to

²⁷Spectator 1, in The Spectator, ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 1:2. Subsequent references cite issue number along with volume and page of this edition.

correspond with me, may direct their letters To the Spectator, at Mr. Buckley's in Little Britain.”²⁸ Like Bickerstaff, Mr. Spectator depends on his readers to help provide material for the journal's daily papers, though he takes these submissions for granted: he and his fellow club-men, “have appointed a Committee . . . for the Inspection of all such Papers as may contribute to the Advancement of the Publick Weal” (Spectator 1, 1:6). The device of the club seemingly invokes a private, rather than public sense of community. But the club is dedicated to public service rather than seclusion; it takes public responsibility seriously. In the end, the distinction is one of method, rather than goal. The Spectator Club's members—Sir Roger de Coverly, the Tory country squire; Will Honeycomb, a fashionable beau; the Templar, a reluctant law student and enthusiastic theater-goer; Sir Andrew Freeport, “a Merchant of great Eminence in the City of London” (Spectator 2, 1:10); and Captain Sentry, a retired soldier, and a sober-minded clergyman, who occasionally introduces some of the papers on morality and religion—are, roughly speaking, supposed to represent a cross-section of the British public, while Mr. Spectator himself has been taken for “a Merchant upon the Exchange . . . a Jew in the Assembly of Stock-Jobbers. . . . a Speculative Statesman, Soldier, Merchant and Artizan” and is “very well versed in the Theory of an Husband, or a Father” (Spectator 1, 1:4-5). The journal's ideological

²⁸It is impossible to resist pointing out the pleasing appropriateness of the location of Samuel Buckley's printshop in the context of the present argument; the street-name “Little Britain” is especially suitable given that Buckley was also the printer of the Daily Courant, England's first daily newspaper.

presuppositions and the social roles it emphasizes are the same as the Tatler's, and both contemporaries and critics read it as a continuation of the earlier journal, with modifications. By establishing the essay periodical as a formal realization of the public sphere, the Tatler enables the Spectator to take for granted the eidolon, readers' letters and the resulting sense of public investment in the journal's success: Mr. Spectator can describe himself as remote from his reading public, but they welcome him with open arms.

As a demonstration of the Tatler's successful creation of a sense of agency on the part of the reading public, the Spectator arrived in a crowd of competitors, as John Gay reports in The Present State of Wit. Although he declares also that "those are at present, become wholly invisible, and quite swallow'd up in the Blaze of the SPECTATOR,"²⁹ the throng of imitators inspired by the Tatler demonstrates that some of its readers had reimagined themselves as a public so thoroughly as to embark themselves upon publication. The Spectator itself notes the transformation, making it the subject of one of its later essays:

the Itch of Writing . . . when it is once got into the Blood, seldom comes out of it. The British Nation is very much afflicted with this Malady. . . . But . . . there is no Species of Scriblers more offensive, and more incurable, than your Periodical Writers, whose Works return upon the Publick on certain Days and at stated times. We have not the Consolation in the

²⁹John Gay, The Present State of Wit, in Essays on Wit, introduction by Donald F. Bond (1711; reprint, n.p.: Augustan Reprint Society, 1947), 5.

Perusal of these Authors . . . that we are sure if we have but Patience we may come to the End of their Labours. . . . our Progress through that kind of Writers I am now speaking of is never at an End. One Day makes work for another, we do not know when to promise our selves Rest. (Spectator 582, 4:590-591)

This paper is not ironic, as one might expect. Rather than a self-conscious satire on journal publication in the style of Bickerstaff, it offers a self-assured condemnation of the inferiority of the competition. Steele and Addison no longer need fear journalistic death. Essay periodicals now beget more essay periodicals; the species may evolve, but as far as the Spectator can see, these journals and the writing public that they support need not fear extinction.

Chapter 3

“What Every True English Family Ought to Be”: Metaphors of Generic Resemblance

Shortly after the Tatler ended and the Spectator began, John Gay published The Present State of Wit, a valuable window onto the scene of the essay periodical's emergence. According to Gay, “The Expiration of Bickerstaff's Lucubrations . . . immediately produc'd whole Swarms of little Satyrical Scriblers”¹ including the Female Tatler, the Tatling Harlot and the Whisperer, to name just three titles among many. These imitators' titles and Gay's comment that the Tatler “set all our Wits and Men of Letters upon a new way of Thinking, of which they had little or no Notion before” demonstrate that the Tatler caused a revolution in the world of London journalism. Twentieth-century studies of the essay periodical focus on the Tatler and Spectator (and occasionally the Guardian) as the earliest examples of the genre, but there were many others. Although Gay asserts that “we cannot yet say that any of them have come up to the Beauties of the Original,” he also admits that “we may venture to affirm, that every one of them Writes and Thinks much more justly than they did some time since” (Gay, Wit, 4). For today's critics, this means that Steele's and Addison's voices, however dominant, should not drown out the babble and chitchat of the gatecrashers that surrounded their tête-à-tête, for these very gatecrashers

¹John Gay, The Present State of Wit, in Essays on Wit, introduction by Donald F. Bond (1711; reprint, n.p.: Augustan Reprint Society, 1947), 5.

transformed a conversation into a party. The imitators developed the Tatler's singular example into a genre. Without them, Steele's journals might have become at best interesting oddities: anomalies in the early days of newspapers, perhaps, or minor unconnected essays, some better than others, that give a quaint feeling of the minutiae of their age. Through trial and error, the (mostly) unknown and unheralded writers who crowded his footsteps established the parameters of the essay periodical and in the process made it, not merely incidental to, but representative of its age.

As Gay's substitution of Bickerstaff's name for the Tatler's title indicates, the Tatler's appeal depends heavily on the eidolon that gives it a personal and consistent voice, unifying its diverse material and providing a sense of narrative consistency over time. An eidolon allows a journal to discuss particularities in a way that appeals to the casual reader, who may not herself frequent coffeehouses, attend the theater, or care who Miss Smith is going to marry, but who does care to hear what Isaac Bickerstaff, Mr. Spectator, or Mrs. Crackenthope—characters she has come to know—has to say about those things. As periodical ephemera, essay journals provide the kind of contingent, historically-specific detail that is particularly valuable to historians; the eidolon interprets those details and mediates the reader's understanding of them, thereby rendering them literary. The eidolon filters the details of everyday life through a conscious mind and gives them meaning and weight by investing them with human interest. At the same time, the

eidolon oscillates between authorial identity and anonymity, generating a resonance that allows particular essay periodicals to reflect distinctive voices and interests even to the point of enabling multiple writers to contribute to the same journal while at the same time establishing a common tone—conversational, amiable, perspicuous—that integrates individual papers under the same title and pervades the genre as a whole.

The Tatler's imitators were therefore faced with the need to imitate more than just the Tatler's content. Recognizing Isaac Bickerstaff's importance, they created eidolons of their own, and in the process indirectly tested and expanded the limits of the public sphere by substituting different personae as its constitutive private individuals. If the essay periodical is a textual version of the public sphere, then the introduction of different kinds of eidolons constitutes a series of experiments with the form not only of a literary genre but of society itself. Indeed, the imitators' very existence complicates the Tatler's representative status: from a self-contained model of the public sphere in action they create a system of interconnected journals that both as individual titles and collectively, as a genre, present structural patterns of heteroglossic dialogue that model and maintain the emerging public sphere. Both the specific attributes of the imitators' eidolons and the ways they construct their relationships to the Tatler and each other must therefore be taken into account in our understandings of the genre of the essay periodical and the formation and possibilities of the public

sphere.

These early imitators draw their eidolons from the pages of the Tatler itself. Bickerstaff's genealogy in Tatler 11 suggests the device, as do the characters of Jenny Distaff and Humphrey Wagstaff (Swift's pseudonym) and Steele's habit of introducing correspondents as Bickerstaff's cousins and kinsmen. But because Bickerstaff also emphasizes his individuality, even idiosyncrasy, this borrowing is potentially problematic: the imitators attempt to navigate the paradox inherent in imitating uniqueness by positioning their eidolons as Bickerstaff's relations, who share his inborn tendency to wit, mild eccentricity, and literary talent but are nonetheless distinct individuals. Some merely borrow the suffix "-staff" for their eidolon's names, as representing branches of his family tree, while others also reflect the "tatter" theme in their titles. The device of relating an eidolon to Bickerstaff through the "family metaphor" would soon grow stale for readers and authors alike; as soon as 1711 (not coincidentally, following the Spectator's successful occupation of its predecessor's former domain), essay periodicals began to abandon the family metaphor. But for the Tatler's very first followers, the family metaphor provided a useful and humorous form of advertisement that implicitly recognized the eidolon's importance. Even after they no longer used the family metaphor, essay periodicals continued to benefit from its aftereffects—the foregrounding of the eidolon and the intuitive

understanding of the genre as descended from a single forebear.² Indeed, that even today it would seem quite natural to define “genre” as a literary “family” indicates how instinctively the first periodical essayists must have hit upon family as a shorthand way of indicating their generic affiliations.³

Along with the family metaphor, certain imitators also employed a second, related device, “rhetorical femininity.” Those that mimicked the Tatler’s title developed that paper’s association of gossip with the “fair sex”—“in honor of whom I have invented the Title of this Paper”⁴—by employing female eidolons, and in keeping with the contemporary shift from a hierarchical to a companionate family ideal, rhetorical femininity could imply the concept of family without explicitly invoking it, thereby avoiding some of its disadvantages. Although many imitators used both devices, it is significant that the Female Tatler, the most successful of the early imitators, did not employ the family metaphor, relying instead on a well-developed female eidolon to position itself as the Tatler’s equal,

²Or at least from twin brothers: the Tatler and the Spectator. Indeed, the received history—that the politically outspoken and occasionally abrasive Steele initiated a project that matured under the more composed Addison’s moderating touch and moralizing influence—presents a remarkably domestic image.

³See Christopher Flint, Family Fictions: Narrative and Domestic Relations in Britain, 1688-1798 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), which also discusses the family metaphor (although Flint does not use the term). Flint makes the important point that whether or not it reflected actual changes in family relations, the family metaphor did “refashion the symbolic and affective power of the family” (10).

⁴[Richard Steele], Tatler 1, in The Tatler, ed. Donald F. Bond, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 15. Subsequent references cite issue number along with volume and page of this edition.

rather than its subordinate. Thus, although the public sphere's exclusion of women is widely noted,⁵ female idolons—that is, rhetorical femininity—are instrumental to its construction. Like the idolon itself, rhetorical femininity may or may not reflect a writer's actual identity, an ambiguity that helps condition readers to understand private and public roles as connected, yet distinct. Significantly, Bickerstaff's genealogy itself suggests that the idolon's textual nature particularly enables female idolons: “one Thing is very remarkable of” the Falstaffian “Branch” of Bickerstaff's family tree, “and that is, there are just as many Women as Men in it” (Tatler 11, 1:100). The Tatler's feminized imitators develop this hint, demonstrating that rhetorical femininity draws particular attention to the nuanced dialectic between the private and public realms because placing a fictionalized woman at the center of the exchange highlights distinctions and continuities between the two categories: distinctions and continuities that would be less noted in the words of a man, and less tolerated from the pen of an actual woman.⁶ Hence, while the family metaphor was an important tool for

⁵See, for instance, Johanna Meehan, ed., Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse (New York: Routledge, 1995); Joan B. Landes, ed., Feminism, the Public and the Private (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Cliona O Gallchoir and Penny Warburton, eds., Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁶Of course, women as well as men could and did employ rhetorical femininity; individual women occasionally contributed to the public sphere, despite the fact that women as a class were excluded.

On male writers impersonating women's voices in other kinds of texts, see Anne Robinson Tyler, Male Novelists and Their Feminized Voices: Literary Masquerades (Troy, NY: Whitson Publishing, 1981) and Elizabeth D. Harvey, Ventriloquized Voices: Feminist Theory and English Renaissance Texts (London: Routledge, 1992).

periodical essayists in the process of genre formation, giving the Tatler's first followers a shorthand way to indicate their connection to their predecessor, rhetorical femininity proved to be a more broadly significant innovation, for it played a constitutive role in the essay periodical's contribution to the emergent bourgeois public sphere.

Among the very first attempts to establish the essay periodical as a genre, there were three counterfeit "Tatlers" that attempted to impersonate Bickerstaff himself; a Tory Tatler and a North Tatler; a "Tatler by 'Donald MacStaff of the North'"; a Tatling Harlot (1709); Titt for Tatt (1710) "by Jo. Partridge, Esq."; the Gazette A-la-mode: or Tom Brown's Ghost (1709), by "Sir Thomas Whipstaff and Dame Isabella his Wife"; the Whisperer (1709), "By Mrs. Jenny Distaff Half-Sister to Isaac Bickerstaff, Esq."; and the aforementioned Female Tatler (1709), itself really two journals competing under the same name.⁷ All except the latter employ some version of the family metaphor. This chapter examines five of these journals—two have male idolons; one has dual idolons, male and female; and two of the idolons are women—in order to describe the roles of the family metaphor and rhetorical femininity in establishing, respectively, the essay

⁷See Richmond P. Bond's introduction to Contemporaries of the Tatler and Spectator (Los Angeles: Augustan Reprint Society 47, 1954), iv-v. Bond gives no dates for the three Tatler impersonators; all were published in 1711. In addition to the titles listed, the century also saw a Political Tatler (1716), a Fairy Tatler (1722), the Tatler Reviv'd (1727-28) and Tatler Revived (1750) and, finally, a revival of the Tatler (1753-54).

The Spectator's title was somewhat less imitated: in addition to Addison's own 1714 continuation, the Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature lists only the Female Spectator (1744-1766), the Spectator (1753-54) and the New Spectator (1784-86), although titles like the Looker-On (1792-1794) and the Observer (1773-1790) obviously recall the Spectator.

periodical, the very concept of (national) literary genres, and the emerging ideology of the public sphere.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the two journals whose eidolons most closely follow the Tatler model display the most anxiety about their relative merit. In a loose application of the family metaphor, Titt for Tatt uses John Partridge for its eidolon, implying that his “Brother Bickerstaff”⁸ is himself the imitator. (Recall that Steele borrowed the Bickerstaff persona from Swift’s Bickerstaff Papers, in which Bickerstaff was the fictional challenger to an actual astrologer named John Partridge.) The real Partridge, of course, had been made a fool of, making him a rather poor candidate as an eidolon, although his central role in Bickerstaff’s origins makes him an obvious choice. Indeed, the fictional Partridge primarily serves to link his journal to Bickerstaff’s while distinguishing between the two—the primary function of the family metaphor. Titt for Tatt’s characterization of Partridge, however, unintentionally confirms the importance of some of Bickerstaff’s most important characteristics: good sense, courtesy towards women, and urbanity. Recalling the original subject of the Bickerstaff Papers, Partridge promises to draw his “Intelligence” from the stars rather than “a pitiful Coffee, or Chocolate-House, the frequent retiring Places of Men of little

⁸Titt for Tatt 1, in Contemporaries of the Tatler and Spectator, introduction by Richmond P. Bond (1709; reprint, Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1954). The papers are unpaginated; subsequent references cite issue number only. The CBEL lists John Partridge as the actual author of this journal; lacking supporting evidence, I am skeptical of this attribution and think it just as likely that he is only an eidolon.

Business, lazy People, or effeminate Beaus” (Titt for Tatt 1). Attempting to differentiate himself from his rival, he deliberately inverts one of the Tatler’s most important images: coffee-houses are places for aristocrats and others who lack business to retire to, rather than forums for the actively employed to inform themselves of necessary news. Moreover, these idle coffee-house patrons are marked as feminine and therefore gossipy, in contrast to the implied reasonableness and masculinity of astrologers and those who read them. His blanket dismissal of “effeminate Beaus,” however, hints at a possible disinterest in women’s concerns that runs counter to the emerging ideology of enlightened civility, in which good manners and the cultivation of good sense, especially with regard to women, were the mark of the gentleman. Hence, his position violates part of the essay periodical’s most appealing features, its claim to present a new code of manners that enables rational polite discourse between men and women.

Furthermore, Partridge’s criticism of coffee-house culture promotes “business” as a primarily private activity: businessmen, it is implied, are too busy pursuing their professions to actively enter the public scene. This sense of “business” allows Partridge to associate business with astrology, since after all, casting fortunes is his business. But Partridge’s focus on his rival causes him to miss his mark:⁹ unlike Bickerstaff’s own astrological speculations, Partridge’s are

⁹Walter Graham succinctly describes the effect of the Bickerstaff joke in this journal as “a boomerang.” (The Beginning of English Periodicals: A Study of Periodical Literature 1665-1715 [New York: Oxford UP, 1926], 75).

presented unironically, thereby undermining both his dependability and his humor as an eidolon. Even more importantly, the association between astrology and business is a troubled one: with the help of the original Bickerstaff Papers, belief in astrology was rejected by educated private gentlemen who believed in the “public good.” Those self-same men, the public sphere’s constitutive members, believed that private interests properly understood contributed to the public good—which unlike private interests, was everyone’s business. Partridge limits business to the idea of one’s trade and opposes his trade of astrology to the camaraderie and companionship of the coffee-house and (implicitly) rational private conversation between men and women. His sense of rivalry with the Tatler compels him to build a wall between the private and the public spheres rather than mapping out the pathways between the two.

Like Titt for Tatt, the Gazette distinguishes its audience from the coffeehouse politicians. In the Gazette’s case, however, this sense of its audience may come more from an aggrieved denial of access to the usual methods of circulation: in his third number, the Gazette’s author complains that “The Coffee-Houses are brib’d already to be our Enemies, and therefore we shall . . . throw this Paper at the mercy of the Critical Reader.”¹⁰ Presumably coffeehouse proprietors, who had to pay for their journal subscriptions, were selective about

¹⁰Gazette A-la-mode: or, Tom Brown’s Ghost 3, in Contemporaries of the Tatler and Spectator, introduction by Richmond P. Bond (1709; reprint, Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1954). The papers are unpaginated; subsequent references cite issue number only.

their choices. In any case, the Gazette's appeal to the reader, however desperate, demonstrates a better grasp of the Tatler's method than Titt for Tatt's: the journal's quarrel is with the way the coffeehouses are run, rather than with the identities of their patrons. Its appeal to the "critical" faculties of its audience implies a belief in the liberalism that underlies the ideology of the public sphere. Like Steele, the Gazette's author creates a relationship with his reader that implicitly contrasts their shared common sense and "Natural Wit" with the "Sophistry" of politics and fashionable life, promising that "The Reader will never find himself disappointed in this Paper, when the Author does ingeniously undeceive him . . . that he is a perfect enemy to Modern Wit" (Gazette 1). Unlike Partridge, he divides people according to their actions rather than their social standing, a distinction that promotes a particular version of the public rather than undermining publicness altogether. Hence, he reflects:

I cannot forbear smiling to think I have nothing to do with News and State Affairs . . . I have so [sic] many Windmills in my Head ever to think of establishing Kingdoms and Commonwealths, tho' I can Build Castles in the Air. (Gazette 5)

Passages like these demonstrate the Gazette's grasp of the Tatler's tone and method, thereby promoting also the ideology that underlies form. Like its forebear, it combines self-deprecating humor with social commentary in a manner that constructs consensus between author and audience, creating a sense of the

public that emphasizes the universality of reason and the reasonableness of universality.

Despite its intuitive grasp of the Tatler style, however, the Gazette employs the family metaphor weakly when it comes to choosing its eidolon. Sir Thomas Whipstaff characterizes (in a double sense) the Gazette's debt to Isaac Bickerstaff; at the same time, like Titt for Tatt's Partridge, he oversteps himself in his attempt to compete with his model, implying a connection that sabotages his successes. Sir Thomas is a baronet who expressly points out that his is "the Eldest Branch of the Family" (Gazette 1). His assertion of preeminence calls attention to the Gazette's mimicry, however, rather than (as it is intended to) marking his as the superior journal. Moreover, Sir Thomas' invocation of hierarchy as a synonym for merit undermines the journal's more well-considered attempt to appeal to a wide audience: here, the family metaphor reflects an aristocratic world view at odds with the essay periodical's construction of public consensus through reason and popular appeal. The family metaphor, in this case, works formally to align the imitator with its original; but it creates a disparity between form and ideology that undermines the Gazette's generic integrity.

The problematic characterization of the Gazette's eidolon results from an inherent flaw in the family metaphor: the problem of hierarchy. While clearest in the Gazette, the question of preeminence also trips up Titt for Tatt, where Partridge's trade rivalry with his brother astrologer compels him to overemphasize

the distinctions between them. While family resemblance metaphorically communicates the nascent concept of generic similarity, the hierarchical connotations associated with the early-eighteenth century family—both the belief in hierarchy within families, and the belief that an individual’s status depended on his family name—conflict with an emerging belief in the fundamental equality of reasonable men. Moreover, the hierarchical implications of the family metaphor contrast with the essay periodical’s formal inclusiveness, as Bickerstaff’s evolution in the Tatler demonstrates. The genre stresses consensus, rather than authoritativeness, an emphasis at odds with the family metaphor’s implicit connotations. The status associated with private families threatens the egalitarian theory of the public sphere, undermining these journals’ ability to promote consensus and camaraderie. While the cultural meaning of “family” was shifting from a hierarchical, aristocratic model to a companionate ideal,¹¹ the older, still-dominant ideology weakens the family metaphor’s utility in shaping a genre that developed in conjunction with the emerging social order. While formally useful, the family metaphor—in historical context—undermines the ideological basis of the essay periodical by keeping the conversation in the family, rather than opening

¹¹On the shifting nature of the eighteenth-century British family, see Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800 (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), Susan Staves, Married Women’s Separate Property in England, 1660-1833 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), Amy Louise Erickson, Women and Property in Early Modern England (London: Routledge, 1993), and Flint, Family Fictions. Erickson points out that “the romantic ideal of companionate marriage” did not reflect reality (7); nonetheless, the rhetorical construction of the ideal was to offer a useful alternative to periodical essayists, as the second half of this chapter will argue.

it to public discussion.

Perhaps the Gazette's unknown author realized that Sir Thomas' self-promotion implied dependence and exclusion, for despite a passing reference to "my Coz. Bickerstaff" in the third issue, Sir Thomas "and Dame Isabella his Wife" appear as characters only in the initial number. In fact, the "Ghost" of the journal's subtitle is the journal's true eidolon—although, being a ghost, he is rather a shadowy figure. Having declared enmity to wit, "the Author" goes on to say that "he shall content himself to trifle . . . rather than . . . mate his with the exalted Genius of a Tatler"—inverting Sir Thomas' presumption and effectively mimicking Bickerstaff's humorous condescension—and goes on to characterize the paper's anti-eidolon:

hav[ing] had the Experience how fatal Wit has been to the World of late . . .
 I have conjur'd up the Ghost of a merry honest Fellow who once possess'd
 it in Perfection, till it had wasted his Substance to a Shadow, and his Body
 to a Skeleton; and now he is come to deliver his Warnings . . . that a
Panegyrick is more dangerous than a Satyr; and that he never made an
Irony here, but he found an Inuendo in it hereafter. That Wit was
 punished with more Rigour than Scandal and Reproach. . . . If a Tradesman
 catches the Infection he's surely made a Bankrupt; and a Poet ought to
 beware of it as he wou'd of the Pill---y . . . in short, 'tis only fit for a
Gamester and a Grave-digger. (Gazette 1)

This introduction, unlike Sir Thomas' letter (which immediately follows it), is in the true Tatler spirit: it humorously criticizes both author and audience by attributing their enjoyment of periodical journalism to a third party—the merry ironist, the bankrupt tradesman, the doomed poet—whose fictionality means that he does and does not represent the reader/writer himself. The ghost, like the eidolon itself, is a mere shadow. Like John Partridge, he alludes to Bickerstaff's origins, but without summoning the problems implicit in the Partridge persona while happily evoking its potential advantages: like the joke about Partridge's "death" in the original Bickerstaff Papers, Tom Brown's Ghost implies both the identification of the writer with his text and its opposite, the difference between his physical life as a private individual and the life of his public, authorial reputation.

The ghost eidolon, like Sir Thomas' assertion of his family's preeminence and Partridge's attack on the Tatler's association with idle coffeehouses, enables a kind of continuity between the private and public spheres—a man and his ghost being different, yet identical—rather than emphasizing hierarchy and distinction. Moreover, the figure of the ghost pleasingly alludes to the ephemerality of periodical publication: for writers whose productions were quickly produced, retailed for a penny, circulated among hundreds of competing publications, and lasted for only a few days, the lives and deaths of their work were two sides of the same coin. Indeed, both Titt for Tatt and the Gazette were short-lived,

apparently having published only five numbers each: Titt For Tatt's first, second and fifth issues have survived, while the Gazette now endures in its first, third and fifth. If the eidolon symbolizes both authorial reputation and journalistic mutability, a ghost is an excellent choice, an alternative to the family metaphor with the potential to reframe kinship as a shared spiritual essence rather than a matter of hierarchy and precedence.

Furthermore, within the context of the emerging public sphere, what Habermas calls a public-oriented privateness means that the identity of "the private individual"—a concept, as opposed to a particular, physical person—depends on his or her public reputation. The man, Joseph Partridge, may continue to exist, but once his public reputation is destroyed, he is, as Swift rendered him, "nobody." Hence, while physical beings are separate entities, private individuals are, paradoxically, collective: the constructions of public opinion. The joke of Partridge's death, reflected in Bickerstaff's "Will and Testament" (Tatler 7, 1.63) and Tom Brown's Ghost's "Warning" that without encouragement "he must take his Leave of this once delightful World, and return to the Shades again" (Gazette 3), hinges upon a new understanding of what it means to be a private person. The joke is that this entire state of affairs is so clearly fictional: an idea, rather than a physical fact.

However, as the real Joseph Partridge failed to learn, death must be treated lightly if one is to survive it. Either because the balancing act required to treat the

topic humorously was unsustainable or because the joke was somewhat stale, the intriguing possibilities of ghostly eidolons were not developed in other journals. Conjecturally, ghostliness too implies a kind of dependence: perhaps it is better for periodical essayists and their eidolons if the specter of authorial death remains in the background. The potential disadvantages of death as a metaphor for authorship can be perceived in yet another imitator, the Tatling Harlot. Its eidolon is not a ghost but a madwoman; nonetheless, the early eighteenth century's association of madness, prostitution, and death allows one to infer that the figure of the ghost, if pursued, would reveal some of the Harlot's weaknesses.

The subtitle to the Tatling Harlot's first issue¹² declares that the journal is “a Dialogue Between Bess o’ Bedlam and her Brother Tom,” while “Mother Bawdycoat” is the putative author. In a sense, therefore, the journal has three eidolons; Bess, however, is the paper’s strongest voice, and the harlot of its title. “I am in love,” she declares, “with . . . one Mr. Tatler . . . Marriage may soon make us two, one” (Harlot, 2). Her declaration invokes the family metaphor as aspiration: not currently a member of Bickerstaff’s family, she longs to become his wife. The journal foregrounds the economic impetus behind imitation and the financial realities of early eighteenth-century marriage and family relations by

¹²Tatling Harlot 1, in Contemporaries of the Tatler and Spectator, introduction by Richmond P. Bond (1709; reprint, Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1954. This is the only issue reprinted in Contemporaries, although according to Walter Graham, “three numbers are extant” (The Beginnings of English Literary Periodicals: A Study of Periodical Literature 1665-1715 [New York: Oxford University Press, 1926], 76). References are therefore to page number only.

casting Bess's declaration of love as transparent cupidity. In keeping with its cynicism, the paper's editorial position is virulently anti-Tatler, and clearly based on political animosity: Bess praises "this Republican life of libertinism" (Harlot, 1) and defends "Mr. Tatler" against Tom's accusation that "he throws clods backward at the Government, and Bishops; but I believe he will in a little time prove a Gift Horse, for no body will buy him" with the assertion that "he is got in with a Party; and one that you call a Mad one too, but not so Mad, but they'll stand by one another" (Harlot, 2). The Harlot's attempt to condemn the Tatler's partisanship primarily reflects back on itself; its rancorous and derisive tone, along with its reactionary nature, impede its ability to develop an independent editorial voice far more thoroughly than the family metaphor. The dependence implicit in prostitution as an expression of the family metaphor thoroughly handicaps the journal's potential as an independent vehicle.¹³ Indeed, the author seems fully aware of this problem, leading the reader to doubt that the paper was ever intended to last: "I will for once follow the modish way," Bess declares, "and be call'd Madam Tatler, tho' I am but his Harlot" (Harlot, 2).

Unfortunately for the Tatling Harlot's unknown author, periodical essayists (like all eighteenth-century authors) were subject to the critical demand

¹³See Catherine Gallagher, Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) for a contrasting argument detailing the ways that women authors use the "playwright-prostitute metaphor" (27) to their advantage.

that they instruct by pleasing.¹⁴ Journals that treat journalistic competition too seriously make unpleasant reading, and undisguised conflict violates the very nature of the genre. The essay periodical, like the private individual operating in the public sphere, is the product of consensus: whether described formally or ideologically—as single essays linked through the device of a unifying consciousness (the eidolon), or as constructing social consensus—the essay periodical gathers together, rather than dividing. Ironically, the Tatling Harlot's criticism of the Tatler's politics points this out: echoing Bickerstaff himself, Bess argues that “he can give a Broadside to either Party” but then goes on, “Whiggish Brains are very quick at Invention” (Harlot, 3). Like many other contemporary critics, the author of the Harlot recognizes the Tatler's partisanship as a serious flaw,¹⁵ one that undermines its attempt to create a shared sense of publicness by dividing its readers. But the Harlot's own partisan tone reproduces the error, and its criticism of the Tatler's hypocrisy reads as a condemnation of the public sphere rather than a defense of it. The particular nature of its publicness—a harlot being a public woman—like the ghost's evocation of death, is too dark a

¹⁴It is worth noting that the two imitators this chapter considers most successful (the Whisperer and the Female Tatler) both articulate their awareness of the entertain/instruct imperative: although I have not based my assessment of their success on this point (not having noted the coincidence until the later stages of writing this paper), it seems probable that the writers who were best able to articulate their understanding of the underlying basis of the Tatler's success would also be those best able to reproduce it on their own terms.

¹⁵For representative examples, see “The British Censor” (1712), William Wagstaffe [pseud.] “The Character of Richard St—le, Esq; With Some Remarks” (1713), “John Tutchin's Ghost to Richard St—le, Esq;” (1713), John Lacy [pseud.] and “The Steeleids” (1714), all reprinted in Edward A. and Lillian D. Bloom, Addison and Steele: The Critical Heritage (London: Routledge, 1980).

shadow for the essay periodical to sustain. The genre encourages sober moral reflection from time to time, but always in a manner consistent with polite discourse: dead men and whores are occasionally entertaining, but make disagreeable company on a regular basis.

The harlot, then, is a clever but ultimately unworkable eidolon. A public woman, of course, is subject to unpleasant associations quite at odds with the responsible trustworthiness implied by the phrase “a public man”: because “the [eighteenth]-century ear heard the word “public” in “publication” very distinctly . . . a woman’s publication automatically implied” a prostitute (Gallagher, *Nobody’s Story*, 23).¹⁶ This fact, however, also means that journals headed by woman eidolons can offer particularly valuable insights into the relationship between privateness and publicness. Moreover, many of the genre’s notable qualities—exercising influence by providing light, pleasing entertainment; functioning as the hub of a social group; fostering consensus rather than discord; recognizing that private identity is thoroughly bound up with public reputation—are also, more or less, the qualities associated with the ideal eighteenth-century woman. The eighteenth-century essay periodical and the eighteenth-century woman are both expected to provide pleasant companionship and a refuge from conflict, be morally earnest without pedantry, effect change

¹⁶Gallagher’s statement refers to the seventeenth, not the eighteenth century; but as the title and scope of her book indicate, this etymologic awareness and its corresponding implications were held in the eighteenth century as well.

through gentle persuasion or good-natured teasing, and treat even serious subjects with a light touch. Critics have, of course, associated the essay periodical with women readers in a variety of contexts, but this association is not merely a result of rising literacy rates for women, the development of a leisured middle class, or the fortuitous combination of Addison's middle style with Steele's "fair-sexing it," as Jonathan Swift put it.¹⁷ Rather, women and essay periodicals fulfill the same social roles; they are conceptually similar in kind.

Women idolons, therefore, are the most significant innovations of the earliest Tatler imitators. The possibility is suggested by the Tatler itself, its title chosen, as Bickerstaff puts it, "in Honour of [the Fair Sex]" (Tatler 1, 1:15). Indeed, by the tenth number, Steele found it useful to substitute an occasional female idolon, Bickerstaff's sister "Jenny Distaff," on subjects specifically relating to women.¹⁸ Like Partridge, Jenny is borrowed by an early imitator, the unknown author of the Whisperer, an enjoyable journal that managed to last for twenty-two issues¹⁹—not very long, but longer than many. The Whisperer's

¹⁷The actual quote is "I will not meddle with the Spectator, let him fair-sex it to the world's end." Jonathan Swift, Journal to Stella, ed. Harold Williams [Oxford: Clarendon, 1947], 2:482.

¹⁸See also Tatlers 33, 36-38, and 247 (1:243-249, 261-277; 3:261-264); additionally, Jenny appears as a character (instead of an idolon) in numbers 26, 27, 40, 68, 75, 79, 84, 104, 140, 143, 168, and 184 (1:198-211, 287-293, 468-476, 512-517; 2:3-7, 32-37, 136-140, 301-305, 314-318, 426-430; 3: 3-7).

¹⁹Graham, The Beginnings of English Literary Periodicals, 76. All quotations are from the Whisperer's first issue, which is the only one reprinted in Contemporaries of the Tatler and Spectator, introduction by Richmond P. Bond (1709; reprint, Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1954). This issue is unpaginated.

Jenny explains that, contrary to the plans announced for her in Tatler 75 ten days before the publication of this new journal, she has refused to marry the husband her brother chose for her. Instead, she is "Setting up for myself," promising that "the World shall find I am of the Family of the Staffs; a Friend to Innocence; a Foe to Vice." Like other imitators, the Whisperer uses the family metaphor to indicate its intentions and appeal to an established audience. Because Jenny is a young woman, here the family metaphor evokes the newer, more romantic ideal of the companionate family, an image the Whisperer emphasizes by stressing her refusal of and her brother's arrangements for her marriage. Rather than allowing her to choose for herself, Jenny complains that Bickerstaff "design'd me a Husband, chosen altogether by his own Notions of the Convenient and the Happy." The conflict between her brother's choice and her own inclinations reveals a series of paradoxes and possibilities within the family metaphor: family can be traditional (hierarchical, patriarchal, ancestral) or bourgeois (nuclear, affectionate); it has a broad meaning that includes servants and distant relations as well as a narrow one confined to parents and children; it confers both public and private identities, which are often dissimilar; and perhaps most importantly, new families create tensions and conflicts (particularly, but not exclusively, for women) with old.

Having left the protection of her brother's household, Jenny must find a way to support herself. As a woman, she lacks access to the established essay periodical world of the coffeehouse; moreover, she must compete with an

established and successful rival whose every characteristic—gender, precedence, age—identifies him as her superior. Directly addressing these difficulties, Jenny acknowledges “the extraordinary Charge I must be at, beyond my Contemporaries” in accessing private sources of information (bribing servants) rather than public (coffeehouses) and reminds her readers that “‘Tis generous . . . to encourage young Beginners.” She worries that “since my ingenious Brother, a Man of such profound Learning, such excellent Morals, and such indefatigable Industry, too often finds, with Pain, he writes to the Incorrigible,” she has little to “expect, who have little more to trust to, than the Fragments I have laid up, from those happy Hours I pass’d in his agreeable Converse.” Nonetheless, because she shares the family “Taste” for “bright Conversation,” she is unwilling “to be shut up,” a phrase rich with double meaning. She insists on her own public voice and rejects the confining hierarchy of the traditional private family, a decision that enables her idolonic independence. Significantly, Steele himself was unable to overcome the implications of the male-headed aristocratic family model: despite Jenny’s popularity, the *Tatler* included just a single paper by her after her marriage, and that not for a long time; moreover, the wifely Jenny is far less engaging than her maiden self.²⁰

The question of whether “family,” with regard to women, refers to their family of origin or their family by marriage, and the conflicting loyalties that this

²⁰*Tatler* 247 argues that “the Perfidiousness of Men has been generally owing to our selves” (3:264), an argument more gracefully made by a woman than by a man.

question implies, mean that the feminized family metaphor contains a structural parallel to the Partridge jest, without the limitations implicit in either the death associations or the joke's tiredness. A married woman's name and identity is subsumed by her husband's, a change that, like Partridge's "death," draws attention to the way a name signifies both a physical person and a public role. The female eidolon as rhetorical device therefore emphasizes the textuality of the family metaphor and the essay periodical, reorienting individual eidolons and their journals within a network of generic family relations towards a form of publicness that calls attention to, indeed insists upon, its rhetorical essence. The metaphorical representation of journals as individuals in turn underscores the rhetorical foundation of all persons when functioning as public individuals. Public identity is, after all, a rhetorical construction: just as an eidolon points to the existence of an author while emphasizing a distinction between the person writing and the written persona, a public reputation attaches to a private individual even as it is widely acknowledged that the two are not one and the same.

Moreover, foregrounding the fact that Jenny is Bickerstaff's sister does more than merely invoke the family metaphor; it protects her from the negative implications of women's publication—whorishness—by emphasizing a non-sexualized aspect of female identity. Hers is an "innocent Liberty," her refusal of marriage a rejection of "Mr. Scrape-all," with whom she "should hear no News, but that of Gain; no Discourse, but of Money." She is girlishly simple and

unbusinesslike, promising never to have “any Design of making this Paper come dearer to you, than One Penny.” The eidolon’s disembodiedness serves female eidolons particularly well. Because the characteristics the genre shares with women—the problem of balancing the private and the public, the need to achieve (and mask) commercial success by emphasizing personal attachments, the imperative to instruct by pleasing—are, like femininity itself, ideological constructs rather than physical realities, women and eidolons are, in Gallagher’s deft phrase “literal nobodies” (Nobody’s Story, xiii). Female eidolons, to an even greater degree than their male counterparts, insist upon their rhetorical and ideological nature. Their particular characteristics—lively wit, breezy volubility, pride of rank—are often less signs of individual character than markers of social types: sprightly miss, incorrigible gossip, society matron. While an eidolon’s particularity is important to any essay periodical, for those with women eidolons, particularity is more a matter of representing a specific kind of woman than any specific individual.

It is important to emphasize that essay periodicals with female eidolons present gender as a textual construct, not an actual one. They are not necessarily journals by women writers or addressed to women readers: instead, theirs is a rhetorical femininity, a form of authorial self-presentation that, like the family metaphor, presumes that the reader understands it as device rather than reality. Examining the female eidolon’s role in the construction of the public sphere

depends upon an understanding that female idolons represented this “rhetorical femininity” instead of actual women. Writing as a woman lends another layer of fictionality to a (usually) male author’s idolon, magnifying the idolon’s inherent oscillation between fact and fiction. Thus Jenny’s explanation of her refusal of marriage uses language the playfulness of which simultaneously characterizes her voice as stereotypically girlish, generically Tatler-like, and entertainingly fictional:

my Brother must be allow’d to know Tempers and Constitutions as well as any Man breathing and yet he thought it possible to persuade me. . . . ‘Tis not out of Inclination, that I am a Slattern, but pure Complaisance to the Fashion. . . . Tho’ I have all the tender Affection for my Brother that a Sister ought, yet I can never forget his Denying me a Coach and Six, the most exalted Sphere of Womankind! . . . Well; I’ll not despair, but hope, that after I have fashion’d some grateful Heir, he will reward me with himself.”

The audience, of course, understands that Bickerstaff has neither breath nor heartbeat; that he could give her a coach, an heir, and a castle in the air, and, by the same token, she can invent for herself a rich husband whenever she likes. Her concerns are entirely appropriate to her station, and at the same time treated so lightly that it is clear she is entirely unconcerned about them. Her irony focuses as much on her own fictional debut as on the equally fictional shortcomings she attributes to the Tatler; she combines silliness with meaning so as to emphasize

the identification of the essay periodical with the stereotypical unmarried woman.

Indeed, Jenny's remark about complying with fashion recalls the Tatling Harlot's similar declaration, and highlights a vital point: she literally owes her existence to fashion. The Whisperer, like all the imitators, begins as a copy of a popular model: the genre itself is inherently stylish.²¹ This fact helps characterize female eidolons who often, like the harlot and Jenny, assert their devotion to fashion. Have at You All's Roxana Termagant declares her "love of fame" gratified by public inquiry into her identity; the Old Maid "hope[s] the love of well-deserved fame is still the ruling passion in many female breasts"; the Parrot "affect[s] a Female Figure. . . . My Garb is English Manufacture, my Lace was made in Hartfordshire, my Drams too of the English Distillery; but I drink Tea for fashion sake"; and a later Parrot introduces itself by announcing that "the Town are gathering thick about me" and describes in its first number "the Opportunities Fortune has thrown in my Way of improving myself under the most learned and witty Persons of their times."²² The tone of these statements, like rhetorical

²¹For an examination of the role of fashion in creating modernity, with particular emphasis on the fashionability of Steele's and Addison's two journals and of their paradoxical promotion of anti-fashion as a fashionable value, see Erin Mackie, Market à la Mode: Fashion, Commodity, and Gender in The Tatler and The Spectator (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

²²[Bonnell Thornton], Have At You All 2 (1752), 26; [Frances Brooke], The Old Maid 3 (1755-56), 16; [Eliza Haywood], The Parrot, by Mrs. Prattle 1 (1728), 2; [Eliza Haywood], The Parrot 1 (1746), n.p. The 1746 parrot is in fact referred to later in the same number as "he"; nonetheless, the journal is rhetorically feminized by subtitle ("by the Authors of the Female Spectator"), tone (gossipy and frivolous), and the contemporary association of parrots and other pets with women. Perhaps alluding to the earlier-noted association between women authors and prostitutes, the journal's second paper begins with the exclamation "that to appear in public, and to submit to become the Butt of a thousand Shafts, are one and the same Thing!"

femininity itself, constructs the public sphere as a feminine realm, not a masculine one. These rhetorical women are both the subjects and the objects of public discourse: talked about as well as talking about others.

Thus, within the world of the essay periodical femininity, usually associated with the private sphere, plays a vital role in reorienting the family metaphor, and by extension the essay periodical itself, towards publicness. A significant example of this function is the Female Tatler, the Tatler's most successful early imitator, which lasted for 115 issues. Although this claim might seem to ignore the Spectator's obviously greater success, that journal was understood by contemporaries as less an imitator than a continuation of the Tatler.²³ moreover, unlike the Spectator, the Female Tatler competed directly with the Tatler itself.²⁴ It even generated imitators of its own: a forgery was issued under the same name by the original printer when the first author changed publishers, and it seems only fair to credit the Female Tatler, as well as the Spectator, with inspiring the title of Eliza Haywood's Female Spectator. The

Because these journals were published many years after the essay periodical had become an established genre, the particular nature of their idolons is not discussed at length. An examination of the development of rhetorical femininity over time would constitute a valuable addition to the current argument.

²³Recall the quotations from Gay at the beginning of this essay. The Blooms also report that the Spectator was "attributed to Steele by contemporaries" (Critical Heritage, 51 n.).

²⁴Like the other imitators, the Female Tatler's importance is underestimated, although its commercial success means that it has received some attention. The inadequacies of the two available modern editions, however, clearly indicate the limits of modern critical regard: see note 2.

remainder of this chapter will therefore examine the Female Tatler as a pivotal model of rhetorical femininity, whose particular concerns and methods offer important evidence of the role of rhetorical femininity in the construction of the public sphere.

One important advantage that rhetorical femininity offers over the family metaphor is that femaleness automatically implies a non-hierarchical dualism: male and female as complimentary roles.²⁵ The Whisperer benefits from this fact, as Bickerstaff's sister Jenny is both dependent and peer. The Female Tatler, which does not employ the family metaphor at all, manages from the outset to "become a complementary rather than a rival paper,"²⁶ becoming indeed the companion paper to its established and successful predecessor. The printer issued the paper on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday—in contrast to the Tatler's Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday—a decision that, like the new journal's title, clearly demonstrates its intent to supplement, rather than compete directly with, its forerunner. The title of Titt for Tatt also positions that journal as a companion to the Tatler, but the cultural significance of femininity is such that the Female

²⁵The opposite is not true: masculinity does not necessarily imply femininity in the same way. Female eidolons therefore imply community and inclusion to an even greater extent than their male counterparts.

²⁶Fidelis Morgan, introduction to The Female Tatler (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Everyman's Library, 1992), vii. Quotations from the Female Tatler (1709-1710) are taken from this edition, although it is better suited for a general reader than for scholarly uses. There is no complete modern edition of the Female Tatler; a less thorough, though better edited edition is Bernard Mandeville, By a Society of Ladies: Essays in The Female Tatler, ed. M. M. Goldsmith (Bristol: Thoemmes, 1999). References cite issue number and page number of Morgan's edition.

Tatler's claim seems more natural; the other, cleverer, but more contrived. In addition, the feeling of inevitability in the title Female Tatler frees its author from the burden of anxiety demonstrated by Titt for Tatt's Partridge and the Gazette's Sir Thomas, while the inspired decision not to belabor the family metaphor by inventing or borrowing an eidolon who shares or aspires to Bickerstaff's patronymic (in addition to the word "tatler" in the title) likewise allows the Female Tatler to disassociate its content from Steele's. Unlike the Whisperer's Jenny—who despite her attempt to make a virtue of necessity, cannot fully avoid the implied subordination of having learned journalism thanks to her brother's condescension—or the Harlot's Bess—whose claim to be Bickerstaff's mistress compromises her far more than it does him—the Female Tatler's Mrs. Crackenthorpe is, with regard to Bickerstaff at least, independent: free to travel in social circles and treat subjects unknown to him.

Women eidolons also affect an author's treatment of his or her subject matter. Mrs. Crackenthorpe presents herself as an expert on questions of social manners and feminine dress, announcements or rumors of recent engagements, weddings, pregnancies and births, and condemnations of the behavior of rakes and fortune-hunters. The Whisperer's first issue tells a story of female superstition as observed by an intimate friend. Even the Harlot, which is primarily a political journal, uses its mad female eidolon to imply that, just as only an improper woman—a mad harlot—discourses on politics, so politicized subjects are

improper for the Tatler.²⁷ In general, feminized topics are related to courtship, marriage, and manners, with occasional forays into housekeeping or religion; in short, as others have pointed out, “women’s subjects” are more or less identical with the content of the usual essay periodical.²⁸ The distinction between the treatment of these subjects by male and female eidolons, however, is less noted; it can succinctly be called a distinction between affect and effect. Rhetorically male journals like the Tatler or Spectator emphasize gentility, manners, love, and morality primarily as private virtues: even the argument that they should be extended into public life rests primarily on the claim that doing so will improve the reputation and therefore the private happiness (including material wealth) of the man or woman to whom they are attributed. In contrast, rhetorically feminine journals emphasize consequences: what might be called public effects.

Typical of the former are two fictional letters in Spectator 236. Though on the same topic, dictatorial husbands, the letters attribute the responsibility for domestic tyranny to both men and women. The longer letter, written by a man, points out to other men that they will be happier in their marriages if they act as generous husbands rather than tyrants, since their families will then be more

²⁷This technique, ridiculing the positions of one’s political opponents by putting them into the mouths of women, is of course not original to the Harlot, as Gallagher’s book points out. Bonnell Thornton’s Have At You All (1752), a satirical and highly politicized response to Fielding’s Covent-Garden Journal (1752), is another example of the practice.

²⁸See Shawn Lisa Maurer, Proposing Men: Dialectics of Gender and Class in the Eighteenth-Century English Periodical (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), and Kathryn Shevelov, Women and Print Culture: The Construction of Femininity in the Early Periodical (London: Routledge, 1989).

content and amiable, while the shorter letter, by a woman, warns women against marrying wealthy fools lest they place themselves under command of “Cunning and Suspicion, the inseparable Companions of little Minds.”²⁹ By dividing the audience, and focusing on different stages of private romantic relationships, the letters together give the impression that domestic happiness is always a question of agency and judgment: that, at different times in the history of a courtship, each partner has the ability to choose freely his or her fate. Private agency is the primary focus of moral instruction.

The satisfaction of possessing a good character and reputation are not unimportant, of course, but in keeping with the doubleness implied by a markedly feminine point of view, “women’s” journals often urge private moral behavior by describing the consequences of private error to its victims. So, for instance, the Female Tatler tells a story of young romance featuring Catherina, a paragon of patient virtue. Her suitor, Sir Samuel Slender, delays his proposal until his uncle, who disapproves of Catherina’s modest “gentlewoman’s fortune, two thousand pounds” dies, leaving Sir Samuel “possessed . . . of a fine seat, a large estate, and a very ancient title.” Catherina, who despite having “prodigious offers” due to her beauty and virtue “led a most reserved life” for fourteen years while she waited for her lover’s fortunes to turn, is thrown off, for, as it turns out, a younger and richer wife (Female Tatler 28, 66-67). Mrs. Crackenthorpe, however, does not

²⁹Spectator 236, in The Spectator, ed. Donald F. Bond, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), 419.

end the tale by focusing on the misery of Sir Samuel's marriage and his frequent regrets for the happy life he might have had with the virtuous Catherina. She pauses halfway through her story for a long paragraph that emphasizes the real consequences of such behavior while at the same time drawing attention to the fictionalizations necessary to render tales like Catherina's into simple parables of vice and virtue:

Before the disconsolate Catherina let us draw a veil, her griefs must be inexpressible, tho' she ought to raise 'em to resentments; and as she has power yet left to prostrate millions at her shrine, she ought to summon every charm, point every glance and pursue 'em with all the coquetry of smiles, frowns, complacency and disdain, all the crocodile arts of designing women, and the inveterate malice of neglected beauty, till she has revenged the injuries done her by the perfidious Strephon on his whole hated race. But as the tenderness of her sex rather supposes her dissolved in tears, we ought to soften her afflictions, reason her into calmness and muster all our forces to punish such unheard of perjuries. (Female Tatler 28, 67)

Sir Samuel is not punished, however. He marries the daughter and heiress of a miserly apothecary, rich from prescribing unhealthy medicines, who despite his wealth died in debtor's prison rather than pay his creditors. Mrs. Crackenthorpe dismisses Sir Samuel as a fool—"having abandoned truth, honour and honesty, breeding, gentility and every agreeable air . . . appears a most awkward, tawdry,

tinsy old fop”—but, as she observes, “the baffled world may rail a little, but the rattling of the chariot wheels drowns the disagreeable noise, and those that keep coaches despise the petty reflections of creatures that walk afoot” (Female Tatler 28, 68). Her tale, therefore, does not demonstrate the consequences of vice to the vicious, or of virtue to the good. Instead, she details the effects of vice on the virtuous in a story of courtship and marriage, ostensibly women’s subjects, told (indirectly) from a woman’s perspective: Catherina’s state of mind and heart is the only one actually considered. This story does not, like the Spectator’s letters, limit its viewpoint to that of the person embodying the vice or virtue being allegorized. Instead it demonstrates a point of view that is both alternative and secondary, one that supplements, rather than replaces, the usual method of didactic narrative.

Indeed, the Female Tatler’s auxiliary status means that the price of Sir Samuel’s perfidy to himself is taken for granted. Mrs. Crackenthorpe implies that his chosen wife, “the ill-turned Blowzabella” (Female Tatler 28, 69) is a disappointing companion but does not provide any details of this. The reader, of course, assumes it based on acquaintance with the expected pattern of similar parables as developed in the dominant, rhetorically masculinized form associated with the Tatler and Spectator. In contrast, the Female Tatler assumes that appearances and public reputation affect private happiness. Sir Samuel can not possibly be happy in his bride because the town disapproves of her. According

to prevailing beliefs about male and female character, this is a typically female assumption, one that the reader accepts easily because the story is told by a woman. For men marriage is a private affair, so that a male eidolon would be unlikely to assume that the opinion of the world helps determine a man's happiness in his bride to such an extent. The instructional aspect of Catherina's story therefore doubly depends on the femaleness—that is, the ancillary position—of the Female Tatler, not only for its ability to represent the effect of Sir Samuel's vice on Catherina, but also for its ability to assume even those formal conventions that it does not, in fact, fulfill.

Rhetorical femininity therefore enables the Female Tatler's autonomy, formal success, and its ability to frame private events and behavior as public issues. As noted above, however, the issues of independence and publicness for women eidolons are complex: their formal usefulness is not unmixed. While Bickerstaff is occasionally portrayed as slightly ridiculous,³⁰ Mrs. Crackenthorpe's comic aspects must be more gently handled. As the Harlot and the Whisperer demonstrate, a woman eidolon must maintain her dignity in order to avoid the unpleasant associations associated with women's writing. Accordingly, Mrs. Crackenthorpe is a model of eighteenth-century condescension:

³⁰His "Astrological Speculations" (Tatler 2, 1.29) of course, as well as his age, appearance and resulting unmarriageability. See in particular Tatlers 83, 93, and 162 (2:26-32, 78-83, 402-405). Physically, Bickerstaff is portrayed as a modern Don Quixote, a resemblance I have not seen noted elsewhere, although according to Donald F. Bond, in the eighteenth century the Spectator's Sir Roger de Coverly was compared to "the work of Cervantes" (Spectator 1:xxxv).

inviting but dignified, amusing, even occasionally frivolous, but never foolish. Less a companion than an accommodating hostess, her self-possession functions in part to distance her from the conventional associations of feminine pseudonymity with libel, slander, or self-sale. At the same time, the journal's ironic tone towards questions of rank and precedence insulates her from appearing insolent. While directing that "every seamstress and mantua-maker" refrain from appropriating the title "Madam" to herself, she frames her command as a response to "several ladies having made complaint" (*Female Tatler* 13, 30); others, not Mrs. Crackenthorpe, are exercised on the subject of proper address. Moreover, since by the eighteenth century "Madam" was a generalized title of respect extended towards women of nearly every station,³¹ Mrs. Crackenthorpe commands that the archaic "words Goody, Gammer, Mistress and Forsooth be used henceforward, as well in town as country." She also directs that no "citizen's wife suffer her servants to banter her at that rate, whose husband can't swear himself worth ten thousand pounds" (*Female Tatler* 13, 30)—a pronouncement that distinguishes between citizens and the nobility by metaphorically substituting income for rank. Mrs. Crackenthorpe thus implies that it is in fact the complaining ladies who, attempting to re-invent the meaning of a common title properly used even for servants—that is, for women not properly addressed as "lady"—reveal their own old-fashioned snobbery and nouveau riche vulgarity; but

³¹ According to the OED, "madam" had actually been generalized by the early seventeenth century; in the eighteenth, the even more casual "ma'am" came to predominate.

at the same time, her easy dismissal of other women's anxiety about rank demonstrates that she herself is secure in her social status.

Mrs. Crackenthorpe's characterization therefore draws on those features of the essay periodical that best suit a respectable female character, its lightness and entertainment value. "Tatling," she points out,

was ever adjudg'd peculiar to our sex; my design is not to rival [Bickerstaff's] performance . . . but as more ridiculous things are done every day than ten such papers can relate, I desire leave to prate a little to the town, and try what diversion my intelligence can give 'em (Female Tatler 1, 1).

Befitting her social position, her news comes not from the streets but from her "drawing room," where "half the nation visits" her, "from his Grace my Lord Duke to Mr Sagathie the spruce Mercer in the city; and from her Grace my Lady Duchess, to Mrs Top Sail, the sea captain's wife at Wapping." Like the Whisperer's Jenny, who draws her "Intelligence" from "My Lady Languish's Confident . . . Sir Hugh Meddle's Valet-de-Chambre . . . my Lady Tipple's Housekeeper . . . My Lord Idle's Page; Miss Aukward's Aunt; Capt. Slander's Friend; Mrs Trifle's Sister; and a long Etcatera" [sic], Mrs. Crackenthorpe draws on feminine sources of information. Unlike Jenny, however, Mrs. Crackenthorpe frames her information as something more than private gossip; indeed, she declares she "shall be very careful, unjustly or ungentlely not to reflect upon any person

whatsoever,” but instead to promote “the reformation of mankind” in general. Where Jenny associates feminine gossip with privacy, drawing her information from personal servants and intimate family members, Mrs. Crackenthorpe implies that women, rather than men, are the true public figures: her “apartment . . . comprehends, White’s, Will’s, the Grecian, Garraway’s, in Exchange-Alley, and all the India houses.” Because not only “grave statesmen, airy beaus, lawyers, cits, poets and parsons” but also “ladies of all degrees” visit her, her parlor is in fact more broadly public than the coffeehouses, each of which had its distinct character, as the Tatler’s “departments” point out. As only an eidolon can, Mrs. Crackenthorpe writes herself into the center of the court of public opinion, making her sex a virtue by emphasizing the role of feminine civility the importance of being at home to all comers: “to support my visiting days, I am forc’d to act the good lady Praise-all” (Female Tatler 1, 2). Because as a gentlewoman she cannot push herself into public notice, she must encourage the public—her readers—to come to her.

Although the Female Tatler emphasizes openness, Mrs Crackenthorpe clearly distinguishes between the behavior of merchant’s wives and their betters. Besides commanding “that no person do henceforward assume the title of madam that can’t prove herself a gentlewoman” (Female Tatler 13, 30) she complains that “the same gay appearance all sorts make in public prevents distinguishing those of substance and true merit from impertinent pretenders and designing parasites”

(Female Tatler 26, 63). Whether her conservative views reflect an ongoing struggle between traditional aristocratic ideology and that of the newer public sphere or demonstrate a conflict within public sphere ideology itself, between theories of equality and realities of inequality, depends on our understanding of the contemporary context.³² “After the 1690s women’s public discourse was fastened to the idea of commerce” because the emerging codes of manners worked simultaneously to enable “‘rational’ intercourse between men and women” and to become “the new support and justification for a commercial civilization” (Gallagher, Nobody’s Story, 109). The essay periodical, for which the subject of manners was central, played a central part in advancing this new ideology. If this assessment of the early-eighteenth century literary context is correct, the Female Tatler must be read in the light of an implicit association between essay periodicals, women, and the emerging commercial society. To the contemporary reader, the Female Tatler’s concern over class distinctions arises precisely because such distinctions are becoming fluid, rather than absolute; this fluidity is most turbulent where the culturally dominant classes compete for precedence. Like Mrs. Crackenthorpe’s drawing room, the essay periodical—especially the

³²Nancy Fraser argues that “discursive interaction within the bourgeois public sphere was governed by protocols of style and decorum that were themselves correlates and markers of status inequality.” (“Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in Habermas and the Public Sphere, ed. Craig Calhoun, [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992], 119.) Although Fraser’s criticism clearly pertains to the Female Tatler, my argument that rhetorical femininity (if few actual women) played a vital constitutive role in the formation of the public sphere complicates the issue of women’s marginalization. In this respect my argument somewhat resembles Nancy Armstrong’s in Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

feminized essay periodical—assumes the context of the bourgeois public sphere, within which the significance of class distinctions becomes subject to public consideration. In this context, Mrs. Crackenthorpe’s conservatism is only a matter of degree. She serves as the early eighteenth-century version of Emily Post or Miss Manners: a social conservative whose conservatism is rooted in an essentially liberal ideology. That three hundred years later the arbiters of bourgeois manners are still women, and still thoroughly textualized—“Miss Manners” is a twentieth-century eidolon, while “Emily Post” refers not to the author herself but to her book, in numerous editions revised by others—surely indicates the durability of the association between women, textuality, and the public sphere.

Chapter 4

“This Eminently Useful Class of Literary Men”: Professionalization and the Periodical Essayist

Readers and critics of the essay periodical have always recognized its historical contingency. In part, temporality is innate to all periodical publication, which necessarily calls attention to its ephemeral nature by dating and numbering individual issues. But periodicity itself is not the only, or in the end even the primary determinant of the essay periodical’s historical specificity, because the genre is especially tied to the eighteenth-century, in particular to eighteenth-century England. Its contemporary popularity and apparently contrasting limitation to its moment and locale mark it as particularly bound to time and place. Hence Samuel Johnson declared that:

If our Essayists have excelled in humour, they owe their materials and their opportunities to circumstances that are not known in other countries—to the freedom of our constitution—to the vast extension of commerce—to the forms of social intercourse, the general relish for conversation, and unconstrained interchange of sentiments; to a taste for dress, to the intermixture of the sexes in all companies—and to the operation of wealth in minds of strong or weak texture.¹

¹I have been unable to trace the original source of Johnson’s statement, which is quoted in both James Ferguson, introduction to The British Essayists (45 vols, London: Thomas Tegg, 1819), vol. 1, xviii, and A. Chalmers, introduction to The British Essayists: With Prefaces Historical and Biographical (45 vols, London: Nichols and Son, 1817), vol 1, xxi-xxii. The version cited is Ferguson’s, which in comparison with Chalmers appears to invisibly shorten the

According to Johnson, the essay periodical depends on a social milieu we would now call bourgeois: one in which men and women alike are free to enjoy the consequences of mercantilism and trade, including leisure and fashion. The content and very existence of these journals reflect this world: in addition to discussing fashionable behavior and dress, periodical essays were themselves fashionable, and successful because their audience had both the means and the leisure to enjoy them.² Johnson's assessment has become an accepted truth: two of the three major nineteenth-century collections of essay periodicals quote Johnson's statement at length, while the third echoes Johnson in promoting the essay as a uniquely valuable modern literary form:

In a country just rising into consequence by commercial efforts, where . . . the higher and middle classes are but little acquainted with the pleasures and advantages of literature, where . . . men [are] busied in the acquirement of wealth, merely for its own sake. . . . it should be our endeavour . . . to insinuate, under the garb of entertainment, a relish for and love of letters, and to meliorate or remove by ridicule those minuter vices and follies on which neither law nor religion has fixed.

original.

²See Erin Mackie, *Market à la Mode: Fashion, Commodity, and Gender in The Tatler and The Spectator* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), which points out that as well as inaugurating a modern interest in fashion, the *Tatler* and *Spectator* helped form the fashionable bourgeois tendency to devalue fashion as mere novelty, thereby implying an inverse relationship between fashion and value.

Modern readers should be encouraged to enjoy the essay periodical, since “few contrivances have been found more effectual toward correcting the foibles and lighter vices of mankind . . . than the periodical publication of short essays.”³ But though Johnson and the nineteenth-century anthologizers agree that the essay periodical is linked to commercial society, they disagree on whether essay journals celebrate commerce or correct for its flaws. The distinction reflects the dialectical nature of the periodical essay’s relationship to the larger culture that it both participates in and claims to reform: the genre is inherently commercial but also literary, and modern literature in turn is itself both a business and a means to express immaterial truths.

As Johnson, Chalmers, Ferguson and Drake affirm, the essay periodical’s relationship to modernity and commerce is more than casual. First, there is the fact that the essay periodical is itself a commodity. All periodicals are especially commodified textual forms: inexpensive and disposable, they must be purchased frequently and repeatedly for readers to keep current. But the very word “currency” emphasizes the particular suitability of the essay periodical—as opposed to newspapers, political pamphlets, and other contemporary ephemera—as the literary expression of a society based on mercantile exchange. The value of essay periodicals lies not in their physical utility, as paper, or their

³Nathan Drake, introduction to *Essays, Biographical, Critical and Historical, Illustrative of the Tatler, Spectator, and Guardian*, 2nd edition, vol. 1, (London: Suttaby, Evance and Fox, 1814), 15-17.

practical utility as disseminators of news; it depends entirely on the journals' ability to perpetuate themselves, to contribute to the formation of a world in which essay periodicals are valuable. Unlike newspapers, essay journals need to be repurchased frequently and at regular intervals not because they provide new information, but because they conform to existing beliefs—the sameness of their content is one of their notable traits. When eighteenth-century readers picked up essay periodicals, they were looking for thought-provoking articles on more or less familiar subjects. The usual subject-matter of these papers is well-known: character types of both sexes, female conduct, domestic economy, the education of men and women, the state of English letters, lessons to be drawn from “the Ancients,” interpretations of common proverbs, the proper scope of religious feeling, the destructiveness of controversy, ambition, and folly, and the laudable nature of moderation, reason, and reflection. These journals help form a taste for fashionable activities, clothing, manners, and literature; prescribe the correct expression of those tastes; inform readers of the ways these fashions change; and also point out the limitations of fashion and argue for the higher value of certain unchanging truths, which they of course identify. The conversation or personal reflection that a given essay inspired might either challenge or confirm the reader's existing beliefs—ideally, over time, a little of both—but in either case, periodical essayists confined themselves to subjects considered within the scope of polite conversation.

But their conversational effect amounts to more than just small talk. In mirroring the beliefs and forms of colloquial communication, journals like the Tatler and Female Tatler reflected and helped shape the very beliefs that gave them value, helping their audience to become comfortable with the newly dominant commercial society by helping ameliorate the anxieties and problems that resulted from social change. Although they did not fully resolve the paradoxes implicit in modern culture, they helped their audience feel in control by providing a forum for readers to understand and debate emerging ideological problems. The reformist and literary goals of essay journals engage in dialectical exchange with the commercial society they were part of, as they work to resolve the conflict between a culture of business and “culture” in a larger sense. The papers helped reconcile these two kinds of culture by folding them into the essay periodical’s structure, and their temporality and iterative nature demonstrate the ongoing nature of this project. Periodical essays become culturally relevant not only through their content, but by their very periodicity and sameness, which create and meet a demand for continual consumption while responding to the dilemmas of commercial ideology by offering, over and over again, different partial solutions to those problems. The self-perpetuating project of ideological formation requires constant maintenance, for which the periodical essayist offers himself as both its retailer and its repairman.

Because they themselves experienced the changes and conflicts of

commerce first-hand, periodical essayists address these problems in highly self-conscious ways. What Alvin Kernan says of print technology specifically is also true of commercialism in general, inasmuch as it was print that changed writing to a market-based system: “it forced the writer . . . to redefine” himself.⁴ Often, therefore, the concerns addressed by periodical essays are both nebulous and specific, responding to “culture” generally and the situation of periodical essayists in particular. Grub Street generally and essay periodicals in particular serve synecdochically as metaphors for business and the nation, for instance in the ways that the first numbers of new journals (frequently) acknowledge their competitors: Have At You All (1752) begins by saying, “The scribbling Haberdashers of small Wares, I agree with you, are already so numerous, that a Witmonger now a days finds it an hard matter to live by the trade.—Yet give me leave to open my shop among the rest”; the Jacobite’s Journal (1747-1748) feels compelled to write because others “have even furnished one Argument to the Enemies of the Liberty of the Press . . . for the Badness and Baseness of the Manufacture hath been always held a good Reason for restraining it”; the Fool

⁴Printing Technology, Letters and Samuel Johnson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 4. On Johnson as author, see also Charles A. Knight, “The Writer as Hero in Johnson’s Periodical Essays,” Papers on Language and Literature 13 (1977), 238-50; Martin Wechselblatt, Bad Behavior: Samuel Johnson and Modern Cultural Authority (Lewisburg, VA: Bucknell University Press, 1998). On shifting practices and meanings of authorship in the eighteenth-century, see Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, The Politics and Poetics of Transgression (London: Methuen, 1986); George Justice, The Manufacturers of Literature: Writing and the Literary Marketplace in Eighteenth-Century England (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 2002); Margaret J. M. Ezell, Social Authorship and the Advent of Print (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Mark Rose, Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); and Martha Woodmansee, The Author, Art, and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

(1746-1747) declares that “if the Fool can laugh the Value of Five-hundred Papers out of People’s Pockets, more than common, or more than the Plain-Dealer, or others, are capable of effecting, I am clear in his having my Vote to be Captain of the Band”; and the Plain-Dealer’s (1724-1725) plain honesty expresses itself in part by his describing himself as “naturally partial to the Manufactures of my Country.”⁵ To these writers, it was clear that their situation reflected the circumstances of business in general: competitive, responsive to consumer demand, flooded with goods both valuable and worthless, and somehow reflective of the state of the nation as a whole. Whether the rush of new essay periodicals signalled a need for regulation or contributed to a healthy national economy depended on one’s point of view, as did the question of whether growing consumption demonstrated decadence or wealth, but it was obvious to all that the state of the nation depended on trade, and that essay periodicals were in the unique position of both demonstrating and commenting on this fact.

For commercial journalists, the conflict between business and letters was perceived as a problem of motivation: were they merely business opportunists, selling shoddy goods to a gullible public, or were their essay papers the tools of

⁵[Bonnell Thornton], Have At You All 1 (London, 1752), 3; [Henry Fielding], Jacobite’s Journal 1 (London, 1747), n.p.; The Fool 1, in The Fool: Being a Collection of Essays and Epistles. Moral. Political. Humorous and Entertaining. Published in the Daily Gazetteer (1746; reprint, 3 vols. [London, 1748]), 1:6; and [Aaron Hill], Plain-Dealer 1 (1724, reprint, 2 vols., 1730), n.p.

A journal’s tone towards the fact of writing as a business reliably indicates its editorial position as contrarian or optimistic; that is to say, whether it perceives modern society as corrupt or as generally improving, and whether its tone will be accordingly pointed or wholesome.

popular reform and education they claimed to be? At the root of the question lies a paradox within modern authorship and literature that mirrors a larger conflict within modern commercial culture. Authors are both romanticized geniuses and paid professionals whose success depends on appealing to a print-buying public, while literature itself transcends commodification and popular opinion, being supposed to elevate the tastes and opinions of readers even as the literary canon is said to represent the collective judgment of society. Because it aspired both to make money and to reform the public, the essay periodical had to confront the perception that these goals were in conflict with one another, if not mutually exclusive. In grappling with the paradox between commercialism and reform, the journals collectively begin to promote a model of the professional author—and by extension, the modern professional—that helped construct a fundamental ideological premise, the belief that private gain and the public good are mutually reinforcing. Private profits benefit society by contributing to national prosperity, and the nation is in turn valuable inasmuch as it promotes free trade; private wealth ought to be used directly and indirectly to contribute to the welfare of others, measured in both material and non-material ways; the merchant's public reputation, like the author's, is the best guarantee of his private integrity, because his popularity testifies to the quality of his goods and his character; and finally, writing is reimagined as a profession, both a means for writers to support themselves and an avocation dedicated to public improvement.

Journals deal with the problem of commercial authorship in different ways. Some reflect an older system of authorship, in which profits are the problem: attempting, albeit ironically, to distance themselves from the disreputable associations of Grub Street, these construct idolons that disdain the money-grubbing ambitions of their writers. Even these idolons, however, acknowledge their fundamental commercialism, though they do so indirectly. Journals with female idolons are particularly likely to reflect seemingly conservative attitudes, inasmuch as their personae are doubly compelled to hold self-interest cheap, both as authors and as women. The Female Tatler “intreat[s]” her readers “not [to] imagine I write this paper merely for the profit that may accrue to me by it; for . . . I have an estate of £300 per annum and always kept two maids and a footman”—but nonetheless allows that “if I should happen to succeed beyond my expectation, it might so far advance my fortune that I may be able to keep a coach as well.”⁶ But as discussed in the previous chapter, Mrs. Crackenthope is not the conservative she appears; although her professed class standing distances her from the commercial classes, the hint that successful trade enables social climbing demonstrates her grounding in a mercantile belief system rather than an aristocratic one.

Like Mrs. Crackenthope, idolons who renounce the bottom line do so in ways that inevitably confirm their awareness of it. Mrs. Prattle, the idolon of

⁶The Female Tatler, ed. Fidelis Morgan (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Everyman’s Library, 1992), 3.

the Parrot (1728),⁷ admits that “the Number of Journals and News Letter, [sic] are even cumbersome to Shops and Coffee houses” but assures “all my Readers that pay Two-Pence for each Paper” that she has “no selfish View” in publishing, as “the Profits of this Paper, after all Charges deducted, I propose to lay out in building a large, new and stately Hospital at Moorfields,⁸ to confine and discipline all the obstinate mad ones that my Paper cannot reclaim.” Her comically insincere charitable impulses do not disguise her business sense: her attention to the charges of producing the paper shows that she does not intend to suffer a loss by her writing. And, by contrasting the journal-purchasing public with the irredeemably insane, Mrs. Prattle reflects several emerging ideological truisms: selling and buying literally define business as usual; trade serves the public good by contributing to national wealth; and the unproductive must be “confined and disciplined”—a phrase that resonates with Foucaultian significance. The Parrot implies that the transaction of purchasing a paper constitutes a kind of middle-class commercial normalcy, and that paper-buying implicitly contains the economic potential to contain London’s threatening anonymity by banishing it to a madhouse on the outskirts of town. The journal provides the occasion for

⁷Not to be confused with the 1746 journal of the same name, although the CBEL attributes both journals to Eliza Haywood. There are only four extant papers of the 1728 Parrot (and nine of the 1746 periodical); citations are from the first number, which is unpaginated.

⁸Pat Rogers points out that “In the work of Pope and Swift . . . Grub Street is regularly associated with Moorfields, and implicitly or explicitly with Bedlam” and reports that in fact “The delinquency sheet for Moorfields is a long one.” Grub Street: Studies in a Subculture (London: Methuen, 1972), 45, 48. For specifics, see 44-52. Moorfields was, in fact, near both Grub Street and Bedlam.

individual readers' insignificant contributions (the Parrot cost two pence) collectively to construct a necessary public institution, and thereby serves as a catalyst to transform private acts into public charity. By opposing reform to madness, she evokes an expectation that her readers internalize social discipline and faintly anticipates utilitarianism: the unproductive must be reformed, or banished.

Hence commerce and productivity inform both the essay periodical's content and the eidolon's self-characterization. As a woman, Mrs. Prattle expresses patriotism through consumption: "Women are here the better Species. My Garb is English Manufacture, my Lace was made in Hartfordshire, my Drams too of the English Distillery; but I drink Tea for fashion sake." She faithfully purchases her country's products, while also supporting international trade. Moreover, she has undertaken the project of publishing for two reasons. First, because she "cannot hold [her] Tongue"; as a childless Widow, she reasons "I thought I could not employ myself better than to write thus for the Good of my country," ironically employing the standard association of women and gossip common to early essay periodicals in order to shift the focus of female creation away from children and onto texts. Second, as a woman she has a special interest in countering the "many cross Suggestions and bitter Hints against the Soldiers and Standing Army, which have been the constant Subject of a certain weekly Writer." In an argument clearly intended to appear ridiculous, she asks, "Is not

the very Pleasure of seeing them, Consideration enough for the Charge they are to us?" Besides, like women, they buy things:

What Money circulates better than the Soldiers? . . . What comes to their Hands returns to the same Funds that produc'd it. Our own Commodities are employ'd in cloathing them; every common Centinel carries at least four or five manufactured Fleeces on his Back, besides the Addition of Granadier's Tufts and Laceing.—What supports the Gold Lace and Embroidery Business.

Although her tone clearly signals to the reader that Mrs. Prattle's viewpoint is the opposite of the writer's, the thoroughness of her irony nonetheless aligns journals as a class with the commercial interest. The popularity of periodical essays is as much parodied as the standing army, and for much the same reason: just as the army is a burden on taxpayers, the deluge of periodical ephemera burdens coffee-house proprietors. But Mrs. Prattle defends both on the grounds that they are entertaining and, though they take money away from some, they channel it to others. Despite the Parrot's short life, the success of the genre as a whole demonstrates that its arguments, notwithstanding their ironic intent, are largely true.

Like the Parrot, the eidolon of the Old Maid (1755-1756), another superfluous woman, implies that writing itself is a gendered form of production. Mary Singleton opens her first paper with the acknowledgment that "amidst the

present glut of essay papers, it may seem an odd attempt in a woman, to think of adding to the number,” and closes with the hope that as her paper particularly encourages “correspondence” from “antiquated virgins. . . . by setting them to work, she shall do society good service, and save the reputation of many a harmless giddy girl, who might otherwise fall under their observation.” Like the papers cluttering coffeehouse tables, unmarried women are presented in terms of trade: young women on the marriage market must find buyers, while old maids, whose gossip undermines these young ladies’ value, are, like the Parrot’s madmen, “useless,” and must be made “of service to the community” by channelling their endless production of gossip into a saleable commodity. Both women and periodical essayists must compete in a crowded marketplace to make their livings, a parallel that Mary emphasizes in telling her own story. Worth a modest but respectable four hundred pounds a year, she unwisely engaged herself to a gentleman who, though “very agreeable, and . . . passionately fond of me . . . had not a shilling” and was “bred to no employment,” so that it “was impossible to get my father’s consent.” Of course, at the time of her father’s death, her lover came into an unexpected inheritance, which caused him to break their engagement with an explanation that the “business” he was now “engaged in” required him “to marry Miss Wealthy.” Her suitor’s description of marriage as a business reveals that courtship, one of the most culturally weighted forms of human intercourse, is itself a kind of trade, as her father—whose characterization as “an honest country

justice” conveys both common sense and uncommon insight—knew. Older and wiser, she has learned her lesson well, promising to reveal the “character” of her unmarried niece to the reader at “another time” because she “chuse[s] to raise the curiosity of my readers, and not satisfy it, on purpose to make them take the next [paper]: an act practiced with great success by those authors whose works are retail’d in sixpenny numbers.”⁹ As a periodical essayist, she now knows that young women, like writers, must not converse with men incautiously, or agree too soon to close a sale. Instead they must be careful what they promise, and withhold some of their stock until they are sure of the best price for their wares.

The Old Maid’s comparison of women with writers emphasizes a view of authorship as a kind of self-sale; by implying that a writer’s text is as much his own as a young lady’s virtue is hers, Mary Singleton is unusual among female idolons in her unembarrassed attitude towards the realities of commerce and publication. She demonstrates a particularly modern sense of the writer’s role, in which authorship inheres in a sense of ownership that is implicitly commercial. Modern authors own their texts in order to sell them and make a living by them.¹⁰

The Old Maid is particularly unapologetic about the need of authors to make a

⁹[Frances Brooke], Old Maid (London, 1755-56) 1, 1-6. Subsequent references cite issue and page numbers.

¹⁰On the modernity of this concept of authorship, see Rose, Authors and Owners. Martha Woodmansee, “Genius and the Copyright,” in The Author, Art, and the Market, 35-55. On the effect of the printing business in reshaping authorship, see Kernan, Printing Technology, in particular chapter two, “Printing, Bookselling, Readers, and Writers in Eighteenth-Century London,” 48-90.

living, devoting the third and fourth numbers of her journal to discussing the issue. She argues that it is “a very unjust assertion, that this is not the age of genius” because the difference between the literary glory of one era and another “is not so much from the difference of genius as of encouragement” (Old Maid 3, 14). Describing “the difficulties which authors have to struggle with” in achieving public notice in distinctly economic terms, she publishes a fictional letter in which the writer offers his “service” as a “Puffer.” “In one word,” her correspondent promises, “make it worth my while, I will . . . blow you up into fame in an instant.” The puffer’s letter illustrates the overdetermined nature of the relationship between business and social life: gossip and reputations may be had for a price, and commercial success ultimately hinges on word of mouth. That the letter is clearly written by the Old Maid’s author to illustrate this point only reinforces its message. Moreover, in pointing out the irony of the public’s dependence on the opinions of others—readers fear to praise a new journal “not considering that they themselves make that Town which they are afraid of,” (Old Maid 4, 19-21)—the Old Maid emphasizes the reflexiveness of the entire situation. Everyone participates in the perpetual creation and exchange of reputations and the businesses that are built on them; even silence and restraint have public and economic consequences.

By composing and retailing the art of conversation, periodical essayists transform verbal production into a form of labor, and therefore assert their

property rights. In a passage on the poverty of writers, the Old Maid recalls Locke's concept of natural property rights, declaring "the most painful of all labour, that of the mind" (Old Maid 3, 14). Authors therefore, like Locke's property owners, have an "unquestionable . . . private right" to the product of their labor, notwithstanding that their work is primarily mental rather than manual.¹¹ This right of authors implicitly reflects and supports the modern belief in property rights as the foundation of both capitalism and liberty. The connection is made explicit by both the title and content of Addison's relatively short-lived Free-Holder (1715-1716), which unlike the Tatler and Spectator lasted for only fifty-five issues. The paper begins by declaring that "The Arguments of an Author lose a great deal of their Weight, when we are perswaded that he only writes for Argument's sake, and has no real Concern in the Cause which he espouses. This," the eidolon maintains, "is the Case of one, who draws his Pen in the Defense of Property, without having any; except, perhaps, in the Copy of a Libel, or a Ballad." In keeping with Addison's reputation for separating his politics from his journalism, the Free-Holder plainly suggests that Grub Street has no business engaging in political debate, since "a Grub-Street Patriot . . . does not

¹¹John Locke, An Essay Concerning the True Original Extent and End of Civil Government, chapter 5 sxn. 27-28. Reprinted as Second Treatise of Government, ed. C. B. Macpherson (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1980), 19.

The equation of mental and manual labor necessarily passes over the question of whether the a printed text properly belongs to the writer or the typesetter; Rose explains that this problem was resolved by conceiving of the printer's role as one of "securing marketable rights" as opposed to outright ownership (Authors and Owners, 3). The typesetter, by selling his labor to a publisher, implicitly signs over whatever claim he might have on the finished product to his employer: Locke offers the example of "the Turfs my Servant has cut," which nonetheless constitute "my Property."

write to secure, but to get something of his own.” Yet the Free-Holder is transparently ideological, declaring soundly that “as a British Free-holder, I should not scruple taking place of a French Marquis; and when I see one of my Countrymen amusing himself in his little Cabbage-Garden, I naturally look upon him as a greater Person than the Owner of the richest Vineyard in Champagne.” He associates aristocracy with the French and declares the essence of Englishness to inhere in property itself rather than in the propertied classes. Hyperbolically, he identifies the interests of the nation with those whose property consists only of a kitchen garden—or, notwithstanding his disdain for Grub Street, a periodical essay. His scorn of impoverished writers becomes, in the end, a declaration of essential equality: “I shall in the Course of this Paper . . . endeavour to open the Eyes of my countrymen to their own Interests, to shew them the Priviledges of an English Free-holder which they enjoy in common with my self,” notwithstanding his self-characterization as an impoverished author who earns no more “than Forty Shillings a year.”¹² The interests of authors can be understood to coincide with the interests of the middle orders and the nation as a whole—as long as what they write represents their true bottom line.

The Free-Holder’s criticism of propagandists-for-hire highlights the essential problem of authorial intent for Grub Street writers in general and periodical essayists in particular. The essay periodical eidolon renders periodical

¹²[Joseph Addison .], The Free-Holder (1715-16) 1, 1-5. Subsequent references cite issue and page number.

essayists formally (if not actually) anonymous, and despite the various advantages of the device, it therefore presents a dilemma for authors whose stated goal is to reform their readers. Recall the Tatler's apologia "that Severity of Manners was absolutely necessary to him who would censure others, and for that Reason, and that only, chose to talk in a Mask"¹³ Where self-interest and public interest are perceived as conflicting, readers are likely to be suspicious of a writer's motives: does the writer who writes for money serve himself or his reader? Similarly, in the context of increasing urbanization and an emerging commercial society, readers feel both keen interest in and suspicion of the intentions of those around them, an uncertainty that underlies the familiar representation of London as a place where blurred class distinctions led to frequent improprieties, where thieves, prostitutes and swindlers proliferated, where young people (women especially) had too much freedom, and where credit—in both senses of the word—was too easily extended. With old marks of rank and status giving way to a more impersonal, mercantile way of life, people sought new civil standards on which to ground social and financial exchanges, to mitigate anxiety and suspicion, and to safeguard their interests without isolating themselves. Englishmen and women in the early eighteenth century needed to know how, among strangers, to distinguish between the trustworthy and the dishonest, a concern that lay under the surface of the desire for "reform," which

¹³Tatler 271, in The Tatler, ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 3:363.

might better be understood as a desire to reconcile the two kinds of cultures: new living conditions and old ideas about propriety and virtue. For essay periodicals and their readers, the problem of authorial intent implicitly addressed the anxieties associated with commercialization not only by providing a common reading experience and promoting a new set of middle-class tastes and opinions, but also by teaching audiences to “read” intent and by helping create the professionalized author and, by extension, the modern professional: an ideological fiction that intrinsically links personal advancement to the public good.

The Free-Thinker (1718-19) is particularly conscious of the problem of authorial intent and its ideological consequences. One of the most successful essay periodicals of the era, it ran to three hundred and fifty issues and was republished in 1739 in a three-volume edition. Its explicit articulation of its methods and anxieties demonstrates a self-conscious pursuit of its success. In addressing the question of intent it identifies the central components in what would become the professionalization of the writer as proprietary author, a process whereby “the author is conceived as the originator and therefore the owner of a special kind of commodity, the work” (Rose, Authors and Owners, 1). Establishing the writer’s sincerity plays a central role in this construction: Addison’s Free-Holder asks that its readers “peruse these Papers with that Candour and Impartiality in which they are written” (Free-Holder 1, 5) but having raised the issue of Grub-Street opportunism, that journal does not explain the basis for distinguishing between

sincerity and self-interest in periodical ephemera, leaving the problem essentially unaddressed.¹⁴ In contrast, the Free-Thinker is conspicuously preoccupied with the problem of authorial anonymity and intent. The eidolon feels compelled to explain that his anonymity enables the reader to “consider . . . the Weight of the Argument, [rather than] their regards for the Person, who enforces it.”¹⁵ This statement reflects Steele’s remark in the final Tatler as well as its author’s awareness of the motivation behind those remarks, that Steele’s critics attacked him for attempting to disguise his known partisanship¹⁶ by levelling criticisms similar to Addison’s comments on pamphlet partisanship in the Free-Holder. The Free-Thinker therefore indicates its generic identity—it is the same kind of paper that the Tatler was—in a way that identifies an underlying anxiety about the very

¹⁴Notwithstanding the general opinion of Addison’s reflectiveness and care while writing, it seems to me that his journalism lacks the authorial self-consciousness that characterizes many essay periodicals considered far less textually rich than the Spectator and Addison’s other journalistic work. The perceived weakness of most essay periodicals may reflect the truth that “‘Weak’ institutions . . . provide better sources for understanding the dynamics of culture than do ‘strong’ institutions that more successfully manage to make themselves look like eternal facts of nature or the everlasting values of culture” (Kernan, Printing Technology, 6-7) or it may reflect the same aesthetic prejudice in favor of texts that appear controlled and harmonious that has occasionally led critics to dismiss Tristram Shandy as a failed novel; Ian Watt, for instance, calls it “not so much a novel as a parody of a novel” (The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding [Berkeley, University of California Press, 1957], 291). Possibly both. I suspect that the latter possibility is more the case than is often realized.

¹⁵[Ambrose Philips], Free-Thinker, vol. 1 (1718-19; reprinted, 1722), 10:69. Subsequent references are to issue and page numbers. On the authorship and politics of the Free-Thinker, see Nicholas Joost, “The Authorship of the Free-Thinker,” in Studies in the Early English Periodical, ed. Richmond P. Bond (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957), 105-134.

¹⁶See, for example, the selection from A Condoling Letter to the Tatler (1710) and the passages from the Examiner (1710) reprinted in Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom, Addison and Steele: The Critical Heritage (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 207-221.

issues of identity and anonymity bound up in the essay periodical. Anonymity highlights the problem of self-interest, as the Free-Thinker recognizes: “Numbers of a Self-interested Reason have . . . used every ungenerous Artifice . . . to justify Falsehoods” (Free-Thinker 26, 181). And yet the Free-Thinker represents it as unavoidable and even necessary, not only because texts, especially printed texts, necessarily distance writer from reader, but because while anonymity enables disingenuous writers to disguise their self-interest, it also forces readers to judge texts according to their merits rather than according to the station of their authors. Hence the Free-Thinker offers to “throw together a few Plain Observations to enable every Candid Reader to judge, whether a Controversialist gives Fair Play to Truth” (Free-Thinker 26, 181). From the reader’s point of view, the ability to distinguish between sophistry and reason is supposed to be a matter of common-sense: “Personal Reflections” indicate malice; appealing “to the Passions and Favourite Prejudices of the People” rather than employing “fair Reasoning” demonstrates willful deception; and misrepresenting “an Authour’s [sic] Words” is the behavior of “a Common Cheat” (Free-Thinker 26, 184-86). The essay periodical’s embrace of the middle style therefore not only reflects an emerging middle class aesthetic, it responds to and reinforces the ideological power of that aesthetic: authors who employ the middle style are reasonable and disinterested; those who do not, are deceitful and self-serving, misrepresenting the public interest in order to serve their private ends.

By labelling inaccurate quotation as cheating, the Free-Thinker implicitly links the problems inherent in authorial anonymity to money. Despite the increasingly commercial public realm, in which both the public sphere and publication were more and more obviously shaped by trade, nakedly commercial interests were still culturally suspect (writers who seem overly motivated by profits are commonly perceived as unliterary even today). The Free-Thinker's self-conscious approach to this problem leads him to a provocative solution, through which he distinguishes "the Learned" from the writer who "[takes] up his Pen" out of "the Integrity of his Heart" (Free-Thinker 26, 181). Contrasting elite authorship with the unadorned writing practices of the non-elite writer, he inverts the contemporary assumption that those who write for profit are for sale to the highest bidder: "Men of Scholarship and Capacity"—that is, men who possess both intellectual and material resources—have interests to protect that unknown writers lack. Those who live by selling their writing to the public have no property to protect other than what they write, and are therefore free of obligations except to the public itself: their interest lies in serving the public interest. Hence, although "Society has suffered, in several Instances, by gratifying every Man in the full Liberty of divulging his Thoughts . . . It has profited a Thousand Times more." The best way to decide whether commercial publication benefits or deceives readers "is to have Recourse to the Merchant's Logick: to state the Account of Profit and Loss, and so to determine our Judgment . . .

remembering still, that it is not possible to trade to much Advantage, without some Losses” (Free-Thinker 1, 6) In short, the logic of mercantilism indirectly tends to make commercial writers more, not less honest tradesmen who honor their craft—if not always, more often than is generally realized.

Periodicals in particular, the profitability of which depends on repeat business, directly link a writer’s self-interest to the interests of the public at large. Declaring that “Free-Thinking is the Foundation of all Human Liberty”—an assurance that should “inspire every honesty English Man with a Love for his Country; and teach him to set a just Value upon that Excellent Constitution of Government, under which the Whole Man is Free” (Free-Thinker 1, 6-7)—the Free-Thinker claims for himself and his journal a fundamental role in calling forth nationalism, patriotism, and freedom. Free-thinking, and the Free-Thinker are “the Source of Knowledge and Wisdom; the Parent of Arts and Sciences; It promotes Industry, and procures Wealth; It imbellishes Vertue and good Manners; It supports Order and Government” (Free-Thinker 1, 7). Linking knowledge to arts, industry and wealth to manners and government, this manifesto articulates the grounds on which the essay periodical justly claims to support the public sphere: not only through its discussions of virtue and behavior, but by circulating wealth and ideas, popularizing letters, and creating a taste for the products of industry and trade—not excluding essay periodicals themselves. Moreover, this process is ongoing and progressive; in a later number, the journal declares that

“what was advanced” in a previous number “being only in very General Terms, it will be requisite to subjoyn something more Particular upon the Subject” of truth and free-thinking (Free-Thinker 14, 92). There is always something more to be said on “The different Kinds of Truths,” the more so since “we generally reason with the most Impartiality and greatest Accuracy upon those Topicks, which are of the least Consequence to us, as Men” since subjects of great importance are most likely to engage “The Prejudices, the Passions and the Interests of Men” (Free-Thinker 14, 94). For periodical essayists, self-interest lies not only in pleasing the public, but in improving it, since improved tastes and reasoning can only lead to a desire for further exploration of truth and virtue: the more the public reads discourses of this kind, the greater its appetite for new essays.

Hence the Free-Thinker, notwithstanding the prejudices attached to his chosen title,¹⁷ “grow[s] bold from my Integrity” (Free-Thinker 1, 4), a statement echoed in the contrast between the “Learned” and writers of “Integrity” discussed earlier. Despite the potential for insincerity attributed to anonymous commercial publication, this journal suggests that anonymity and the logic of the marketplace tie private character to one’s public reputation: one has integrity when one’s public words and actions correspond to one’s inner nature. For authors, this

¹⁷Free thinkers, including deists and others who relied on their own judgment rather than the authority of the church in religious matters, were popularly seen as “atheists, libertines, despisers of religion” (Jonathan Swift, Sentiments of a Church of England Man [1708], in The Works of Jonathan Swift, ed. John Hawkesworth [London, 1755]: 2, pt. 1:56, qtd. in The Compact Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed., s. v. “free thinker”). Indeed, the Free-Thinker himself reports that “a Friend” has advised that he “‘had better, for Brevity, call it The Atheist’” (1, 4).

means that writing becomes the textual expression of an author's character.

Expressing this construction negatively, the Free-Thinker announces "that scarce any one dares at present think his Soul is his Own; or, in other Words, entrust himself with his own Thoughts; much less take the Liberty to speak them: And he must be a bold Man indeed, who shall venture so far as to publish them in Print" (Free-Thinker 1, 4). Publication entails boldness and conviction, and actively expresses liberty and probity. Therefore, since writers are most likely to succeed when they identify their self-interest with the public interest, the periodical essayist links mercantilism to a nascent theory of market self-regulation: market forces determine the worth of an author's work, which in turn becomes the sign of his personal moral character. Commercial success therefore demonstrates a positive judgment of an author's work and person. The public is the ultimate judge of whether an author is as good as his word.

This construction becomes one of the logical supports of the professionalized author. The writer who writes for money serves the public interest because, not in spite of, his commercial interests; and in turn, his financial success demonstrates the value of his work. The professional who writes for profit owns his writing in a double sense: it is both his possession and a declaration of that which he holds as truth. While "profession" originally referred

to the church¹⁸ and, somewhat later, to law and medicine, it was in the mid- to late-eighteenth century that “professional” as an adjective, distinct from religious orders, came into use: the Oxford English Dictionary attributes the first use of the word in this sense to Samuel Richardson’s Clarissa, published from 1747-1748.¹⁹ At this time the term “professional” broadened to include a range of profitable occupations; the modern professional is one who enters a vocation explicitly in order to make a living at it. But professionals are also expected to uphold codes of ethics and standards, and successful professionals are generally perceived as pillars of society: the ideological concept of professionalism therefore reconciles self-interest with sincerity, encompassing the competing imperatives of public-mindedness and private benefits. As writers of essay periodicals professionalized themselves, they modernized professionalization by linking profit to respectability through the description of profit as socially valuable, and by defining the social value of their work in terms of its profitability.

Another aspect of professionalization approaches the problem of authorial intent, not through the lens of commerce, but by claiming a literary role for the essay periodical. Many periodical essayists employ eidolons with few, if any

¹⁸In the present context, it is suggestive though perhaps not indicative that “profession” originally referred to both vocation and utterance; clergy entered their profession through a profession of faith. Perhaps this original formulation accounts in part for the role of writers in modernizing professionalization.

¹⁹Samuel Richardson, Clarissa: or The History of a Young Lady, ed. Angus Ross (London: Penguin Books, 1985). Note that Clarissa’s epistolary format and ideological presuppositions are much the same as those of the essay periodical.

characteristics unrelated to their textual role: rather than widows or old maids, animals, madmen or the descendants of large families, a number of eidolons are simply gentlemen who write. These eidolons are usually men, just as tatteresque or gossipy eidolons are usually women, and they emphasize their grounding in the field of letters: the literary eidolon may be an Instructor (1724), an Intelligencer (1728-1729), a Seasonable Writer (1727) or Occasional Writer (1738), a Weekly Oracle (1734-1737), a Censor (1749-1750), an Entertainer (1754), a Monitor (1755-1765), a Rhapsodist (1757), a Free Enquirer (1761), an Investigator (1762), a Monitor (1767-1768), an Occasionalist (1768), a Philosopher (1777-1779), a Literary Fly (1779), an Actor (1780), or a Reasoner (1784); there is even a journal with the exceedingly unimaginative title of Periodical Essays (1780-1781). Many of these journals lasted for only a very few issues, but the prevalence of titles like these demonstrates that one approach to authorial professionalization was for periodical essayists to distance themselves from commerce by embracing the role of writer tout court, to position themselves as authors among other literary men.

The most successful of these “literary” titles is the Prompter (1734-1736), which lasted for a hundred and seventy-three issues and has been partly reprinted in the twentieth century.²⁰ In explaining his choice of title, the journal’s author, Aaron Hill, explains that having observed a prompter backstage, he “could

²⁰Aaron Hill and William Popple, The Prompter: A Theatrical Paper (1734-1736), eds. William W. Appleton and Kalman A. Burnim (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1966). Citations are taken from the original folio sheets rather than from Appleton and Burnim’s edition, which heavily edits the original. The original papers did not number their pages; accordingly, all citations are to issue number only.

perceive, that tho' he seemed not to command, yet all his Instructions were punctually complied with, and that in the modest Character of an Adviser, he had the whole Management, and Direction of that little Commonwealth." The role of prompter is thoroughly textualized: his job is to ensure that the actors adhere to the playwright's script, and to prompt them when they forget their lines. The Prompter's imagery attributes the power to shape the nation directly to the printed text: hence, "without ever appearing on the Stage himself," both prompter and Prompter have "some Influence over every thing, that is transacted upon it." The author, like a theatrical prompter, is an essential member of the company, "diligently attended to by every one, who plays a Part," though he himself remains "unseen." He finesses the problem of authorial intent by evoking the traditional association of anonymity with modesty, declaring that "the Post of Honour is a private Station" (Prompter 1). Yet his eidolon is a member of an acting company, rather than a nobleman, so that this declaration claims an upper-class standard of behavior for one who earns his living; the Prompter portrays author and actor, not as aristocratic amateurs, but as professionals who practice their arts in expectation of payment.

Hence, like the eidolon of the Free-Thinker, both prompter and Prompter professionalize the author by distancing the writer from his text, but the approach of the latter journal reverses that of the former: where the Free-Thinker bases the writer's integrity on his recognition that his profits depend on pleasing the public,

the Prompter implies that the writer pleases the public by adhering to a code of integrity to which profits are a secondary but natural consequence. Nonetheless, the writer's self-erasure promotes a conception of author through which profit and public service are linked. Like the theatrical prompter, the Prompter's eidolon is virtually invisible: Hill's choice of persona requires and receives no further characterization. Having reduced the role of eidolon almost purely to textual function, the Prompter suggests that one aspect of authorial professionalization is the ability to take on any role without justification. Rather than evoking anxiety, authorial "anonymity" instead demonstrates an author's professional skill: authors, like actors, take on roles not in order to deceive but in order to entertain, reform, or educate.

Prompter 18 provides a particularly telling example of the power of authorial role-playing: purportedly "the Speech of Moses Bon Saam, a Free Negro," it was reprinted in both the January issues of the Gentleman's Magazine and the London Magazine, provoking an angered response in the next issue of the former from a purported Jamaican colonist signing himself "Caribeus," and inspired the 1736 publication of The Speech of Campo-bell and a follow-up letter by Campo-bell's author, in 1741, again to the Gentleman's Magazine.²¹

²¹Gentleman's Magazine, vol. 5 (London, 1735), 21-23; London Magazine (London, January 1735), 13-15; "Reflection on the Prompter, and the Speech of Caribeus in Answer to Moses Bon Saam." Gentleman's Magazine v. 5 (London, 1735), 91-93; [Robert Robertson], "The speech of Mr. John Talbot Campo-Bell, a free Christian-negro, to his countrymen in the mountains of Jamaica. In two parts. . . ." (London, 1736); [Robert Robertson], "Case of the Negroes and Planters stated, in Answer to Mercator Honestus." Gentleman's Magazine vol. 11 (1741), 145-147, continued on 186-188. Modern editions of both Bom Saam's and Campo

Ostensibly delivered to a group of escaped slaves “in one of the most considerable Colonies of the West Indies,” the speech debates the moral justification for slavery but urges its auditors not to attack the British colonists; instead they should establish a sort of parallel colony in the mountains, where the Africans can “plant, and possess for Posterity.—Cultivating Law, too, as well as Land,” and trade with the English colonies below. Despite the external and internal evidence of Hill’s authorship,²² contemporary readers obviously found the speech too provoking to dismiss, and modern critics also seem reluctant to simply assume that the piece was written by Hill, demonstrating the success of the eidolon’s substitution for the writer: the essay’s successful career is partly the result of its apparent anonymity. Indeed, this anonymity disguises and therefore effectively promotes the essay’s colonialist agenda: the ostensible speaker, though an African slave, repudiates outright rebellion in favor of trade and mercantilism. The part of

Bell’s “speeches” are available in Thomas W. Krise, Caribbeana: An Anthology of English Literature of the West Indies 1657-1777 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 101-107 and 108-140.

²²Prompter 16 promises to print the speech, which he has received in “A Letter” from “An Eminent Merchant,” in a later number as an illustration of the subject of that paper, which is the distinction between moralizing in general and specific instances; this paper particularly emphasizes the case of slavery as a specific example. The speech, which is mentioned at the end of the paper, seems clearly to be an afterthought conceived of towards the end of composing Prompter 16; moreover, the initial “B,” which identified Hill’s essays, appears at the bottom of Prompter 18. There is also the extreme improbability of the speech’s being genuine (how would an English merchant have heard it?) and the internal evidence of the speech itself, including the speaker’s disinclination towards violence and a suspiciously Anglocentric reference to the Dutch at the end.

According to Thomas W. Krise, Wylie Sypher “supports the view. . . that Bon Sääm [sic] represents an actual Maroon leader”; I read Sypher’s remark, that “the tradition of noble-Negro eloquence surely begins with Moses,” (Wylie Sypher, Guinea’s Captive Kings: British Anti-Slavery Literature of the Eighteenth Century [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1942], 94, quoted by Krise, 102) as ambiguous, possibly referring merely to the fictional trope of the noble savage.

Bon Sáam, like that of an acting company's prompter, explicitly contributes to a larger commercial enterprise.

The theatrical metaphor suggests that professionalism allows authors, like actors, to slip freely in and out of character while trusting audiences to perceive this role-playing as a sign of professional skill, rather than an attempt to deceive. The significance of this development is made clear in the 1730 preface to the two-volume edition of another of Hill's journals,²³ the Plain-Dealer (1724-1725), which declares that while

we can't forgive a real Author acting or thinking oddly or idly, though our Entertainment arises from thence, because we consider him as a reasonable Man . . . we can indulge an imaginary, or assumed Personage . . . because we know that he only plays the Fool for our Delight and Amusement, which we grudge him to do for his own. Thus Montaigne's Faults are the Beauties of Bickerstaffe [sic] and Ironside; and thus Cibber and Hippesly are applauded on the stage, for what they would in private Life run the

²³Hill's career itself demonstrates the link between authorship and commerce: both a man of letters and a famous projector, he involved himself in many of the predominant literary and business trends of his era. In addition to the Prompter and Plain-Dealer, he also wrote Essays for the Month of December 1716 and Essays for the Month of January 1717; these last two collections are particularly suggestive of the contemporary perception of periodical essays as commercial ventures, being collections of individual essays proposing various money-making schemes. For details on Hill's literary and financial projects, see Dorothy Brewster, Aaron Hill: Poet, Dramatist, Projector (New York: Columbia University Press, 1913), still the standard biography of Hill's life.

Hazard of Correction.²⁴

By foregrounding the fictionality of the persona, the eidolon also foregrounds the author's professional role, so that his ability to entertain serves the public, rather than raising suspicion of his motives. Moreover, this development actually improves the literary status of the essay by considering the author's effect on his audience: Montaigne's "Digression and Distraction" (Plain-Dealer, iii) draws the attention of his reader away from his subject onto his person, but the essay periodical eidolon allows an author to shape his narrative voice in accordance with his content.

Hence, play-acting and earnest vindications of sincerity each represent aspects of authorial professionalization. The Plain-Dealer, which emphasizes the entertainment value of the eidolon, also contrasts the foolishness of an author's persona with the actual writer's "superior Duty to another kind of Behaviour" (Plain-Dealer, iv). The author's embrace of a professionalized public role enables the eighteenth-century critical mandate to entertain and instruct by developing both sides of this injunction as occupational prerogatives. As the writer's role becomes subsumed by the author's, later essay periodical eidolons become less self-conscious and more perfunctory, taking for granted the unifying personification that earlier journals had struggled to maintain. Aspects of this

²⁴[Aaron Hill], preface to the Plain-Dealer (1724-1725; reprinted in 2 vols., London, 1730), 1:iv. Although the preface to the bound edition is paginated, individual essays are not; subsequent references to the preface therefore indicate page number in lower-case roman numerals, while references to the original essay-sheets are to issue number only, and use arabic numbers.

transformation can be seen already in the Plain-Dealer itself, in which the speaker's fictional characteristics clearly serve the subject matter of individual essays; rather than developing a well-characteristic eidolon whose viewpoint shapes the journal's tone, the author simply invents traits or features as needed.

So, for instance, the Plain-Dealer's eidolon is said to be in love with a coquet named Patty Amble, whose sole raison d'être is to serve as an illustration of certain feminine traits: her foibles and charms are not used to help develop the eidolon's portrait, but rather serve only as catalysts for essays on the subjects of love and female behavior. Indeed, her affectations contrast sharply with his self-description, and despite his supposed infatuation, he usually presents her as an object of ridicule in a manner that emphasizes the artifice of her character, his own, and the fictional situation at hand. In an essay on talkativeness and vanity, he explains that he has enlisted "the Assistance of Ned Volatile" to curb her tongue, advising the reader "not to assume more Triumph than is due to me" by pointing out that "the Strategem I made Use of, was found out by Shakespeare before me" (Plain-Dealer 14). Unlike Bickerstaff's relation to Shakespeare's Falstaff, which nationalizes his admittedly fictional pedigree, collapsing the distinction between the text and the world, the Plain-Dealer's reference highlights this gap: the paper is presented as primarily a literary exercise constructed in service of a pattern, rather than as a demonstration of the correspondence between fiction and reality.

When Patty begins babbling, the Plain-Dealer's eidolon prompts Ned to interrupt, which he does by beginning a lengthy discourse on the material of his coat:

Mark the wonderful Progress of this silly Thing call'd Wool, but from the Sheep's Back to mine! . . . There's the Grazier for Example; and the Shepherd, and the Shearer, and the Sorter, and the Comber, and the Carder, and the Spinner, and the Dyer, and the Scowerer, and the Fuller, and the Weaver, and the Napper, and the Presser, and the Stretcher, and the Carrier, and the Factor, and the Draper, and the Taylor, and the Packer, and the Merchant. . . .

He likewise discusses the colonial origins of the silver laces in Patty's shoes. In response, she entertains "The Assembly" with a discourse on "Lace-making," which expands into a lengthy monologue on housewifery; the Plain-Dealer admits that "to do her Justice," her prattling teaches her auditors to become "as good Housewives as her Aunt was. We all learnt to Brew and fatten Hogs, and feed Poultry," to make "a Pudding, Farces, Bisks, and forc'd Meats, Marinades, Puptoons, and Olios, Soups, Sauces, Ragousts, Puffs, Pastry, and Pickles, Tarts, Cheesecakes, and Custards, Jellies, Conserves, and Marmalades, Slops, Washes, Pomatums, Cold Creams, and Cordial Waters!" Ned's monologue serves as an essay in miniature on the English wool industry and the role of fashionable young ladies in supporting the nation's colonial enterprise, while Patty's response

likewise constitutes a disquisition on the subject of domestic economy: notwithstanding the paper's ostensible subject, which is the tedium of voluble conversationalists, the reader's impression of Patty is not that she is boring but that she is industrious. Indeed, the Plain-Dealer concludes this paper by admitting, "I am my self too a great Talker." (Plain-Dealer 14), a confession that identifies the eidolon with his foil and reminds the reader that both characters are, in fact, creations of an author, who makes his living by producing bi-weekly essays. Even more to the point, Patty's and Ned's chatter fills up a paper, transparently suggesting that the author found himself at a loss for material and turned to the subject of talkativeness in order to fill copy.

But this ostensibly superficial essay is more serious than it at first appears because, like all essay periodicals, it demonstrates the social importance of minutiae in myriad ways. Stylish dress is economically important, housewifery requires broad knowledge and hard work, and authors like the writer of the Plain-Dealer cultivate and depend on an audience interested in reading about the very details that make up daily life. Frivolity and fashion are objects of fun, but in the end, fun is serious business. Essay papers refashion "the little Incidents of human Life, Pieces of Conversation, and familiar Arguments" (Plain-Dealer, v) into "essays . . . written in the truest Taste," that "cloathe good Sense with Humour . . . embellish good Morals with Wit . . . instruct Familiarly, and reprove Pleasantly (Plain-Dealer, vi). This transformation depends on both their commercial nature

and the professionalism of their authors, whose abilities to make literature out of everyday experience, appeal to a mass audience, write well under deadlines, and balance business and literary impulses so as to emphasize the latter while yet placing it in service to the former constitute the emerging practices of modern authorship.

But it must be acknowledged that modern authors seldom employ masks, a fact that contrasts with the essay periodical's reliance on the eidolon. On the contrary, their literary and financial interests alike combine to promote "ownership" of their works, in both senses of the word. And in fact, virtually all canonical essay periodicals are identified with particular authors, especially authors whose literary success extended to other genres: Steele and Addison of course, but also Eliza Haywood, Oliver Goldsmith, Henry Mackenzie, and above all Samuel Johnson, whose assessment of the genre's cultural significance opens this chapter. Paradoxically, although periodical essayist's authorial professionalization required them to distinguish their role as paid writers from their claims as literary authors, and both the generic identity and social importance of the essay periodical depended on the figure of the eidolon, even in the eighteenth century the most important and influential essay journals were produced by writers whose authorship was widely known.

Moreover, in most canonical journals eidolons are merely generic gestures rather than fully-developed characters. In a sense, these represent the apotheoses

of the “literary gentleman” eidolon type: their near-invisibility reduces them to a tool of the author, rather than his substitute. Most canonical essay papers sketch the outlines of their personae and viewpoints primarily in the first numbers of their journals, returning little if at all to develop the character further in later numbers. The “eidolons” of the Rambler (1750-1752), the Adventurer (1752-1754), the Idler (1758-1760), the Lounger (1785-1787), the Observer (1773-1790), and the Looker-On (1792-1794) are merely personified nouns that convey a sense of detached observation. The authors of these respective papers do not bother to sketch their eidolon’s outlines; instead they offer brief explanations of their chosen denominations in general terms, if indeed they comment on their titles at all. Rather than developing into characters, these nominative descriptors overemphasize their nature as generalities and abstractions: “the Adventurer . . . confides . . . in . . . the justness of his cause . . . has also the power of enchantment, which he will exercise in his turn; he will sometimes crowd the scene with ideal beings, sometimes recal [sic] the past, and sometimes anticipate the future . . . till the charm is dissolved by a word, which will be placed the last in a paper which he shall give them”; “the Idler may flatter himself with universal patronage” because “There is no single character under which such numbers are comprised. Every man is, or hopes to be, an Idler”; the Lounger allows that “Of generic names, indeed, people are not always very scrupulous in the application, and therefore I could easily pardon those who ranked me under the class of men

which the title of Lounger distinguishes,” but explains that “A Lounger of the sort I could wish to be thought, is one who, even amidst a certain intercourse with mankind, preserves a constant intimacy with himself”; the Observer remarks only, “As I mean this to be a kind of liber circumcurrrens, I have thought it not amiss to intitle it The Observer.”²⁵ One of the most preeminent essay periodicals, the Rambler—along with the Spectator, the most canonical journal of all—does not discuss its choice of title at all.

But not all canonical journals dispense with the eidolon entirely, and one, the Mirror (1779-1780) offers a particularly instructive exception to this tendency. As the title indicates, its eidolon is not a person, but it does emphasize authorial anonymity: the first number compares the situation of “a stranger . . . introduced into a numerous company” to that of “an anonymous periodical writer.” Both are ignored unless those around them “chance to discover” that they are otherwise important; in the author’s case, “no sooner is the public informed that this unknown Author has already figured in the world as a poet, historian, or essayist; that his writings are read and admired by the Shaftesburies, the Addisons, and the Chesterfields of the age; than beauties are discovered in every

²⁵[John Hawkesworth], Adventurer 1, in The British Essayists, ed. James Ferguson (London, 1819; new edition), 23:4-5; [Samuel Johnson], Idler 1, Ferguson 33:2; [Henry Mackenzie], Lounger 1, Ferguson 36:3-4; Observer 1, Ferguson 38:5. The exception that proves the rule that canonical papers have identified authors, the Observer, which appeared in Town and Country Magazine, remains anonymous. Like the Observer, the Idler is an essay series that appeared in the Universal Chronicle, rather than an independent journal, although both were canonized as independent bodies of work. I have not been able to examine the first papers in the Looker-On, so cannot definitely remark on its introduction of the title, but in reading later papers in the journal, I have not seen a characterized eidolon.

line.”²⁶ Recalling the explicit arguments of the Free-Thinker, the implicit considerations of the Tatler, and the situations of other earlier and less renowned periodical essayists, the Mirror suggests that a writer’s status interferes with the public’s evaluation of his work as an author: only if he is known to be important will his current audience appreciate his talents. This construction identifies the paradox of canonicity, not least for the essay periodical: although literary merit is supposed to inhere in texts, literary canons are discussed in terms of authors, not works. Moreover, canons are self-perpetuating: once established, an author’s reputation attaches to his further productions and colors their reception, while unknown writers, however excellent, are likely to be overlooked.

Hence the Mirror’s distinction between the case of the stranger and that of the anonymous author is enlightening: the stranger’s reception depends on known social status, while the writer’s depends on his reputation as author, not his rank or connections. Authors, at least, are judged according to preconceptions based on previous assessments of their work, rather than simply according to who they are; they are, in this sense, professionalized, their status based not on birth or extra-literary accomplishments, but on the merits of their chosen vocation. The celebration of established authors is therefore better understood as the consequence of their professional careers than as simple prejudice. Hence the reification of writers does not contradict, but rather completes, the logic of

²⁶[Henry Mackenzie], Mirror 1, Ferguson 34:1-2. Subsequent citations are to issue and page numbers of this edition.

authorial professionalization. Status and anonymity exist in dialectical relationship to one another: only by divorcing themselves from their private status through anonymous publication—that is, appearing in public without reference to non-literary distinctions—can writers become authors whose consequent status reflects the merit of their works independent of their persons.

Hence the author's canonical status reflects the collective public assessment of his merit, which in turn demonstrates his professional success. A good author will gain a reputation because many people will have purchased and read his works. Both author and product therefore promote literary commerce, supporting not only the author himself but also booksellers, publishers, and critics. The Mirror goes on:

Nor is the world to be blamed for this general mode of judging. Before an individual can form an opinion . . . he is under a security of reading with attention . . . and though . . . this may be done with moderate talents, and without any extraordinary share of what is commonly called learning; yet it is a much more compendious method, and saves much time, and labour, and reflection to follow the crowd, and to re-echo the opinions of the critics. (Mirror 1, 2-3)

While perhaps ideally each reader would approach each new text with an open mind, it is more efficient for society as a whole to draw on public and professional opinion. This shift away from the eidolon represents a shift of focus, away from

the individual and on to the public as a collective, and the Mirror's focus on efficiency demonstrates the extent to which the public sphere has already become commercial. The Mirror presents this analogy as a matter of common sense, with none of the anxiety about authorial intent and the commercialization of human relations expressed in earlier journals. In general, public opinion can be trusted, and new but talented authors can expect to make their way notwithstanding early inattention. The anonymity of beginning authors creates space for critics and other professional literary men, including newly rising authors themselves, to inform the general public and help shape a public sphere that enables commerce and cultivates civility.

Conclusion

Enabling Fictions

“As with the Grand Whiggery, so with the Dunces”

—Pat Rogers, Grub Street: Studies in a Subculture

Throughout this dissertation, my argument has relied on the concept of the enabling fiction. The transparently fictional eidolon helped essay periodicals to bring forth the idea of the textually-realized public sphere, the family metaphor and rhetorical femininity made it possible for the Tatler's imitators to establish the essay periodical as a literary genre, and professionalism allowed commercial writers to reimagine themselves as authors who combined an interest in profits with public-mindedness. By drawing attention to both the writer's presence and absence from his text, eidolons enabled readers and writers to distinguish between private and public identities. Frankly requesting submissions in the form of correspondence with an authorial “ghost” in order to help maintain the writer's immaterial reputation and his physical livelihood, eidolons simultaneously implied continuity between these two distinct states of being and invited readers to identify with authors, allowing them to reimagine themselves as similarly cognitive entities. Public identities therefore became text-dependent in multiple ways: based in writing and publishing, but also in consuming essays and letters written by other people, reading and debating them in a public forum, and responding to them through letters intended for publication.

Hence the essay periodical eidolon made public reputation more enduring and in a sense “real” than physical identity. Importantly, the durability of public reputation results from its creation and maintenance by the concept of a reading and writing community that possessed the reciprocal power to shape the material reality of the journals themselves. Eidolons brought the public sphere into being on the very pages of the essay periodical, where readers could listen to others and voice their own opinions on a variety of common subjects transformed through their attentions into the stuff of public culture, in the process revising the circumstances and therefore the meaning of their participation.

This textual manifestation of the public sphere necessarily rests on an understanding of the public sphere itself as an enabling fiction. Although the ideological underpinnings of the public sphere—indifference to rank, attention to the rationale and rhetorical effectiveness of arguments rather than to the interests of their proponents or auditors, balancing private desires with public benefits, and pursuing open and egalitarian relationships between men and women from different walks of life—were never fully realized, people began to believe in them as ideals to be pursued. Indeed, it is this very belief that enables a critique of the gap between concept and realization. Only by holding the desire for equality and disinterest can we realize that we fall short of both ideals and perceive this failure as a problem. This paradox runs throughout my dissertation, which argues on the one hand that essay periodicals promoted the ideology of the public sphere and

the accompanying (and foundational) beliefs in equality and disinterest as desirable and necessary qualities for public participation and cultural criticism; and on the other, points out that by engaging in this project, periodical essayists and their readers acted in accordance with their historical context, in which these ideals served specific political and economic interests.

These apparently contradictory claims reflect a similar problem in recent feminist histories, as pointed out by Amanda Anderson in “The Temptations of Aggrandized Agency: Feminist Histories and the Horizon of Modernity”:¹ while understanding human agency as always necessarily contextual, so that historical actors can never achieve true objectivity because they cannot escape their ideological frameworks, feminist critics have also valorized exceptional individuals who manipulate the ideological presuppositions of their time in order to empower themselves and others—implying that in some cases people can in fact step outside their historical context enough to exploit its inconsistencies and loopholes. I have attempted to manage the paradoxical relationship between ideal and reality and avoid reproducing the problem Anderson identifies by emphasizing the essay periodical’s ideological effects as collective and generic, rather than individual. My chapter on the family metaphor is central because, as Anderson points out, the distinction between individual agency and collective belief has been made clearest in the context of a feminist analysis of gender. In my own argument, the

¹ Amanda Anderson, “The Temptations of Aggrandized Agency: Feminist Histories and the Horizon of Modernity,” *Victorian Studies* 43, no. 1 (2000), 43-65.

distinction between rhetorical femininity and the agency of real women highlights the larger gap between the public sphere as enabling fiction and the public sphere as incomplete, even unreachable, actuality. I have referred to the public sphere primarily as a textual entity, notwithstanding the prevailing critical consciousness that the concept of the public sphere is at best still in the process of becoming and at worst fatally compromised by its historical non-existence.² Anderson calls for an understanding of “detachment as a set of historically situated, modern practices” and an attempt to theorize the “relation between these practices of detachment and the forms of agency that they express and engender” (“Temptations,” 62); while my own argument was not conceived as a response to this invitation, I believe that its emphasis on the textual nature of the public sphere suggests that a more nuanced approach to feminist history and to historicizing the public sphere might begin by emphasizing the distinction between texts and actions as different kinds of historical evidence. Hence detachment can be understood as an attribute of language and, more appositely, of authors as conceptual agents, rather than as an intrinsic quality of historic individuals, a shift that might begin to resolve the problem of understanding people as both detached from and bound by their ideological contexts.

It seems to me that this is how eighteenth-century readers understood the

²For an overview of both viewpoints, see Bruce Robbins, “The Public as Phantom,” introduction to The Phantom Public Sphere, Cultural Politics, vol. 5 (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1993), vii-xxv.

term. The essay journals of the eighteenth century suggest that the public sphere was in fact understood primarily as a textual construct rather than a description of actual conditions, and that this understanding rested in part on its being deliberately and consciously distinct from perceived political activity. For essay writers as well as for the general public, the fiction of the public sphere provided ways of understanding the world that promoted writing as a primary means of shaping culture, mitigated the anxieties accompanying the shift to commercial culture, and promised that private individuals could help shape the world in which they lived. By substituting ideology for politics, the public distanced itself from the disruption of the previous century, which it perceived as destructive to the nation; hence, even as the middle class began to exercise power, it also wanted to perceive itself as apolitical. Rather than direct status and political influence, publicness (and publication) provided cultural capital, including especially a belief in the importance and power of reading, writing, and public discussion. Like the public sphere itself, the importance of writing to the newly dominant middle class was an enabling fiction: newspapers and novels, essays and letters were important not so much because their content was practically necessary as because reading and writing conveyed status supposed to be independent of birth and fortune. Writing became more important because people believed it was; their belief made the fiction of the textual public sphere into an influential if intangible truth.

The example and medium of essay periodicals allowed readers to remake themselves as correspondents and citizens. Through these journals, people moved from discussing journals and arguing over political pamphlets in coffeehouses to reimagining their roles as contributors to a new code of civil discourse, conducted both in person and through print. This shift drew upon and perpetuated a new sense of egalitarianism based on the distancing effects of print, which by separating writers from their words encouraged people to strive for a parallel separation between public arguments and private persons. But even as periodical essayists, with the *Tatler*'s cautionary example before them, eschewed obviously partisan political content, the genre was nonetheless effectively political in an ideological sense. Its dependence on and celebration of commerce, consensus, conversation and civics advance Whig political principles and trade interests and "enact a Lockean program" both by presenting individual papers as evidence of "how the mind combines and works upon discrete and periodic evidence . . . to create ideas"³ and by promoting the importance of public opinion and private property, this last particularly with regard to writer's ownership of their texts through the concept of authorial professionalization.

Hence the "Whig view of history" that so long dominated criticism of the essay periodical—a view that collapses the distinction between agency,

³Charles A. Knight, "The Spectator's Generalizing Discourse," *Telling People What to Think: Early Eighteenth-Century Periodicals from the Review to The Rambler*, eds. J. A. Downie and Thomas N. Corns, special issue of *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism*, vol. 16 (1993), 51.

disinterest, and public egalitarianism as ideological values and these same qualities as supposed historic achievements—stems from the journals themselves, to which Whig values are innate. Significantly, most of the known authors of the journals listed in the “periodical essays” section of the Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature were politically or personally associated with prominent Whig politicians. Steele and Addison between them wrote or contributed to fourteen journals besides the Tatler and Spectator; their friends and associates Arthur Maynwaring, John Oldmixon, Anthony Hedley, Ambrose Philips and Addison’s cousin Eustace Budgell collaborated on some of these and also wrote or edited essay periodicals of their own—notably the Free-Thinker, which Philips was in charge of, and the Bee (1733-1735), which was Budgell’s journal. The Craftsman (1726-1747) was primarily the project of Nicholas Amhurst, who claimed that his “persistent Whig principles” were the cause of his expulsion from Oxford; it ran to over a thousand numbers and is estimated to have sold up to ten thousand copies per paper, making it both the longest-lived and most successful essay periodical of all. Other, more obscure authors include religious dissenters and non-conformist clergymen: John Hughes, who wrote The Lay Monk (1713-1714) with Richard Blackmore, “was educated at a dissenting academy”; Blackmore was at one point the physician to William III, by whom he was knighted. Benjamin Avery, a Presbyterian minister associated with dissenters, wrote the Occasional Paper (1716-1719, known also as the “Bagweel Papers”) with Moses Lowman, a

“non-conformist divine” who also engaged in a pamphlet war with Thomas Sherlock, a conservative cleric who criticized the Bishop of Bangor’s sermon against the disciplinary authority of the church. Thomas Gordon also wrote on the Bangorian controversy; as a result he was noticed by John Trenchard, a confirmed Whig, and together they wrote both The Independent Whig (1720-1721) and an essay series known as the “Cato letters” in the London Journal and British Journal (1720-1723).⁴ Collectively, these authors and their journals demonstrate the essay periodical’s appeal for anti-establishment writers and those who perceived hierarchy and traditional forms of authority as inimical to the public interest.

That so many of the genre’s known authors were Whigs or dissenters presents two problems for my argument. First and most obviously, the Whig dominance of the essay periodical calls into question my claim that commercial and anti-hierarchical principles consistent with Whig ideology are intrinsic to the essay periodical’s form, rather than extrinsic consequences of historic coincidence. Are Whig authors so prominent because, as I am claiming, the essay periodical form inherently promotes their world view, or are the journals Whiggish merely because they were written by Whigs? The question can be addressed by surveying the journals written by Tories. Swift contributed to the Tatler, of

⁴Dictionary of National Biography, rev. ed., s.v. “Amhurst, Nicholas”; “Hughes, John”; “Blackmore, Sir Richard”; “Avery, Benjamin”; “Lowman, Moses”; “Gordon, Thomas”; “Trenchard, John.”

course, as well as the Examiner and the Intelligencer (1728); Pope also contributed to Steele's journals as well as to the Grub-Street Journal (1730-1737); Delariviere Manley may have written the Female Tatler and contributed to the Examiner; Lady Mary Wortley Montagu wrote The Nonsense of Common-Sense (1737-1738) and Bolingbroke wrote the Occasional Writer (1727) and contributed to the Craftsman. Regardless, there are many fewer journals by known Tories or Tory sympathizers than by known Whigs,⁵ and generally speaking, successful Tory journals are exceptions that prove the rule. The Examiner and the Nonsense of Common-Sense are both more or less reactions to Whig journalism rather than fully independent publications in their own right; although the Examiner was extremely successful, the fact that it was founded in an attempt to counterbalance the Whig dominance of the form indirectly confirms its ancillary status. Other evidence similarly demonstrates that Tory journals represent a minor branch of a Whig-dominated genre. The Female Tatler might have been written by Thomas Baker, an obscure minor dramatist whose politics apparently made little impact on his career, rather than by Manley; when either Manley or Baker gave it up, it was taken over by Bernard Mandeville, whose ideological principles were the

⁵ According to Jeremy Black, there are no Jacobite newspapers from the time of the Revolution and the lapse of the Licensing Act in 1695, along with the failure to revive it in the following years, "may have owed something to a conviction among some parliamentarians that the press was beneficial"; Black demonstrates that attempts to control the press during this time were headed by Tories. See The English Press in the Eighteenth Century (London: Croom Helm, 1987), 7-10.

opposite of Manley's.⁶ Bolingbroke, though a Tory, was extremely moderate and friendly with a number of prominent Whigs, as his association with Amherst and the Craftsman confirms. Moreover, popular attacks on modern authors, Grub Street, and "dulness," most prominently by Swift and Pope but also by other writers, show that Tories and social conservatives held Grub Street, and by extension journalists and journalism, in disdain, perceiving them as subliterate. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that there are far more "Whig" journals than "Tory" ones. The association between Whigs and journalism is not merely casual, but deeply ideological, built into the literary culture.⁷

A second and more important problem for my argument is that the essay periodical's dominance by like-minded writers, many of whom knew one another, potentially undermines the case for the essay periodical's openness and public accessibility. The claim that the genre formally represents the ideals of liberalism and the public sphere is arguably, in this light, ahistorical: the facts of authorship indicate that the more successful journals were dominated by a small circle of partisans, rather than being open to authors of varied viewpoints. Still, there were many more anonymous journals than there were papers by Whigs and dissenters: although the Whig authors are identifiable, those that are not almost certainly

⁶See M. M. Goldsmith, introduction to By a Society of Ladies: Essays in The Female Tatler, by Bernard Mandeville (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1999), 16-28.

⁷On the historical atmosphere of Grub Street and its consequent significance as a literary metaphor, see Pat Rogers, Grub Street: Studies in a Subculture (London: Methuen, 1972).

represent a broader cross-section of political and apolitical points of view.⁸ Indeed, in basing much of my analysis on minor journals, some by unknown writers, and excluding better-known papers like the Guardian, the Craftsman, and the Bee, my goal has been to present an argument that necessarily balances the authorial record by focusing on reader reception and the cultural milieu of these periodicals. While Addison and his circle may have directly or indirectly promoted their politics in their journals⁹, the genre collectively cannot be said to have such an “intent.” Nor can we assume that its large popular audience was composed only of partisan allies of a small, if influential, group of writers. Instead, the evidence of the journals themselves suggests that the reading public perceived these authors’ works as reflecting more generalized needs and beliefs, and that this perception helped shape the sense of the essay periodical’s representative and inclusive nature.

In the end, essay periodicals did not create a democratic utopia, or enable the British public to fully realize the ideal of the public sphere. They provided a vision of a liberal utopia that was practically unattainable, but the extent of this achievement and its limitations reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the

⁸The fact that so many Whig authors have been identified may also indicate something about attribution studies: it seems reasonable to conjecture that writers who were less conflicted about commercial writing would be easier to trace—a supposition not pursued here, and one that bears further thought.

⁹Knight argues convincingly that “The indirection of The Spectator seems more a matter of conscious political strategy than of Addison’s moderate personality” (“Generalizing Discourse,” 55).

ideology they helped create. The distinction between their effects and the intentions of their authors, emphasized through the figure of the authorial eidolon, can help us to make similar distinctions between ideologies as collective forms of belief and responses to those beliefs on the part of individuals as historic agents. The genre came into being as the relationship between private individuals and the public as a whole was being formed alongside ideals of disinterest and objectivity, values which were increasingly perceived as particularly meaningful to writers and publication. Essay periodicals and their eidolons therefore constitute valuable evidence in understanding the emergence and power of the enabling fiction of the public sphere.

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