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A GENEALOGY OF ECCENTRICITY

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Chapter 1

Introduction: A Genealogy of Eccentricity

The following pages comprise a study of the eccentric--of his invention as a relatively coherent, recognizable figure in early-eighteenth-century England; of his purported characteristics (above all, male sex, monomania, benevolence, sexual haplessness, and sentimentality, with different emphases at different times); of his changes between 1700 and 1900, by which time he had taken essentially the same form we still understand him to take; and of the social and discursive purposes he has served.

This study of the eccentric is the first, to my knowledge. By this statement I mean two things. First, that to this day, very few books focus directly upon the subject of eccentricity and/or eccentrics. Only a handful of books are devoted entirely to the subject, and they are not really *studies* in the rigorous sense (see below). Most broach the subject only glancingly. They refer (after 1800) to particular fictional characters as "eccentric," for example, but take that concept as granted and timeless, requiring no discussion or analysis. This makes discursive sense, in that the word "eccentric" was not used as a noun signifying what we now usually assume it to signify--"A person whose conduct is irregular, odd, or whimsical"--until the nineteenth century. The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists the first such use as Sir Walter Scott's, in *St. Ronan's Well*, 1832: "Men of every country playing the eccentric." The first application of the adjective "eccentric" to human beings, meaning "irregular, odd, or whimsical," occurred about twenty years before this. This sense of the word[1] did not appear earlier because the concept was still forming. Only after rules for eccentrics had been firmly codified, only

[1] The English word "eccentric" actually goes back to 1398; but until the nineteenth century, it was generally used in an astronomic or geometric sense. "Eccentric" described the path of orbits or the shape of ellipses that imperfectly followed the circular form.

after "the eccentric" had acquired a widely recognized shape and personality, only after a fairly coherent discourse of eccentricity had been formed, could he be signified by the nominative "eccentric." Only after the figure gained discursive recognizability could he be studied and written about; therefore, until the nineteenth century, he really wasn't. And even since then, the eccentric having been codified and the discourse which accomplished this having been naturalized,[2] it has seemed pointless to analyze or discuss the figure. Not only has he appeared inherently laughable, and unworthy of serious consideration on that ground, but also naturally occurring and timeless. To study such a figure would be like "studying" the fact of the sun's coming up in the east: once the self-evident fact is observed, what's to study? And so there is no significant body of literature which directly addresses the subject.

Therefore, to study the eccentric I have largely had to do so indirectly. By examining medical, legal, and scientific texts, popular novels, biographies, and periodicals published between 1700 and 1900, I have pieced together an account of the process by which the concept of eccentricity was invented, developed, and solidified. Throughout my research, the idea that a culture's boundaries are embodied in its texts has guided which texts I've chosen to study and cite. Stephen Greenblatt observes that "texts are not merely cultural by virtue of reference to the world beyond themselves; they are cultural by virtue of social values and contexts that they have themselves successfully absorbed" (227). Thus one can understand a culture, and the rules and boundaries abroad in that culture, by reading its literature (in the broadest sense of "literature"--writings of all kinds). This is especially true of writing that explicitly concerns itself with setting, enforcing, and/or altering

[2] See Chapter 4 for a discussion of this process.

its cultural boundaries, "the kinds of literature that are explicitly engaged in attack and celebration: satire and panegyric" (226). For any culture draws its limits both positively and negatively, through both dos and don'ts, by both

> *constraint* and *mobility*. . . . The ensemble of beliefs and practices that forms a given culture function as a pervasive technology of control, a set of limits within which social behavior must be contained, a repertoire of models to which individuals must conform. . . . [A] culture's boundaries are enforced more positively as well: through the system of rewards that range again from the spectacular (grand public honors, glittering prizes) to the apparently modest (a gaze of admiration, a respectful nod, a few words of gratitude). (225-26; emphasis in original)

For this reason, most of my "literary" examples (as distinct from the "scientific" examples such as Dr. Battie's treatise on madness, or legal examples such as John Brydall's explanation of madfolks' legal rights) are, at least in significant part, works of satire and panegyric: for example, *The Spectator*, *Launcelot Greaves*, Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, and the novels of Charles Dickens and George Gissing. At first I chose such works instinctively, since satiric and panegyric works seemed most relevant to the elusive subject of eccentricity; then later, recognizing this pattern, I did so consciously, purposely.

My second point in claiming this book as the first study of eccentricity is that it is the first real *study* of eccentricity. That is, "studies" of the eccentric--particularly after the turn of the nineteenth century, after the eccentric had a name--tend in actuality to be literary freak shows, galleries,[3]

[3] There is, in fact, a 1943 British book titled *An Eccentric Gallery*.

collections of oddities. They don't *study* eccentrics so much as *exhibit* them: "Look at this nut! Now get a load of the one over here!" Their tone is uniformly one of "amused tolerance," to borrow Michel Foucault's phrase from *Madness and Civilization*. Eccentric galleries directly or indirectly elicit tolerance, even applause, for their subjects' personal quirks--but always with the unmistakable stronger message that these quirks are silly, comical, and misguided, and that they render their possessors ridiculous, laughable, and harmless. This has been true of eccentric galleries since the early nineteenth century, from the four wacky volumes of *The Eccentric Mirror*, first published in 1807 and running through several immensely popular editions; through Dickens's first published book, *Sketches by Boz*, and his subsequent large and famous assortment of fictional oddballs; to such twentieth-century galleries as Edith Sitwell's 1933 classic *English Eccentrics*. One recent book that typifies and perpetuates this freak-show approach is *Timpson's English Eccentrics*, published in 1991. John Timpson whimsically divides this book into chapters corresponding to the themes of particular eccentrics' oddities, arranging them in the table of contents so that the themes' first letters spell out the word "ECCENTRIC":

Eccentimentals[:] love me, love my rat--or whatever

Competicentrics[:] taking sport to extremes

Clericcentrics[:] quirkiness is next to godliness

Eccentrifrugals[:] mean, moody, and mostly miserable

Natticentrics[:] dressed to kill, or just to confuse?

Touricentrics[:] better to travel oddly than to arrive

Reliccentrics[:] if it's old, collect it

Inhericentrics[:] oddness can run in the family

Colossucentrics[:] build it extravagantly, and build it big

In Eccentricium Memoriam[:] and it's goodbye from him

Technicentrics[:] "mad inventors" or genuine geniuses?

Yukkicentrics[:] if it moves, eat it

Many exhibitionist "studies" such as *The Eccentric Mirror* proclaim their own high educational value and serious-mindedness: "It has been justly observed by the prince of British poets, that 'The proper study of mankind is MAN.' It is with a view to promote and facilitate this important study, that the Editor of these volumes presents to the public a series of lives of such individuals of either sex, as have been distinguished by any extraordinary circumstances from the mass of society" (1:iii). But in fact, what the exhibitionist approach encourages in the reader is the unabashed gawk, the normal person's open-mouthed astonishment at the freak. If these "studies" teach anything it is normative boundaries; aside from that, they merely entertain.

In 1995 Dr. David Weeks and Jamie James published one of the very few ostensibly rigorous studies of the eccentric, namely, *Eccentrics: A Study of Sanity and Strangeness*. It is intriguing, and telling, that for a would-be study of eccentrics to be written it takes a British psychiatrist[4] so insistent upon his impeccable professional credentials and high scientific seriousness that he places the title "Doctor" before his name on the book's cover. He even describes his day job on the back cover: "clinical neuropsychologist and

[4] That Weeks is British is interesting, and fitting, given that Great Britain has since the nineteenth century proudly proclaimed itself the world capital of eccentricity (see Chapter 4).

psychotherapist at Scotland's Royal Edinburgh Hospital." Apparently only one whose vocation it is to study "sanity and strangeness" can be induced to keep a straight face on the subject.[5]

Eccentrics beautifully exemplifies how strongly ingrained is our habit of viewing the eccentric with amused tolerance. No matter how analytically we originally approach the subject, we eventually meander, like Weeks and James, back into amused tolerance--because that is the way certain powerful cultural forces which are discussed in this study direct our thoughts.

Eccentrics begins with a few chapters establishing the study's scientific ground rules, covering such topics as the defining characteristics or symptoms of eccentricity (see below), the authors' methods for locating and gathering information from eccentrics, and the serious purpose behind the study--a revaluation of eccentricity backed by science. But even in stating the study's ostensibly scientific and pro-eccentric purpose, the authors reveal the presence of a powerful cultural demand for amused tolerance. Weeks and James argue that eccentricity, which "is taken on at least partly by free choice, . . . is something positive and pleasurable to the individual" (14); consequently, "eccentrics tend to be healthier than most people" (9); and therefore, "in an age of increasing standardization and homogeneity, psychologists [and society in general] . . . should keep their minds open to the rebellious fun of those who deviate from the norm" (19). Eccentricity, the authors claim, is good not only for the individual but for the species: "Human evolution needs human

[5] Speaking of keeping a straight face: in writing this work, I have been struck by the universality of the response to my topic. People have asked me what I'm working on, and I reply, eccentrics. They then invariably smile: "Ah, eccentrics!" Usually they then name a few of their favorite eccentrics from literature, most often *Tristram Shandy* or characters from Dickens. Or else, clearly thinking that a serious study cannot be written on such an obviously unserious topic, they dubiously ask, "Really? Eccentrics?" These highly consistent responses demonstrate how powerful a hold the "discourse of eccentricity," or certainly amusedly tolerant ways of understanding and speaking about the eccentric, still have on our culture as a whole.

eccentricity" (19).[6] Eccentricity is good, then, for a variety of scientifically verifiable reasons: people enjoy being eccentric (good from a psychiatric point of view), it makes them healthier, it combats societal homogeneity, and it benefits the species. Solid, analytical stuff...except for that phrase "rebellious fun." Eccentrics and their differences, their eccentricity, are merely "fun"--amusing, laughable, silly, and so on. Though vaunted on several grounds, and supposedly the subject of analytical study, eccentrics are in the end hilarious freaks even for Dr. Weeks. Whenever tolerance for them is recommended, even with scientific documentation, the amusement cannot be far away.

The beginning of *Eccentrics* is about as close to serious study of eccentricity as anyone ever gets. Most of that book, too, succumbs even more thoroughly to the cultural demand for amused tolerance. For instance, Weeks and James actually begin with the surprising statement, "It is usually assumed, erroneously, that the United States has never been a monarchy" (3), then go on to chuckle over the bizarreries of the self-appointed "Emperor" Joshua Abraham Norton. In other words, this would-be sober study begins with an amusing anecdote, like some after-dinner speech. Several chapters--for example, "Four Hundred Years of Eccentrics," "Eccentricity and Creativity: The Artists," and "Lost Continents and Golden Ages"--have little content *but* one anecdote after another, short, entertaining mini-freak shows that closely resemble the "freak books" of the early nineteenth century (see Chapter 4). The opening chapter, then, is a microcosm of the book at large (which itself typifies our general cultural inability to take eccentricity seriously): it *seems* to be about something serious--"What, the U. S. A. has been a monarchy?" or

[6] See Chapter 5 on this point, especially the discussion of John Stuart Mill on eccentricity as a cure for societal homogenization, and the discussion of Charles Darwin on the importance of individual difference to the species.

"Eccentricity is scientifically proved to be valuable?"--but closer examination reveals that the underlying and more important message is, "Gosh, cracked-headedness is funny!"

Eccentrics demonstrates that the ways of thinking, speaking about, and responding to eccentricity--the "discourse of eccentricity"--which developed and solidified in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries still dominate our late-twentieth-century understanding of the subject so thoroughly that, to a considerable extent, replacing our usual amused tolerance proves literally unthinkable. Discourse in general shapes our whole social existence both overtly, through disciplines and institutions such as medicine, madhouses, prisons, and hospitals, and covertly, through ineffable forces such as the definition and delimitation of truth, perception, and speech. Overt and covert discursive means circularly support and perpetuate each other: discourse "makes possible disciplines and institutions which, in turn, sustain and distribute those discourses" (Bové 57). Because this is so, I freely examine both "literary" and "nonliterary" texts, and frequently discuss socio-material forces, in making my argument. As Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* in particular shows, discourse operates through myriad channels, blatant and subtle. Because, for example, a popular novel, an influential scientific text, and a new tendency for people to move to cities can all affect and reveal the workings of a discourse, all such phenomena provide legitimate materials for this study. Therefore, I trace the development of the discourse of eccentricity by all means available, moving freely among them.

Discourse presents itself not *as* discourse--as a construction that could be otherwise--but as simple, obvious truth; as James H. Kavanagh phrases it, "The dominant discourse produces an audience, context, and text in which the reigning political framework appears as 'normality' itself; any other

sociopolitical nuances of a text are rendered either imperceptible . . . or impossible to take seriously" (318). Other truths are hard to imagine, for as Foucault argues comprehensively, "Discursive practices are characterized by the delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge, and fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories" ("History" 199); in other words, a given discourse dictates that only certain ways of seeing, understanding, and speaking about its objects are even possible. And finally, we can never truly break free from our own discursive milieu; there is "no place for any of us to stand outside of it" (Bové 54).

So I attribute great and subtle power to discourse. Still, my approach is "Foucauldian" but not *hardline* Foucauldian. To explain: Foucault shows in "What Is an Author?" that authors--for example, Freud and Marx--can produce radically new discourses. He also demonstrates that particular cultural events and works, such as Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon and its theoretical justification, can profoundly alter existing discourses. Discourse is not static; events and authors change it. And so, as Foucault articulates the point in "History of Systems of Thought," discursive practices "cannot be reduced to precise and individual discoveries; and yet we cannot characterize them as a general change of mentality, collective attitudes, or a state of mind" (200). In other words, neither the individual (or the individual work) nor "the system" is solely responsible for changes in discourse. Foucault credits *both*/neither individuals *and*/nor discourse with autonomy, and this is the model for discourse I follow here. I conceive of and discuss the discourse of eccentricity in dialectic fashion: individual authors alter the shape of this discourse, *and* what they write is shaped by the discourse with which they live. Influence travels both directions.

I would distinguish this approach from a "hardline" Foucauldian approach such as that examplified by Nancy Armstrong. As Pat Gill argues, Armstrong envisions discourse speaking through authors, who perform as oblivious mouthpieces for a power greater than themselves. Between her essays in *The Ideology of Conduct* and her book *Desire and Domestic Fiction,* Armstrong posits a coherent, unified discourse which originated in women's conduct books, insinuated itself into other discourses (primarily by means of the novel, which was then a new literary form), disseminated itself, and thereby ultimately caused "the formation of a coherent set of [capitalist] economic policies," "the establishment of marriage as a social institution" (*Ideology* 135), and modern bourgeois consciousness. Aside from the large problem of having one discourse do too much too coherently, Armstrong has all this happening as if by magic--by the power of the discourse speaking itself, autonomously. In Armstrong's account, "individual authors seem tools of a process of which they are entirely unaware and to which all personal motives and specific concerns are subordinated" (Gill 462).

My objection (and Gill's) to this understanding of discourse is that it requires us to view discourse as one huge false imposition upon everyone by no one. It is all too easy to make this error when adopting a Foucauldian emphasis upon discourse's power, and it is an error this study attempts to avoid.[7] As Terry Eagleton points out:

> it is surely hard to credit that whole masses of human beings would hold over some extensive historical period ideas and beliefs which were simply nonsensical. Deeply persistent beliefs have to be supported to some extent, however meagrely, by the

[7] To speak of the study as if it had its own will. In writing this explanation of what I'm trying to do, I notice I alternate between imputing will to the work itself--"this study tries..."--and imputing all will to myself--"I try..." Again, this is how I want the study to proceed: assuming a dialectic, mutual relationship between individual authors and a discourse.

> world our practical activity discloses to us; and to believe that immense numbers of people were absolutely vacuous and absurd is to take up an unpleasantly demeaning attitude towards ordinary men and women. (12)

Although it is true that "we have witnessed enough pathological irrationalism . . . to be nervous of any too sanguine trust in some robust human rationality" (Eagleton 12), still, the concept of no-consciousness or of totally false consciousness is in my opinion finally not warranted. I do, therefore, impute *some* agency and consciousness to authors, and I delve for the often sound cultural reasons why the discourse of eccentricity takes the particular shape it does.

In this dialectical model, rebellion against current discursive conventions is quite possible. One can transgress a culture's boundaries only so far, though, for two reasons. First, the dominant discourse heavily influences (but does not fully determine) our thought; therefore, dissent or transgression is only imaginable for a certain limited distance. Greenblatt makes this point in his famous essay "Invisible Bullets": in Shakespeare's day, to call someone an atheist was an extremely rude but, in terms of getting the charge to stick, ultimately ineffectual insult, because to actually *be* one was unimaginable under that culture's dominant discourse. God simply *was*, and that was that, and so to believe that someone else might truly *not* believe was finally impossible: "the stance that seemed to come naturally to me as a green college freshman in mid-twentieth-century America seems to have been almost unthinkable to the most daring philosophical minds of late sixteenth-century England" (22). Second, even challenges to the dominant discourse are influenced by that dominant discourse. Aside from the first problem--that the dominant discourse shapes the very means of thought and

expression we can muster to fight it--there is the problem of preoccupation: the very fact of feeling sufficiently dissatisfied with an empowered discourse to try to change it means that one is for the moment still caught within the dominant discourse's web. That discourse is still occupying our time and thought, if only in the sense that we are plotting to subvert it. To make fundamental change in the offending discourse takes several authors, several small discursive steps, considerable time. But again, with these built-in limitations, discursive change is possible. After considerable time and many subtle discursive shifts, a dominant discourse can look radically different from how it used to. As Karl Marx explains the concept in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past" (300)--I would add, from the present, as well.

This view of discourse and of discourse's means and rate of change inform this study. I must explicitly make this point because eccentricity, like love, or benevolence, or madness--and, as I will show, tightly bound up with these concepts--is a quality that "we [erroneously] tend to feel is without history" (Foucault, "Nietzsche" 139). But in fact, there was no such thing as "the eccentric" before 1700. There were of course strange people we would now call eccentric; however, there was no systematic method for viewing, understanding, and talking about them; there was no name for the figure. There was no discourse of eccentricity. A discourse had to be invented, and it was invented early in the eighteenth century. Then it went through slow but significant shifts; certain sociocultural and economic forces, as well as individual authors, speaking both in their own voices and in the voices of their respective dominant cultures, effected these changes. By the end of the

nineteenth century, these forces had produced a powerful, solidified discourse of eccentricity. Since that time, we have known (or thought we knew) who is or can be eccentric, what eccentrics are like, how we can tell they're eccentric, and how good or bad a thing it is to be eccentric. So again, the eccentric is anything but timeless and naturally occurring; he is a product and creation of a particular discourse which is itself contingent. In short, there is no such thing as *the* eccentric--there are and have been eccentrics, plural, as culturally and temporally defined, but there is not *one* ahistorical, acontextual, unchanging creature we can call *the* eccentric. When in this study I refer to "the eccentric" I always mean the eccentric as understood at a particular cultural moment.

This study is arranged according to this discursive, contingent understanding of eccentricity. Each chapter focuses upon one major alteration in the discourse of eccentricity. These alterations correspond roughly to standard literary periods: the early and late eighteenth century (Chapters 2 and 3), the Romantic era (Chapter 4), and the Victorian era (Chapter 5). Chapter 2 describes the invention of the eccentric, which arose out of the overly rigid (yet difficult-to-fix) Augustan dichotomy between reason and madness. The eccentric was from the start coded as male, as the first two chapters in particular show, and he was modeled directly after Don Quixote. Early in his existence, great effort had to be poured into making him as admirable as he was dotty, in order to make him welcome in a culture so hostile to madness. He was therefore, made upper-class, benevolent, and generally beneficial to British society.

Chapter 3 shows how, in the second half of the eighteenth century, increasingly medicalized conceptions of madness altered conceptions of eccentricity. Eccentricity, which had always been grasped as a form of minor

madness, came to seem a minor illness, complete with diagnosable symptoms. At the same time, the means used to make eccentricity palatable were increasingly sentimental: what was ostensibly great about the eccentric was his good, loving heart. Thus was produced the still-current idea of the eccentric as harmless and silly: he was considered mentally ill, but lovably and not dangerously so.

In the Romantic era, covered in Chapter 4, eccentricity or oddity in general became of much greater general interest. "Freak books," which described many varieties of unusual people, sold like proverbial hotcakes. By the 1830s, these books evolved into innocuous "physiologies" like the Parisian "sketch-books" Walter Benjamin describes. These books reflected and furthered the culture's mania for scientific classification; they sought out all kinds of difference in order to account for it all, in order to contain it. Under these pressures, "the eccentric" finally gained a name to go with his now-"scientific" status as a kind of species unto himself. He also came to seem less unusual, less different, less oppositional.

As Chapter 5 shows, in the Victorian era both positive and negative views of eccentricity were asserted with increased intensity. Some writers staunchly and directly defended eccentricity's value. Victorians' newly practical, Darwinian understanding of the world, on the other hand, made the impractical, asexual eccentric appear biologically unviable and doomed. Somewhat paradoxically, both positive and negative assertions regarding eccentricity finally did it in. Both views finally made eccentricity seem even less valuable (and possible) than it already did. What we hold today is essentially the late-Victorian conception of eccentricity, which, as even this brief summary of discursive developments should show, differs widely from that of the early eighteenth century.

That the eccentric is a figure with a history is a key, and new, aspect of this study's method. The standard approach is to view the figure as timeless. Timpson, for instance, describes eccentrics from the English Renaissance onwards, making no cultural allowances and providing no historical context. All his examples are simply "eccentrics." Weeks and James discuss eccentricity this way, too. Because they provide more detailed explanation of what they are doing than anyone else, a close examination of their method reveals the erroneous assumptions and built-in pitfalls of an ahistorical approach to eccentricity.

They assert that *the* eccentric--of any period--"may be described in the following ways, more or less in descending order of frequency":[8]

- nonconforming;
- creative;
- strongly motivated by curiosity;
- idealistic: he wants to make the world a better place and the people in it happier;
- happily obsessed with one or more hobbyhorses (usually five or six);
- aware from early childhood that he is different;
- intelligent;
- opinionated and outspoken, convinced that he is right and that the rest of the world is out of step;
- noncompetitive, not in need of reassurance or reinforcement from society;
- unusual in his eating habits and living arrangements;
- not particularly interested in the opinions or company of other

[8] That is, eccentrics of all periods supposedly exhibit the following traits, the most common ones first and the least common last.

people, except in order to persuade them to his--the correct--point of view;

- possessed of a mischievous sense of humor;
- single;
- usually the eldest or an only child; and
- a bad speller. (27-28)[9]

These are the characteristics by which Weeks and James identify both their current and historical samples. This presents the problem of inappropriately retrofitting current discourse. That is, Weeks, a psychiatrist, defines eccentricity here as if it were a form of mental illness. Doubtless because he is a psychiatrist and trained to think and write in accordance with that field's specialized discourse, his list very closely resembles a *DSM-IV*[10] classification of a mental illness. A standard *DSM* entry on a particular illness lists, say, seven symptoms, at least five of which must be present for that illness to be diagnosable. Some of the characteristics of the eccentric even duplicate official *DSM* symptoms: "not particularly interested in the opinions or company of other people"; "unusual in his eating habits and living arrangements"; and "convinced that he is right and that the rest of the world is out of step." The influence of psychiatric discourse is especially visible in this case, given *Eccentrics*' author's occupation, but Weeks merely exaggerates our general cultural tendency to view eccentrics as "nuts." As my study shows, madness has been associated with eccentricity from the start, and is now more than ever. The discourse which casts madness as mental illness--

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[9] One should return to this list and read it again after reading my study. The list reflects the persistence of several key concepts in the history of eccentricity: the eccentric's quixotic, idealistic benevolence, his sexual haplessness, and the concept of the "hobbyhorse."

[10] The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, now in its fourth edition, is nearly universally used among mental health professionals. It standardizes criteria for diagnosing and rating the seriousness of all forms of mental illness. (The manual includes a few catch-all categories in order to be truly comprehensive.)

regrettable but blameless, etiologically physical, and probably treatable--is a very modern discourse; thus, to speak officially like Weeks or unofficially like the rest of us, of eccentricity as if it were a diagnosable mental illness, is a peculiarly modern tendency. Therefore, to identify eccentrics from centuries past by quasi-psychiatric symptoms is anachronistic. As is the case with any discourse, psychiatric discourse presents itself as timeless, simple truth; but it isn't, necessarily, and so to proceed as if it were is to misrepresent the past.

Having defined eccentricity anachronistically, as we all tend to do, Weeks and James search 400 years of historical records[11] for a "historical sample," for characters fitting that definition. The definition is inherently dismissive of historical contexts, for psychiatric discourse, like scientific discourse in general, implicitly claims for itself universal application and validity.[12] It should be no surprise, then, that the authors find all eccentrics throughout history to be like their living sample. Having set up their study so that they can only find the present in the past, they "prove" scientifically that eccentricity has always been the same.

This method leads to absurd statements like: "Our research revealed a great outburst of eccentricity beginning around 1725, with a peak in numbers during the last quarter of the eighteenth century" (47). I would argue that there was not in fact a sudden increase around 1725 in people who objectively speaking *were* eccentric; instead, after 1725 it was newly possible to know and say, by the terms of the budding discourse of eccentricity, what an eccentric

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[11] They read "legal documents, parish church records, the annals of local historical societies, and old newspapers, magazines, and encyclopedias" (42) written between 1551 and 1950. Actually, though, most of the historical examples they discuss come from between 1725 and 1800--just after the eccentric had been invented.

[12] One of the guiding assumptions of scientific discourse is that science steadily uncovers *a priori*, timeless, universal truths: Newton's laws, for example. This is true of individual scientific disciplines, as well: for instance, one can hardly imagine a psychiatrist who *didn't* think that modern psychiatric discourse and techniques were self-evident improvements upon earlier benighted beliefs and methods.

was. Such conceptions, constantly changing, remained relatively novel and visible until the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the freak books diluted them by expanding the category of eccentricity to incorporate all forms of individual difference.

Weeks and James do make a vague nod toward historical forces, but only to dismiss those forces' significance: "Eccentricity has doubtless been with us in some form since the beginning of history: establish a norm anywhere, anytime, and there will be someone to flout it" (41). In other words, eccentricity has been ever thus, and will ever be. In contradiction to the fairly specific, psychiatric definition of eccentricity given above, Weeks and James--again, like our culture in general--define the eccentric simply as that person who crosses cultural boundaries, whenever, wherever, and in whatever form those boundaries exist. Only the act of crossing signifies--not the shape of the boundaries, not the methods of drawing and policing them. That methodological move, telescoping all of history, cuts out the most interesting questions, those this study specifically concerns itself to answer: What cultural forces produced and, later, changed the eccentric? *How* did the eccentric change? Why? What cultural purposes has the figure served? How does the discourse of eccentricity intersect with other discourses, such as those of madness, sentimentality, politics, class, and gender? What can the discourse of eccentricity as shaped over two centuries tell us about the relationship between hegemonic power and dissent? With historical difference erased, there is nothing to do *but* tell anecdotes--so that's what Weeks and James, and most of us, do. Without a historical contextualization of the concept of eccentricity, the most we can accomplish is to be more tolerant than amused. We will be both, as long as we perpetuate the dominant discourse of eccentricity.

Erasing historical context creates one further problem: the expansion of the category into meaninglessness. Without further elaboration of the definitive criterion of boundary-crossing,[13] the category of eccentrics could legitimately include, for example, criminals, homosexuals, the exceptionally ugly, communists, and so on. People in those groups cross cultural boundaries, so how exactly are they not eccentric? Virtually anyone not absolutely adhering to the standards of the dominant culture (and paradoxically, even adherents, if they adhere too absolutely) could be considered eccentric. Weeks and James, too, recognize this possibility, acknowledging that "eccentricity is a trait that everyone partakes of to a lesser or greater extent: absolute, uniform conformity, if it existed, would itself be a kind of eccentricity" (11). And when everyone is eccentric no one is eccentric. The category loses all meaning.

These are the problems built into an ahistorical, essentialist method, the method suggested by our usual conception of eccentricity. To avoid such problems, this study does not seek eccentricity's timeless essence. As Foucault (after Nietzsche) observes, there is no such thing, no matter what the object of study; one "finds that there is 'something altogether different' behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms" (142). The object of this study is to trace the ways in which the eccentric's essence was fabricated in piecemeal fashion from alien forms: in a word, to construct what Foucault calls a *genealogy*.

My study, then, is in part an imitation of Foucault's own works

[13] The list of quasi-psychiatric symptoms seems to provide the means to further elaborate this criterion, but taken individually, those symptoms are even more generally applicable than the criterion of boundary-crossing, and and therefore even more meaningless. Very many people whom no one would ever describe as eccentric, and many eccentrics, too, could accurately be described as curious, idealistic, creative, bad spellers, oldest children, single, and so on. And the first quality listed, "nonconforming," is just another way of saying "boundary-crossing."

classifiable as genealogies: for instance, *Madness and Civilization, Discipline and Punish, The Birth of the Clinic,* and *The History of Sexuality.* Like Foucault, I focus upon questions of discourse and assume discourse to have great productive power. However, as explained above, I do not assign *all* power to discourse. I try to do what Raymond Williams does so well in, for example, *The Country and the City, Culture and Society: 1780-1950,* and *Keywords:* account for the ways specific social and material forces shape discourse. I try to account for the dialectic interaction between discourse and material conditions, between individual authors and broad discursive movements.

Like Foucault and Williams, I seek the *origins,* plural, of the discourse of eccentricity; to seek a single unified origin would amount to a search for essence. As Foucault explains, such a search "is an attempt to capture the exact essence of things, their purest possibilities, and their carefully protected identities, because this search assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession" ("Nietzsche" 142). That assumption makes the search misguided, for in fact, "[w]hat is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity" (142). It is "numberless beginnings" (145), generally mutually hostile. Such disparities and dissensions form the objects of this study, for a good genealogy will "cultivate the details and accidents that accompany every beginning; it will be scrupulously attentive to their petty malice" (144). The concept of the eccentric did not appear fully formed, unified, and harmonious, as a happy, generally available alternative to social conformity; instead, it arose slowly, gradually, out of bickering political factions, irrational[14] fear of madness, and

[14] (But, given the conditions of madhouses and the woeful state of legal rights for the mad, also eminently rational.)

invidious class distinctions.

Once invented, the eccentric did not remain static, unchanged. Various cultural and discursive forces--for example, the rage for sentimentality, the increasing medicalization of madness, the madness of King George III, the popularity of "sketch-books," the Industrial Revolution, and the Victorian demand for social conformity--changed the eccentric. The task of my genealogy of eccentricity is to "delineate this interaction, the struggle these forces wage against each other or against adverse circumstances, and the attempt to avoid degeneration and regain strength by dividing these forces against themselves" ("Nietzsche" 149). My genealogy is to

> maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations--or conversely, the complete reversals--the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us; it is is to discover that truth or being do not lie at the root of what we know, and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents. (146)

Cultural phenomena such as "the eccentric" do change over time, and they do not change without social, cultural, and discursive struggle, nor without chance or error.

In dispersing misplaced piety toward supposedly sacred origins; in showing the pettiness and randomness behind our history and our most deeply held current beliefs; and in demonstrating the "empty synthesis" of selves such as the eccentric's which we presume to be eternally unified, the genealogy, "from the moment it stops being pious . . . has value as a critique" (Foucault, "Nietzsche" 146). If nothing else, it shows that things *have been*

otherwise and that things *could have been* otherwise. To move from there to the position that things *can be* otherwise then comes to seem more possible.

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Chapter 2

The Eccentric's Quixotic Origins

i. Madness and the Eccentric

At the beginning of the eighteenth century in England "the eccentric" did not exist. Oddballs and misfits abounded then, as always, but there was no familiar category, no nominative to apply. Until the nineteenth century, the word "eccentric" was used as an adjective, or a noun substantive, applied to the orbits of heavenly bodies and other circular movements:

> 1. Of a circle: Not concentric with another circle . . . [I]n the Ptolemaic astronomy, an orbit not having the earth precisely in its centre (afterwards sometimes used in a Copernican sense: an orbit not having the sun precisely in its centre). . . .
>
> 5. Of orbital motion: Not referable to a fixed centre of revolution; not circular. Of a curve, an elliptic, parabolic, or hyperbolic orbit: Deviating (in greater or less degree) from a circular form. (*Oxford English Dictionary*)

We can see intuitively how this description of planetary motion also fits human behavior, because we have a category and a name for the eccentric. It is in fact difficult for the twentieth-century reader to read these definitions and *not* think of people "deviating . . . from a circular form." But back then a solid conception of "the eccentric" did not yet exist.

In England *circa* 1700 there were commonly assumed to be two kinds of people, which were easily distinguishable: the mad and the sane. As Michel Foucault reports in *Madness and Civilization*, "The Great Confinement," which began in "1656, [with] the decree that founded, in Paris, the Hôpital Général" (39), swept Europe in the second half of the seventeenth century. The poor, the unemployed, and the putatively mad were locked up *en masse*

and put to work, in hopes that labor would prove "a general solution, an infallible panacea, a remedy to all forms of poverty" (55). Like lepers before them, and often in the same locations, the mad were separated physically and symbolically from reasonable, sane society. In 1675 London's Bethlehem Hospital[15] moved to Moorsfields[16] and significantly increased its inmate population, caging and chaining the mad and exhibiting them "for a penny, every Sunday" (68) until 1815. A report to the House of Commons reports earnings that year of "almost four hundred pounds, which suggests the astonishingly high number of 96,000 visits a year" (68). Such spectacles of madness were "offered as a diversion to the good conscience of a reason sure of itself. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century . . . madmen remained monsters--that is, etymologically, beings or things to be shown" (69-70). To show the mad so was to impute difference and hierarchy: *there* are the poor mad, and *here* are we. Madness and disorder reign inside asylum walls, reason and order outside. And so a "sensibility was born which had drawn a line and laid a cornerstone, and which chose--only to banish." In the newly cleansed city, "order no longer freely confronted disorder, reason no longer tried to make its own way among all that might evade or seek to deny it. Here reason reigned in the pure state, in a triumph arranged for it in advance over a frenzied unreason" (64).

British law, reflecting this popular understanding, recognized madness and sanity as a binary pair--either one or the other, and not both, was possible. In 1700 John Brydall published a pamphlet, *Non Compos Mentis, or, the Law Relating to Natural Fools, Mad-Folks, and Lunatick Persons, Inquisited, and*

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[15] Bethlehem, pronounced "bedlam," is the origin of the latter word, which denotes chaos, unrestrained madness.

[16] Bethlehem Hospital had existed since the Middle Ages, having originally been founded as a priory for the order of the Star of Bethlehem. In 1547 Henry VIII seized it (it was Catholic church property) and placed it under the jurisdiction of the City of London.

Explained for Common Benefit, which explains for the lay reader "such Laws, with the Cases, Opinions, and Resolutions, of our common Law Sages, as do properly concern the Rights of all such, as are wholly destitute of Reason" (A2). Those partially destitute of reason are never mentioned; the implication is, they do not exist. As far as the law was concerned, anyway, they didn't. The law concerned itself strictly with determining whether or not a person was sane *during the process* of composing a document or taking an action such as selling land. If so, then the document or action was legal. If not, then not.

Brydall's explanation of how to prove madness amounts to saying that people are mad when they act mad, which is to say that madness is self-evident--again, obviously and completely different from reason:

> [I]t is not sufficient for the Witnesses to depose, that the Testator was mad, or besides his Wits, unless they yield a sufficient Reason to prove this their Deposition; as that they did see him do such Things, or heard speak such Words, as a Man having Wit, or Reason, would not have done, or spoken; namely, they did see him throw Stones against the Windows; or did see him usually to spit in Mens Faces; or being asked a Question, they did see him hiss like a Goose, or bark like a Dog, or play such other Parts as Mad-folks use to do. (68)

Such madness, though, was most unexpected: "Every Person is presumed to be of perfect Mind and Memory, unless the contrary be proved" (66). This was true not only legally, but also in everyday circumstances; reason was presumed "more agreeable to the Disposition of Nature; for every Man is a Creature reasonable" (69). This dominant conception lends weight to Swift's famous promise to write "a Treatis proving the falsity of that Definition

animal rationale [rational creature]; and to show it should be only *rationis capax* [capable of reason]" (letter to Alexander Pope, 29 Sep. 1725; *Writings* 585). Swift would not have to prove human unreason if it were generally assumed; in fact, *reason* was assumed.

Nevertheless, a special limited recognition and tolerance of madness still remained, a residual ideology yet lingering from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, when fools and madmen were tolerated, even revered.[17] This tolerance never completely disappeared, and it would ultimately enable the advent and institutionalization (not being locked up in Bethlehem, but being made a fond, familiar tradition) of the eccentric.

> The law *circa* 1700 recognized four different categories of the mad: Some whereof are become so by a perpetual Infirmity, as *Idiots,* or *Fools Natural:* Some, who were once of good and sound Memory, but by the Visitation of God, are deprived of it, as Persons, in a high Degree, Distracted: Some, that have their lucid Intervals, (sometimes in their Wits, sometimes out,) as Lunatick Persons: And some, who are made so by their own Default; as Persons overcome with Drink, who during the time of their Drunkenness, are compared to Mad-Folks. (Brydall A2)

True, all four groups were equally limited by law, unable, for example, to write a binding will, buy or sell land, or hold public office. But the madman could not be punished for a felony, because in his case, "the Punishment of a Man, who is deprived of Reason and Understanding, cannot be an Example to others."[18] He furthermore could not be punished because guilt is not possible where reason is absent: as Brydall cites the famous legal

[17] See "Stultifera Navis," *Madness and Civilization* 3-37.

[18] See, of course, the first chapter of *Discipline and Punish*. Brydall's reasoning here follows the line described by Foucault. It is the reasoning ultimately replaced by the system of discipline and surveillance: namely, punishment as exemplary spectacle.

commentator Sir Edward Coke (famed for the standard legal text *Coke upon Littleton*), "altho' he [the felon] hath broken the words of the Law, yet he hath not broken the Law; for that he had no Memory, nor Understanding, but meer Ignorance" (76). Additionally, as Brydall comments, "his own Furor, or Madness, is a sufficient Punishment to himself" (77). Unreason is thus not considered punishable in itself, and it is also grounds for waiving punishments for other, legal offenses. The mad deserve pity and sympathy, for there but for the grace of God go we all: "Take no Pleasure in the Folly of an Idiot, nor in the Fancy of a Lunatick, nor in the Frenzy of a Drunkard; make them the Object of thy Pity, not of thy Pastime. When thou beholdest them, behold, how thou art beholding to Him, that suffered thee not to be like them" (A3).[19] To feel such sympathy seemed only common sense, even in this time and place, because the second and third categories of the mad, the once-sane-but-now-mad and the sometimes-mad-sometimes-sane, always remained open to new members. One could always be impressed unwillingly into the Stultifera Navis.

Enter *Don Quixote*. Cervantes first published the novel in 1605 (Part I) and 1615 (Part II), and Thomas Shelton first translated Part I into English back in 1612. It became *widely* popular in Great Britain, though, when Peter Motteux published an English translation in 1700-1703.[20] Cashing in on Motteux's success, Ned Ward published a popular version in "Hudibrastic

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[19] Brydall ascribes this quote to "an ingenious Author" whom he never names, and whom I have not been able to discover.

[20] Donald F. Bond cites an advertisement for a book published "this day," from the *Daily Courant* for 17 Dec. 1702:

> The History of the Renowned Don Quixote de la Mancha: Written in Spanish by Miguel de Cervantes de Saavedra; Translated from the Original by several Hands, and publish'd by Peter Motteux. In 4 Volumes in 12°, with Sculptures. Printed for Sam. Buckley at the Dolphin in Little Britain, and Sold by the Booksellers of London and Westminster. Those that have the Two First Volumes already, may have the Two Last apart. (*Tatler* 1:125 n. 3)

verse" in 1711. *Don Quixote* arrived anew in a Britain obsessed with maintaining reason and banishing unreason, concomitantly anxious about its own sanity, and mildly sympathetic toward madness. So the "Knight of the Woeful Countenance's" mad exploits struck a resounding chord. Many of the best-known and most influential early-eighteenth-century British writers, including Pope, Swift, Addison, and Steele, knew the book well, referring to it frequently in their publications and private correspondence.[21]

The nation wholeheartedly embraced the book but experienced a more complex reaction to its protagonist. Don Quixote served as the primary literary model for the British eccentric, including two key early examples, Addison and Steele's Sir Roger de Coverley and the Scriblerus Club's Martinus Scriblerus. Both these characters, created by Whig and Tory writers, respectively, closely resemble Quixote in several significant ways discussed below. However, in the British versions, his madness is conspicuously toned down. Apparently British readers, or at least the British writers who modeled after Don Quixote characters which became well known, loved the Don and wanted to see more of him--more of everything but his madness. The dominant culture's will to reason made them unwilling to indulge true quixotic madness. At the same time, residual tolerance for madness made the Don's figure attractive. In Martinus Scriblerus, the Scriblerus Club transmuted Quixote's violent madness to the merely self-damaging enthusiasm of the virtuoso. In Sir Roger de Coverley, Addison and Steele transform Quixote's elaborate, anachronistic, and therefore (to those around him) bizarre chivalric behavior and speech into slight, barely detectable

[21] Addison and Steele also knew Motteux personally and wished him well publicly in *The Spectator*, giving him lots of free advertising. A letter ostensibly from Motteux but probably written by Steele takes up half of No. 288 (30 Jan. 1712); in this letter Motteux gives notice that he has quit literary endeavors for trade, and then he goes on to puff his wares. In No. 552 (3 Dec. 1712), Steele writes glowingly of his (i.e., Mr. Spectator's) personal visit to Motteux's warehouse.

oddities of manner and social graces. Foucault describes the eighteenth century's first response to unreasonable characters as "amused indulgence" (*Madness* 200). The dominant culture silenced and dismissed the power of madness by laughing it off--by producing the eccentric, who was only slightly "unreasonable" and largely funny and sympathetic. Madness became amusing oddity. By means of the eccentric, "[u]nreason reappeared as a classification, which is not much; but it nonetheless reappeared, and slowly recovered its place in the familiarity of the social landscape" (200).

Eccentrics were not the first literary oddballs, of course. The genre of the "character," a brief sketch no more than a couple of hundred words long, describes a *type* of person, usually in amusing and/or satirical terms. The character was in fact "a genre of great antiquity which, however, achieved its final definition in the seventeenth century" (Witherspoon and Warnke 196), not as an invention of the eighteenth century. Characters generally focus on the type's most prominent characteristics, as the brevity of the genre demands; this often means spotlighting strange or abnormal characteristics. For example, this very brief character written in 1616 by Sir Thomas Overbury describes "A PEDANT":

> He treads in a rule, and one hand scans verses, and the other holds his sceptre. He dares not think a thought, that the nominative case governs not the verb; and he never had meaning in his life, for he traveled only for words. His ambition is criticism, and his example Tully. He values phrases, and elects them by the sound, and the eight parts of speech are his servants. To be brief, he is a heteroclite for he wants the plural number, having only the single quality of words. (199)

Aside from the obvious difference of length and depth of description, there

are two significant differences between literary eccentrics such as Martinus Scriblerus and Sir Roger de Coverley, and characters such as this one. First, the character lacks the eccentric's singularity. Unlike the character, the eccentric has a particular name, history, and personality, even if at the same time he resembles a common type. What matters about the eccentric is his difference from the dominant culture's norms. What matters about characters is their similarity to others in their group, their recognizability as a type. By these standards, "A Tavern" can be a character--and it was, written by John Earle. Second, whereas the cultural function of the eccentric--at least early in the eighteenth century, in the instances of Scriblerus and Coverley--is primarily didactic, the character simply displays the author's wit. Overbury describes the character as "a quick and soft touch of many strings, all shutting up in one musical close; it is wit's descant on any plain song" (Witherspoon and Warnke 203). The subject is "plain": for Overbury, "A Good Woman," "A Courtier, "An Amorist," "An Old Man"; for Earle, "A Child," "A Young Raw Preacher," "An Antiquary," "A Blunt Man." The task in drawing a character is to make even a "plain song" witty and interesting, by means of exaggeration ("never had meaning in his life"), metaphor ("the eight parts of speech are his servants"), and word play ("he is a heteroclite for he wants the plural number"). A successfully drawn character demonstrates the author's wit and skill. Eccentrics such as Scriblerus and Coverley, in contrast, teach "proper" behavior, by negative and positive example, respectively. Their interest or power lies less in their portraits, in authors' wit, than in their function as centerpieces of programs for social change.

By March 1711, when Sir Roger de Coverley first appeared in *The Spectator*, and certainly by 1714, when the Scriblerus Club formed and began to compose their daft creation's fictional *Memoirs*, the stage was set for the

appearance of the British eccentric. The reading public was already familiar with "characters" and their oddities; a complex mixture of impatience, disgust, and sympathy with madness reigned; and Don Quixote had provided a popular if distastefully mad model for a new kind of character.

ii. Sir Roger de Coverley, Eccentric Exemplar

Sir Roger de Coverley first appeared in this milieu via the pages of *The Spectator* No. 2 on March 2, 1710/11. Sir Roger's popularity was both a cause and an effect of *The Spectator*'s legendary popularity and influence. The paper had a run of three to four thousand copies, a very large readership by the standards of the day,[22] and one that included most of the nation's educated and powerful. Peter Gay writes that "no daily paper before, and few daily papers after *The Spectator* reached so wide an audience; certainly none influenced so many, and such influential people" (qtd. in Bloom and Bloom 7). It was collected into volumes while still in print, as well as long afterwards, so its readership even increased over time. In the 1760s, long after Addison and Steele's deaths, Hugh Blair observed that *The Spectator* was "in the hands of every one" (Ketcham 3). As Maximillian E. Novak sums it up, "the influence of the *Spectator* on English manners and taste has been described as being only slightly less than that of the Bible" (iii-iv). This powerful influence is not only apparent in hindsight; Addison and Steele's contemporaries felt it, too. One published an anonymous pamphlet shortly after the paper began its run, insisting that the

[22] Addison estimated in No. 10 that there were twenty readers of the *Spectator* for each copy sold. This is probably way too high an estimate, but it serves as a reminder that papers did circulate around coffeehouses and that there were more readers than papers. Even granted Addison's high estimate, Ian Watt estimates the entire newspaper-buying public at about one in eleven of the entire population, and points out that early in the eighteenth century there was "very limited distribution of literacy . . . in the modern sense of a bare capacity to read and write the mother-tongue" (37). Literacy then meant proportionally much more in terms of power than literacy does today.

> Tyranny that he [Mr. Spectator] pretends to exert over the Sense and Discretion with which he lays his Daily Burthen of *Speculations* upon them, makes it necessary to stop him in the beginning, and let him know, that the Foundations of his Power are only imaginary, and his Notions are of the same Nature, as the clouds and Mist that he pretends to cast over his Actions. (Qtd. in Bloom and Bloom 27)

Such attacks, however, were merely gnats to a rhinoceros. The paper continued unfazed to provide "an image of society that influenced representations of social life for fifty years" (Ketcham 163).

A central feature of Addison and Steele's image of society was characters. The authors created many but gave none such lengthy, affectionate, and purposeful treatment as Sir Roger. For instance, they introduced a Club in *The Tatler* very similar to the later Spectator Club but never developed it further. *Tatler* No. 132, printed ten months or halfway through that paper's run, describes its six surviving members (the "Club consisted originally of Fifteen" [2:265]). In addition to the Tatler himself, there was Major Matchlock, "who served in the last Civil Wars, and has all the Battles by Heart," and who regales the Club with his part in them at every meeting; the piquantly but meaninglessly named "*Dick Reptile* . . . a good natured indolent Man, who speaks little himself, but laughs at our Jokes, and brings his young Nephew along with him, a Youth of Eighteen Years old"; an unnamed "Bencher at the neighbouring Inn," who "pretends to have been intimate with *Jack Ogle*," apparently a famed rake and wit; and "Sir *Jeoffrey Notch*, who is the eldest of the Club, . . . a Gentleman of an antient Family" (2:266). After this introduction, Dick Reptile only reappears three more times, doing and saying nothing suggested by his name, and nothing unusual. He

bewails the emptiness of current speech in No. 137, claims he "would hate no Man out of pure Idleness" (3:83) in No. 203, and advises men not to heed "being laughed at for any Thing that is not in the Mode" (3:260) in No. 246. Neither Reptile's nephew, the Bencher, nor Matchlock ever reappears at all. A few pointedly odd characters--in the generic, seventeenth-century sense of the word--do make one or two appearances apiece: for example, Tom Folio, "a Broker in Learning," a pedant "of deep Learning without common Sense" (No. 158; 2:386); Ned Softly, "a very pretty Poet, and a great Admirer of easy Lines" (No. 163; 2:406); and the "political Upholsterer," a man obsessed with news to the detriment of his business (Nos. 155, 160, and 232).[23] These are brief, one-dimensional, exaggerated portraits of familiar types--in a word, characters. They mostly appear in one cluster within a few weeks of each other, beginning about two months after the Club was introduced. I do not want to insist upon this point too much, because no one can say confidently what Addison and Steele intended; however, this timeline suggests that Addison and Steele recognized the potential significance and interest of the Club's characters, experimented with a few other, non-Club characters, and finally gave up characters altogether due to lack of direction or purpose.

But characters formed a significant part of *The Spectator* from the very beginning. In the first number Mr. Spectator describes himself and his background, then promises "a more particular Account" (1:3) of his Club friends in the next number. The Club includes a Templar (i.e., lawyer) who knows his classics better than the law he is supposed to practice; Sir Andrew Freeport, a prosperous London merchant and Whig; Captain Sentry, an early-retired soldier and the "next heir to Sir Roger" (1:16); Will Honeycomb, a

[23] In No. 180 the *Tatler* cites a letter probably written by Steele that ascribes the Upholster's going broke not because he overindulged his news addiction but because noblemen didn't pay their bills. A lecture then follows on the unethical nature of stiffing tradesmen.

superannuated beau and walking encyclopedia of the history of fashions; an unnamed Clergyman; and most prominently, Sir Roger de Coverley himself.

Although characters occupy more space, and more prominent space, in the *Spectator* than they did in the *Tatler*, they still tend to fade into the woodwork--except for Sir Roger. The Clergyman and Templar virtually disappear after their introduction. Sir Andrew is featured in about half a dozen further numbers, but generally as the representative of a position, such as support of free trade (No. 174) or the virtues of labor over charitable donations (No. 232); he is not so much a character (even in the seventeenth-century sense) as a mouthpiece. The introduction of his name merely gives Addison or Steele[24] the means to air their Whig views without doing so directly, under their own names. Will Honeycomb *is* a character in the seventeenth-century sense, a caricature of the Vain Old Beau. In No. 359 he boasts, "I think that without Vanity I may pretend to know as much of the Female World as any Man in *Great-Britain*" (3:343), and only when he is married at last does he admit that he is not 48 years old, a fact all his friends know very well, but in fact over 60. Captain Sentry never quite steps out of the shadows; he shows no kind of peculiarity or even particularity. He appears in only a small handful of numbers, and when he does, he functions mainly to point up Sir Roger's good qualities. For instance, in No. 544, Sentry writes Mr. Spectator from Sir Roger's estate, which Sentry has now inherited, to lament his uncle's irreplaceability.

Sir Roger, on the other hand, figures prominently in thirty-five numbers--more than one in twenty of the 635 total, more than one starring

[24] Granted, other writers contributed to the *Spectator*, Eustace Budgell foremost. But Addison and Steele exerted strict editorial control over all numbers, very few of which featuring Club characters were contributed by other writers. Even Budgell wrote only three numbers featuring Sir Roger: 331, which has the Knight admiring beards' tendency to make men look wiser; 359, in which Will Honeycomb points Sir Roger to a relevant passage in *Paradise Lost* regarding the perversity of women; and 116, discussed below.

appearance per month--and is mentioned in passing as part of the Club in many more. Mr. Spectator writes more than three weeks' worth of numbers, 106-131, from Sir Roger's country estate, much in the way American television programs today travel to other cities to boost ratings. I would argue that there are two important reasons Addison and Steele featured Sir Roger so prominently. One I just alluded to: the Knight was well-loved, and he was well-loved in large part because he so closely resembles Don Quixote. Much of Don Quixote's interest lay in the complex of responses to madness described above; he is *the* perfect illustration of the once-sane-but-now-mad man, as well as the sometimes-mad-sometimes-sane man. He once was sane, but "by sleeping little, and reading much, the Moisture of his Brain was exhausted to that Degree, that at last he lost the Use of his Reason" (Cervantes 2). As nearly everyone who meets him remarks, in nearly identical words, "in all his Words and Answers he display'd an excellent Judgment; and . . . only rav'd when the Discourse fell upon Knight-Errantry" (416). Similarly, Sir Roger: rejection by the widow forty years ago unfastened his reason, and when she comes to his mind, he, too, loses his reason. Second, Sir Roger embodies the manners and values Addison and Steele were explicitly trying to promulgate by means of their paper. By spotlighting Sir Roger they spotlighted their program for society; by making him attractive they made it attractive.

Certainly the resemblance between Sir Roger de Coverley and Don Quixote de la Mancha is close, whether or not Addison and Steele intended it consciously. Evidence suggests, though, that the parallels *were* consciously drawn. Steele describes *himself* as a Quixote figure in the preface to the octavo edition of the *Tatler*:

[N]ever Hero in Romance was carried away with a more furious

> Ambition to conquer Giants and Tyrants, than I have been in extirpating Gamesters and Duellists. And indeed, like one of those Knights too, tho' I was calm before, I am apt to fly out again, when the Thing that first disturbed me, is presented to my Imagination. I shall therefore leave off when I am well, and fight with Windmills no more. (Qtd. in Novak vii)

Sir Roger apparently represents the writers' values (as I discuss below), and one of the writers casts himself as Quixote; therefore, to draw the third leg of the triangle and read Sir Roger as a Quixote figure seems to follow. The likeness is supported by Sir Roger's characteristics, in any case. Many of these characteristics were institutionalized as core characteristics of the eccentric, and so in many ways, to describe Quixote and Sir Roger is to describe the eccentric of three hundred years later.

Specifically, both knights are members of the landed gentry. This fact enables their eccentricity both practically and socially. On a purely practical level, they can afford it: "eccentric behavior has always been more frequent among the leisured classes, for eccentricity itself is essentially a leisure activity. Some eccentricities require money to be maintained, and a person who must hold down a job in order to put food on the table is not in a good position to tell the world to go to the devil" (Weeks and James 50). As Thorstein Veblen ironically observes in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*,[25] the ability to waste time and money, to consume them conspicuously, is what sets apart the upper classes, and what classes below try to emulate (in the

[25] In this work Veblen focuses so exclusively (and so amusingly) upon wastefulness as an honorific category (the other one being archaism) that is easy to overlook his rationalistic bias. That is, implicit in his position regarding wastefulness is that anything not purely "practical," i.e., productive of unquestionably useful, tangible goods such as food and plain clothing--for example, art and literature--serves only the purpose of providing falsely based dignity to the (upper-class) consumer. Obviously that aspect of his position can be attacked in a number of ways. Nevertheless, his insights regarding conspicuous consumption still ring true and remain relevant.

eighteenth century, the middle class in particular). Upper-class status, conspicuous consumption, and eccentricity form a conceptual triangle: conspicuous consumption signifies high class; eccentricity, requiring large amounts of leisure time and money, is a form of conspicuous consumption; eccentricity is taken to signify high class. Practically, the concepts form a chain of causes and effects: high class enables the pursuit of impractical hobbies, which in turn provide presumptive evidence of eccentricity. For example, Don Quixote can afford to sell "many Acres of Arable-Land to purchase Books" (2), which were several times more expensive, relatively, than they are today. He has leisure time to spend on reading: "when our Gentleman had nothing to do (which was almost all the Year round) he pass'd his Time in reading Books of Knight-Errantry" (2). Reading the books feeds his chivalric obsession, placing a "world of disorderly Notions, pick'd out of his Books . . . into his Imagination" (3), and placing him astride Rozinante in his attempt to restore knight-errantry to the fallen world. Finally his exploits as self-appointed knight-errant convince observers of his oddity or madness.

The process works similarly with Sir Roger. His social position enables him to maintain excellent hunting hounds and horses, as well as the time to employ them. Hunting generally demonstrates high social status by means of conspicuous consumption, for "the fast horse . . . much like . . . the dog . . . is on the whole expensive, or wasteful and useless" (Veblen 104). And Sir Roger's consumption with regard to these animals is particularly conspicuous: "His Hunting-Horses were the finest and best managed in all these parts: His Tenants are still full of the Praises of a grey Stone-horse that unhappily staked himself several Years since, and was buried with great Solemnity in the orchard" (*Spectator* No. 116; 1:475-76). He chooses to bury

his dead favorite rather than suffer it to be eaten, even by his own tenants--conspicuous consumption (or nonconsumption) indeed. His impracticality with regard to hunting-hounds is equally notorious:

> He is so nice in this Particular, that a Gentleman having made him a Present of a very fine Hound the other Day, the Knight return'd it by the Servant with a great many Expressions of Civility, but desired him to tell his Master, that the Dog he had sent was indeed a most excellent *Base*, but that at present he only wanted a *Counter-Tenor*. (1:476)

If such highly wasteful consumption is not sufficient evidence of eccentricity in itself, then Sir Roger's manner of indulging himself in his hobby provides more:

> The constant Thanks and good Wishes of the Neighbourhood always attended him on Account of his remarkable Enmity towards Foxes; having destroy'd more of those Vermin in one Year, than it was thought the whole Country could have produced. Indeed the Knight does not scruple to own among his most intimate Friends, that in order to establish his Reputation this Way, he has secretly sent for great Numbers of them out of other Counties, which he used to turn loose about the Country by Night, that he might the better signalize himself in their Destruction the next Day. (*Spectator* No. 116; 1:475)

He clearly illustrates Veblen's observation that far from "love of nature" motivating the hunter, "It is, indeed, the most noticeable effect of the sportsman's activity to keep nature in a state of chronic desolation by killing

off all living things whose destruction he can compass" (171).[26]

In any case, he did that when young; now, in late middle age, he practices a different but equally odd method of hunting that still shows his (selective) benevolence. In company with Mr. Spectator, Sir Roger pursued a hare to the point of capture, stopped his dogs,

> and alighting, took up the Hare in his Arms; which he soon after delivered to one of his Servants, with an Order, if she could be kept alive, to let her go in his great Orchard, where, it seems, he has several of these Prisoners of War, who live together in a very comfortable Captivity. I was highly pleas'd to see the Discipline of the Pack, and the Good-nature of the Knight, who could not find in his Heart to murther a Creature that had given him so much Diversion. (1:478)

The hare becomes another pet--yet further conspicuous consumption, and further proof of Sir Roger's eccentricity. (Rabbits were not commonly kept as pets in early-eighteenth-century England; almost invariably, they served culinary or "sportsmanlike" purposes.)

Sir Roger's hunting also proves his masculinity. As I discuss below, Sir Roger's haplessness at love makes him ridiculous, even calling his manliness into question. His devotion to hunting, however, is "a meritorious employment and an expression of the honorable predatory impulse" (Veblen 103). It makes up for his otherwise suspicious haplessness, for in popular tradition real men hunt, and one who hunts is a real man. Note in this connection the detail that the horse everyone singles out for special praise, and that Sir Roger insisted upon burying, is a "Stone-horse," a stallion. The

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[26] Hunting also confirms his class status: it performs the important symbolic function of publicly demonstrating the nobleman's ability to survey, manage, and order his estate. This includes the right and practice of riding upon tenants' land during the hunt, in pursuit of game.

horse confers masculinity by association.

High class standing enables eccentricity on a practical level. High class standing also enables eccentricity on the social level by setting the terms for perceiving and interpreting it. That is, all people's circumstances determine how they will be "read" or understood by others; the same personal characteristics will be read differently in different contexts--particularly in different classes. This works the other way, too; perceivers' circumstances determine their reading. These are hermeneutical commonplaces, but they are worth repeating for the purpose of understanding *The Spectator*'s take on eccentricity. Mr. Spectator's visit to Sir Roger's parish shows that one must be of a certain rank even to perceive eccentricity: the congregation, mostly Sir Roger's tenants, "are not polite enough to see any thing ridiculous in his Behaviour" (1:461). His social equals, however, can see what is different about him, and they appreciate it: "the general good Sense and Worthiness of his Character, make his Friends observe these little Singularities as Foils that rather set off than blemish his good qualities" (1:461). On the part of both perceiver and perceived, the perception of eccentricity is a function of class. When the Political Upholsterer persistently awakens the Tatler before dawn to tell him about a military victory, the latter finds it annoying; when early in the morning Sir Roger walks "upon the Terrace hemming twice or thrice to himself with great Vigour, for he loves to clear his Pipes in good Air (to make use of his own Phrase) and is not a little pleased with any one who takes Notice of the Strength which he still exerts in his Morning Hemms" (No. 269; 2:549), Mr. Spectator feels only "a secret Joy" (2:549).

On this point of the eccentric's lovability: it is important to note that Sir Roger is "lovable" in large part because Mr. Spectator says he is. This is important because the response authorially indicated as proper in Sir Roger's

case is very different from the "proper" response to Martinus Scriblerus, despite the fact that both are eccentrics with many characteristics in common. In other words, merely being an eccentric does not automatically make a character sympathetic, especially at this time of his introduction. Sir Roger is explicitly intended as an exemplar; Scriblerus is clearly meant as an anti-exemplar, an example of what *not* to be. The Knight's actions--hunting, traveling to the assizes, failing to declare his desire for the widow, and so on--are not obviously or inherently cuddly; the reader requires Addison and Steele's cues to respond positively to Sir Roger. For instance, Mr. Spectator observes that the Knight is "the best Master in the World"; his servants love him so that upon his return to the country they "could not refrain from Tears at the Sight of their old Master" (No. 106; 1:439-440). Even strangers instantly take to him--the serving-boys at Squires coffee-house, utter strangers, "seemed to take Pleasure in serving him" (No. 269; 2:552). In short, *everyone* loves him: "My worthy Friend Sir ROGER is one of those who is not only at Peace within himself, but beloved and esteemed by all about him. He receives a suitable Tribute for his universal Benevolence to Mankind, in the Returns of Affection and Good-will, which are paid him by every one that lives within his Neighbourhood" (No. 122; 1:498). Addison and Steele, aware that they cannot count upon a favorable response to Sir Roger's oddity, thus carefully and insistently guide our response to the benevolent Knight. They cannot write, for example, "Sir ROGER amidst all his good Qualities, is something of an Humourist; and that his Virtues, as well as his Imperfections, are as it were tinged by a certain Extravagance, which makes them particularly *his*, and distinguishes them from those of other Men" (No. 106; 1:440), and count upon the reader to love him. They must tell us that Sir Roger is to be loved, so they continue: "This Cast of Mind, as it is generally

very innocent in itself, so it renders his Conversation highly agreeable, and more delightful than the same Degree of Sense and Virtue would appear in their common and ordinary Colours" (1:440).

To return now to the connection between eccentricity and high class standing: Addison and Steele found the point that circumstances determine understanding important enough to begin the paper with it. Mr. Spectator begins No. 1 by writing:

> I have observed, that a Reader seldom peruses a Book with Pleasure 'till he knows whether the Writer of it be a black or a fair Man, of a mild or cholerick Disposition, Married or a Batchelor, with other Particulars of the like nature, that conduce very much to the right Understanding of an Author. To gratify this Curiosity, which is so natural to a Reader, I design this Paper, and the next, as Prefatory Discourses to my following Writings . . .
>
> I was born to a small Hereditary Estate, which, according to the Tradition of the Village where it lies, was bounded by the same Hedges and Ditches in *William* the Conqueror's Time that it is at present, and has been delivered down from Father to Son whole and entire, without the Loss or Acquisition of a single Field or Meadow, during the Space of six hundred Years. (1:1-2)

Mr. Spectator does not explicitly name class as one of the "Particulars" affecting readers' responses, but he does acknowledge generally here that who he is will determine the way he is read. And the fact that he proceeds from making the general point straight to telling his class and noting the extreme age of his family strongly implies class's importance. Mr. Spectator later reinforces his general point: in No. 131, he writes that people who don't

know him invent various readings for what they can see of his personality--all of which must strike the reader, who knows more about Mr. Spectator, as wildly unsupported.

> [S]ome look upon me as very proud, some as very modest, and some as very melancholly. *Will. Wimble,* as my Friend the Butler tells me, observing me very much alone, and extremely silent when I am in Company, is afraid I have killed a Man. The Country People seem to suspect me for a Conjurer, and some of them hearing of the Visit to *Moll. White,* will needs have it that Sir ROGER has brought down a Cunning Man . . . A Justice of the Peace, who lives about five Miles off, . . . wishes Sir ROGER does not harbour a Jesuit in his House . . . (19-20)

To preclude misreadings, he presents impeccable class and family credentials--entirely fictional[27]--to insure the broadest possible tolerance for his own self-professed oddity (which mainly includes not speaking), and incidentally for the oddity of his friend, Sir Roger de Coverley. "Odd and uncommon characters are the Game that I look for, and most delight in" (No. 108; 1:448), writes Mr. Spectator, and he encourages readers to do the same--at least, to look for and delight in *upper-class* odd and uncommon characters, anyway.

In addition to upper-class status, Sir Roger shares with Don Quixote a certain haplessness in sexuality. This has the effect of softening or making more palatable--particularly for *The Spectator*'s many middle-class readers--upper-class power, thereby widening the eccentric's appeal. Quixote is a late-middle-aged virgin, as he proudly informs everyone who will listen. He is absurdly protective of his intact status, frequently imagining nonexistent

[27] Aside from the obvious fact that a biography of *one* man must be fictional when *three* were impersonating him, the pointedly ancient landed family Mr. Spectator describes matches none of his creators' actual circumstances (notwithstanding Addison's strong political connections, and both men's upper-class status).

threats to it. For example, in Book I, he foolishly believes that the dwarfish Maritornes, sneaking into his room in search of her lover the mule drover, is coming to seduce him (Quixote).[28] In Book 4, when the beautiful young noblewoman Altisidora pretends for amusement that she loves him desperately, he takes it as one of the ineluctable and unfortunate consequences of being a knight-errant, protesting however, "still I am *Dulcinea*'s, and hers alone, dead or alive, dutiful, unspotted, and unchang'd" (736). Dulcinea[29] is key to his madness: Quixote's chivalric ideals dictate that he devote himself spiritually to a woman, singing her praises, performing heroic deeds in her name, sending conquered foes to pay homage to her, and most importantly, never expecting her to grant him sexual favors. Thus he imagines sexual threats where clearly none exist, and sublimates any actual sexual urges he might have into spiritual/chivalric form. (There is an obvious Freudian sublimatory quality to his riding around with lance held high for the honor of Dulcinea.) Furthermore, the very idea that Quixote might be sexually attractive strikes most of the women in the book--for instance, Altisidora and the Duchess (who puts Altisidora up to feigning love for him)--as utterly ridiculous, unthinkable.

Sir Roger's oddity, too, has roots in sexual haplessness. In fact, whereas

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[28] The other mistake he makes here, which further points up his sexual haplessness (as well as, more generally, his mad, chivalry-addled perception), is in taking Maritornes for a sexually attractive princess. Cervantes describes her as grotesquely as possible: she is "a Broad-fac'd, Flat-headed, Saddle-nos'd Dowdy; blind of one Eye, and t'other almost out . . . She was not above three Feet high from her Heels to her Head; and her Shoulders, which somewhat loaded her, as having too much Flesh upon 'em, made her look downwards oftner than she could have wish'd" (96).

[29] Dulcinea, like Maritornes, is not what Quixote imagines her to be. Cervantes describes her as "a good likely Country Lass, for whom he had formerly had a sort of Inclination, though 'tis believ'd, she never heard of it, nor regarded it in the least" (6-7). Even the name is an invention of Quixote's: "Her name was *Aldonza Lorenzo* . . . he studied to find her out a new Name, that might have some Affinity with her old one, and yet at the same time sound somewhat like that of a Princess, or Lady of Quality" (7). He does not really care whether or not she even exists: "Heaven knows whether there be a *Dulcinea* in the World or not, and whether she be a Notional Creature or not. These are Mysteries not to be so narrowly enquir'd into" (657).

Quixote's odd, sexless devotion to Dulcinea seems more a symptom than a cause of his madness, "the widow" clearly caused Sir Roger's. Our first glimpse of Sir Roger in *Spectator* No. 2 reveals that "he keeps himself a Batchelour by reason he was crossed in Love, by a perverse beautiful Widow of the next County to him" (1:8). The disappointment caused more damage than merely keeping him single: Mr. Spectator asserts "that the Widow is the secret Cause of all that Inconsistency which appears in some Parts of my Friend's Discourse" (No. 113; 1:466). Sir Roger agrees: at no prompting from Mr. Spectator, he says, "I am pretty well satisfied such a Passion as I have had is never well cured; and between you and me, I am often apt to imagine it has had some whimsical Effect upon my Brain" (No. 118; 1:486).

What makes this hapless instead of just sad is that Sir Roger was not really "crossed in love" so much as simply unable to speak his desire. His own passivity, not the widow's "perversity," caused his failure. Certainly the desire was there, and if it can be measured by the wedding gifts he planned to give her, it was prodigious. The gifts included "an hundred Acres in a Diamond-Ring, . . . on her Head fifty of the tallest Oaks upon his Estate . . . a Colepit to keep her in clean Linnen, . . . the Profits of a Windmill[30] for her Fans . . . [and] the Sheering of his Sheep for her Under-Petticoats" (No. 295; 3:54). His failure came about like this: forty years ago, having heard reliable gossip that "this accomplished Mistress of mine ha[d] distinguished me above the rest, and ha[d] been known to declare Sir ROGER DE COVERLEY was the Tamest and most Human of all the Brutes in the Country" (No. 113; 1:465), he "set out from hence to make [his] addresses" (1:465). But having been "admitted to her Presence with great Civility," he began to fumble: "she discovered new Charms, and I at last came towards her with such an Awe as

[30] No reference to windmills in *The Spectator*, including this one, is innocent (i.e., not to be considered as a subtle reference to *Don Quixote*).

made me Speechless" (1:465). She sent the encouraging signal of speaking philosophically of Love and Honor, then asking "whether she was so happy as to fall in with [his] Sentiments on these important Particulars" (1:466). He simply could not speak: "after I had sate half an Hour meditating how to behave . . . I rose up and took my leave." In forty years he never once has told the widow of his lasting passion, which he deeply regrets, lamenting, "I am angry that her Charms are not more accessible, that I am more inclined to worship than salute her" (1:466). He tries to blame the widow's female companion for spoiling his success, but gives us every reason to believe it is all his own fault. It's certainly not the widow's; apparently she remained receptive to his addresses all those years. Even when he's on his deathbed she sends a "kind message" that gives his family and servants "great Hopes of his Recovery" (No 517; 4:340); unfortunately, so long as Sir Roger keeps his feelings to himself, her affection must prove ineffectual. Perhaps most hapless of all: he never pursued another woman. One failure warped his mind forever.

Sir Roger's inability to speak about his feelings due to being overwhelmed by them has an honorific aspect: his tongue-tiedness is supposed to prove the depth and sincerity of the emotion, and thereby the depth and goodness of the man. In this way, Sir Roger's exploits can be read as an early example of the literature of sentimentality,[31] particularly given that it is not the effects of excessive reading (as with Quixote) but of sentiment, of undying frustrated love, from which he suffers. Sir Roger's visits to Westminster Abbey, where he shows not only an encyclopedic knowledge of British history but a laudably "honest Passion for the Glory of his Country, and such a respectful Gratitude to the Memory of its Princes"

[31] See Chapter 3 for a discussion of sentimentality.

(No. 329; 3:216); to the play, where he ingenuously responds to the play as deeply as if the fictional events on stage were actually happening to real people (No. 335); and to a London tavern in a rainstorm, in the company of Will Honeycomb and a woman everyone but Sir Roger recognizes as a prostitute, whom he innocently feeds and tries to assist (No. 410)--all such events show the Knight at his deeply feeling best, and provide the reader with an emotional model. He appears just a bit ridiculous for the naivety of his responses, true, but even this naivety shows the depth and thoroughness of his goodness (see below). He may be silly, but his *feelings* are exemplary.

Sir Roger's sentimentality is the site of an important nexus between oddity and admirability. That is, it causes his sexual haplessness, which lies at the root of his oddities, as well as at the root of his admirable qualities. Unable to couple with the widow, he instead remains innocently obsessed with her, acknowledging, "It is, perhaps, to this dear Image in my Heart owing, that I am apt to relent, that I easily forgive, and that many desirable things are grown into my Temper, which I should not have arrived at by better Motives than the Thought of being one Day hers" (No. 118; 1:485). Like Quixote, Sir Roger is too innocent for this world, which is to his (and the Don's) credit. Sexual innocence serves as a kind of iceberg tip, a prominent sign of much deeper, broader innocence. And that broad, deep innocence is honorific; it is proof that he has not been corrupted by decayed modern manners. Quixote seeks to restore the now-defunct system of chivalric manners, refusing to acquiesce to their loss from the world. Similarly, Sir Roger, who "continues to wear a Coat and Doublet of the same Cut that were in Fashion at the Time of his Repulse" (No. 2; 1:8), is visibly a throwback to better, older days. "There is now," observes Will Honeycomb, "an Evil under the Sun which [is] intirely new, because not mentioned by any Satyrist or

Moralist in any Age: Men, said he, grow Knaves sooner than they ever did since the Creation of the World before" (No. 352; 3:313).[32] Sir Roger is the rare man who has both aged and maintained his innocence. Innocence, in the general sense of the word, is perhaps his very best quality; Mr. Spectator notes that Sir Roger's conversation "left me at a Loss whether I was more delighted with my Friend's Wisdom or Simplicity" (No. 109; 1:452).

Thus Addison and Steele reproduce in Sir Roger de Coverley most of Don Quixote's character, including the latter's noble innocence. The two characters differ most in madness: quite simply, Quixote is mad and Sir Roger isn't. How madness is defined is famously contingent and debatable; however, Cervantes himself constantly refers to the Don as "mad," suffering from "madness," "absolutely mad and distracted," and similar expressions, without apparent irony. The Don seems clearly *intended* as mad, in any case. His understanding is fundamentally flawed: where Quixote sees long-armed giants he must conquer, others see windmills.

But in Sir Roger, that madness has been softened to a slight oddity of manners. His "mad" qualities, the symptoms of the widow's lasting influence upon his brain, primarily include innocence and deep sentiment. Addison and Steele endorse these qualities, so their presence in Sir Roger show him actually to be especially sane. His benevolence manifests itself in his manners, his social interactions. He is so kind to his servants, the butler writes Mr. Spectator, that his death "afflicted the whole Country, as well as his poor Servants, who loved him, I may say, better than we did our Lives" (No. 517; 4:340). Coverley talks to servants kindly and personally:

When a Servant is called before his Master, he does not come

[32] See Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* on the "well-known habit of using the past, the 'good old days,' as a stick to beat the present" (*Country* 12). Quixote and Coverley do so implicitly by adhering to "old-fashioned" values and manners, refusing to adopt the "artificial" new ones.

> with an Expectation to hear himself rated for some trivial Fault, threatned to be stripp'd, or used with any other unbecoming Language . . . But it is often to know, what Road he took that he came so readily back according to Order; whether he passed by such a Ground; if the old Man who rents it is in good Health; or whether he gave Sir *Roger*'s Love to him, or the like. (No. 107; 1:443)

In fact, Sir Roger is always inquiring after people's health--that of his neighbors and acquaintances, their uncles, and so on. He even has a "Custom of Saluting every Body that passes by him, with a Good-morrow, or a Good-night. This the Old-Man does out of the Overflowings of his Humanity . . . He cannot forbear this Exercise of Benevolence even in Town, when he meets with any one in his Morning or Evening Walk" (No. 383; 3:437).

That Addison and Steele tone down Quixote's madness into oddity of manners is itself significant. The transformation comprises an uneasy treaty between reason and madness, a fencing-off of a middle ground where minor differences, minimal deviations from the norm in the form of manners, can be allowed. But the significance of manners in themselves--as opposed to manners as symbols of incompletely repressed madness--is not to be underestimated. "[T]he apparently superficial reformation of manners is in fact one of the most powerful ways in which a culture inculcates its metaphysical, moral and political scheme of things," as Peter Stallybrass and Allon White argue (88). Pierre Bourdieu holds that when societies

> set such store on the seemingly most insignificant details of *dress, bearing,* physical and verbal *manners,* the reason is that, treating the body as a memory, they entrust to it in abbreviated and practical, i.e. mnemonic, form the fundamental principles of

> the arbitrary content of the culture. The principles em-bodied in this way are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness, and hence cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation . . . (94-95)

So-called basic points of good breeding, then, have great power. "Placed beyond the grasp of consciousness," they seem only "natural," mere common sense or reason. As such they demand adherence; not to follow them would seem unreasonable, even mad.

The importance of manners proves particularly great when, as was the case with the dominant culture of early-eighteenth-century Great Britain, the self is presumed to be transparent, to be plainly visible *by means of* appearances and manners. I want to emphasize that this presumption was not necessarily objectively true or accurate--in fact, as my introduction states, I would argue definitively that it is *not* the case; instead, I simply observe that it was the dominant presumption and that this presumption bore indirectly but significantly upon the time's conceptions of eccentricity. The presumed ability to see the self directly through appearance and manners provided a putative guarantee of the eccentric's (in particular, Sir Roger's) goodness: he looked good, and acted as if he were good, therefore he must be good. That the eccentric could be presumed *really*, thoroughly good was key to his being accepted by early eighteenth-century society; thus, the presumption of a totally visible self indirectly but significantly aided the institutionalization of eccentricity.

To explain the basis and functioning of this assumption, which is revealed and solidified in *The Spectator*: one's manners ostensibly showed what one was; the outward and the inward corresponded, so the inward self was readable to the public. Ketcham notes that this system of beliefs comes

from "Descarte's mechanistic psychology" (35). According to this system, stimuli encountered in the world make impressions upon the soul; the soul affects the emotions; the emotions shape and move the muscles of the body; and the muscles of the body determine facial and other bodily features. The chain of cause and effect was direct and unbroken, so one could read the "real," "natural" inner self by means of outward appearances. Addison and Steele perpetuate this belief in *The Spectator*. Mr. Spectator asserts its truth, observing, "every one is in some Degree a Master of that Art which is generally distinguished by the Name of Physiognomy; and naturally forms to himself the Character or Fortune of a Stranger from the Features and Lineaments of his Face" (No. 86; 1:365). Granted, Mr. Spectator leaves some slight room for doubt: the "Characters or Fortunes" spectators form may or may not be strictly accurate. He does allow that it is (barely) possible for a person to "give the Lie to his Face, and to be an honest, just, good-natured Man, in spite of all those Marks and Signatures which Nature seems to have set upon him for the Contrary" (1:367). Still, on the whole, accurate readings are the norm, for we cannot dissemble how we look:

> I think we may be better known by our Looks than by our Words; and that a Man's Speech is much more easily disguised than his Countenance. In this Case however, I think the Air of the whole Face is much more expressive than the Lines of it; The Truth of it is, the Air is generally nothing else but the inward Disposition of the Mind made visible. (1:366)

Appearance and manners converge, or blur here: the "Air of the whole Face" includes more than just "the Lines of it"--namely, other significant circumstances, for example, manners.

A correspondent, one Tom Tweer,[33] qualifies his claims for the science of physiognomy even less. He has the reading of selves down to an almost mathematically precise operation:

> [T]here is a very close correspondence between the Outward and the Inward Man; that scarce the least Dawning, the least Parturiency towards a Thought can be stirring in the Mind of Man, without producing a suitable Revolution in his Exteriors, which will easily discover it self to an Adept in the Theory of the Phiz. . . . The Practitioners in this Art often make use of a Gentleman's Eyes, to give 'em Light into the Posture of his Brains; take a handle from his Nose, to judge of the size of his Intellects; and interpret the over-much Visibility and Pertness of one Ear, as an infallible mark of Reprobation, and a Sign the Owner of so saucy a Member fears neither God nor Man. In Conformity to this Scheme, a contracted Brow, a lumpish down-cast Look, a sober sedate Pace, with both Hands dangling quiet and steddy in Lines exactly parallel to each Lateral Pocket of the Galligaskins, is Logic, Metaphysics and Mathematics in Perfection. So likewise the *Belles Lettres* are typified by a Saunter in the Gate, a Fall of one Wing of the Peruke backward, an Insertion of one Hand in the Fobb, and a negligent swing of the other, with a Pinch of right and fine *Barcelona* between Finger and Thumb, a due Quantity of the same upon the upper Lip, and a Noddle-Case loaden with Pulvil. (No. 518; 4:345)

Tweer's confidence is too great to allow the reader to take him seriously:

[33] Bond notes that Addison probably wrote the other letter in this number, one that mourns the death of Sir Roger, since "the account of Sir Roger's death was published only on the preceding day" (4:342). (No. 518 is dated Friday, 24 Oct. 1712.) Addison may also have written "Tom Tweer's" letter.

concluding total reprobation from "the over-much Visibility and Pertness of one Ear"? Still, this is the logical end of Mr. Spectator's line of thought, which replicates the dominant culture's, and to which no apparent signs of irony are attached. That is, although Mr. Spectator likely views with ironic amusement Tweer's certainty, Tweer's general line of argument essentially duplicates Mr. Spectator's own. Additionally, Tweer's first, general point regarding "the Outward and the Inward Man," for example, very closely resembles Mr. Spectator's unironic position. With some slight qualification, then, it seems safe to assert that for Addison and Steele, manners reveal the man, which, again, is key to Sir Roger's being accepted as an eccentric exemplar.

Hence the emphasis on Sir Roger's odd but natural manners; according to the sensibilities and assumptions of Augustan culture, Coverley's manners prove the special, unfeigned benevolence of his natural self. Addison recommends such manners in No. 119, on the grounds that they are actually more fashionable now:

> I must observe a very great Revolution that has happened in this Article of Good Breeding. Several obliging Deferencies, Condescensions and Submissions, with many outward Forms and Ceremonies that accompany them, were first of all brought up among the politer Part of Mankind who lived in Courts and Cities . . . These Forms of Conversation by degrees multiplied and grew troublesome; the Modish World found too great a Constraint in them, and have therefore thrown most of them aside. . . . At present therefore an unconstrained Carriage, and a certain Openness of Behaviour are the height of Good Breeding. (1:486-87)

This would come as good news to the thousands of middle-class *Spectator* readers. "Natural" manners would be within their means to adopt. The kinds of manners Addison describes here as being rejected, on the other hand, require a lifetime of leisure to acquire. And so Sir Roger recommends himself to a wide audience by shedding the inimitable, off-putting, "artificial" manners of the upper classes.

In *The Country and the City,* Raymond Williams delineates sets of association, ideas people have historically linked, which are relevant to the passage above. On the one side are the city, artificiality of manner, and general corruption. On the other are the country, naturalness of manner, and honesty. Obviously Sir Roger, a country squire, represents the latter side. He describes himself as "so whimsical in a corrupt Age as to act according to Nature and Reason" (No. 6; 1:29). Mr. Spectator records that the Knight is "unconfined to Modes and Forms," which "makes him but the readier and more capable to please and oblige all who know him," and while he "is very singular in his Behaviour," "his Singularities proceed from his good Sense" (No. 2; 1:7). Mr. Spectator further observes that the Knight possesses a "blunt way of saying things, as they occur to his Imagination, without regular Introduction, or Care to preserve the appearance of Chain of Thought" (No. 109; 1:449); i.e., he speaks naturally, extemporaneously, and therefore, obviously, honestly. And an anonymous letter-writer claiming to have sat near Sir Roger at the play in London[34] calls the Knight's ingenuous responses such "as pure Nature suggested" (No. 338; 3:252).

Reason (that superficially resembles unreason), benevolence, natural manners, and innocence all join, then, in the eccentric personality of Sir Roger. As Ketcham observes, in *The Spectator* Addison and Steele "do not

[34] Addison or Steele wrote the letter. No one sat near Sir Roger at the play.

test conventions or test language in order to examine their inadequacies or hidden potentials. Instead, they create conventions which will, in turn, create a self-confirming system of values" (5). Central to the promulgation of these conventions and values is the positive example of Sir Roger de Coverley. For better or worse, the "people in the *Spectator* . . . served as dynamic symbols of customs to endorse or reject" (Bloom and Bloom 22), and this is most true of the starring character. One "R. O.,"[35] a correspondent in No. 424, writes to Mr. Spectator, "your Friend . . . cannot therefore (I mean as to his domestick Character) be too often recommended to the Imitation of others. How amiable is that Affability and Benevolence with which he treats his Neighbours, and every one, even the meanest of his own Family! And yet how seldom imitated?" (No. 424; 3:590).

What were these conventions and values Addison and Steele were trying to solidify? "Naturalness" and benevolence, for two, as discussed above. For another--and as an extension of naturalness and benevolence--freedom from political parties. To value one's alliance with a party, an artificial construct associated with the corrupt city,[36] over general benevolence or particular friendships, would be "unnatural," and certainly the opposite of benevolent. Sir Roger denounces the "Mischief that Parties do in the Country; how they spoil good Neighbourhood, and make honest Gentlemen hate one another" (No. 125; 1:509). Mr. Spectator frequently denounces parties for the same reasons. In his self-introduction in No. 1, he declares, "I never espoused any Party with Violence, and am resolved to observe an exact Neutrality between the Whigs and Tories, unless I shall be forc'd to declare my self by the Hostilities of either side" (1:5), and he

[35] Steele wrote this number, which "R. O.'s" letter entirely fills.

[36] This is so despite the Tory party's connections with the country, in that Parliament and the Court convene in the city. See Williams, *The Country and the City* Chapter 5 on the association of city and government/administration.

exemplifies that neutrality throughout the entire paper. Sir Roger de Coverley and Sir Andrew Freeport, too, model appropriate (i.e., neutral) party behavior. Despite the fact that they represent (in both the political and the symbolic senses of the word) Tory/landed and Whig/trade interests, respectively, "This Humour is so moderate in each of them, that it proceeds no farther than to an agreeable Raillery, which very often diverts the rest of the Club" (No. 126; 2:3). They never let their party differences interfere with friendship and good humor; in fact, the differences even *add* to the social mirth and cohesion. Addison proudly declares (in Mr. Spectator's voice), "Among those Advantages which the Publick may reap from this Paper, it is not the least, that it draws Mens Minds off from the Bitterness of Party, and furnishes them with Subjects of Discourse that may be treated without Warmth or Passion" (No. 262; 2:519).[37]

I don't mean to take all this disclaiming of party affiliations at face value. Even an ideology that disclaims ideology is ideological in its own way: it implicitly critiques all opposing parties as blamefully "ideological," thereby dismissing all opposition to its own position. Besides, as Terry Eagleton observes, "Ideology, like halitosis, is . . . what the other person has" (2): people tend to find *other* positions ideological, but not their own. Still, that *The Spectator* disclaims ideology is an important point, one to be taken cautiously at its own representation--because it emphasizes the individual, and

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[37] On the subject of the *Spectator*'s good effects, No. 547 provides an interesting example. There are printed several mock advertisements, ostensibly sent in by readers, that extol the *Spectator*'s curative effects. To give one example:

> *Remedium efficax & universum*; or, An effectual Remedy adapted to all Capacities; shewing how any Person may Cure himself of Ill-Nature, Pride, Party-Spleen, or any other distemper incident to the Human System, with an easie way to know when the Infection is upon him. This Panacea is as innocent as Bread, agreeable to the Taste, and requires no Confinement. It has not its Equal in the Universe, as abundance of the Nobility and Gentry throughout the Kingdom have experienced.
>
> *N. B.* No Family ought to be without it.

individual sociability, over the party and party squabbling. This emphasis enables further the acceptance of the eccentric.

One last convention Addison and Steele solidify by means of *The Spectator* is self-control. "R. O." (actually Steele) describes in a letter to the paper a remarkable, and remarkably Foucauldian,[38] institution of self-control:

> [A] set of Company of my Acquaintance, who are now gone into the Country, and have the Use of an absent Nobleman's Seat, have settled among themselves, to avoid the Inconveniences [of fighting among themselves]. . . . [T]here is a large Wing of the House which they design to employ in the Nature of an Infirmary. Whoever says a peevish thing, or acts any thing which betrays a Sowerness or Indisposition to Company, is immediately conveyed to his Chambers in the Infirmary; from whence he is not to be relieved, till by his Manner of Submission, and the Sentiments expressed in his Petition for that Purpose, he appears to the Majority of the Company to be again fit for Society. You are to understand, that all ill natured Words or uneasy Gestures are sufficient Cause for Banishment; speaking impatiently to Servants, making a Man repeat what he says, or any thing that betrays Inattention or Dishumour, are also criminal without Reprieve: But it is provided, that whoever observes the ill natured Fit coming upon himself, and voluntarily retires, shall be received at his Return from the Infirmary with the highest Marks of Esteem. (No. 424; 3:592)

Correction is assumed; self-correction is preferred. The offender is deemed not "fit for Society," and is separated from it, until his behavior qualifies

[38] See particularly the section "Discipline" in *Discipline and Punish.*

under its stringent norms. This is very much like the disciplinary form of punishment, or disciplinary discourse, which Foucault shows in *Discipline and Punish* was at this time making great discursive gains. Later letters in Nos. 429 and 440[39] offer stories of people who are voluntarily committing themselves for cure: Thomas Sudden, Esq., who wishes to be cured of arguing with everyone; Frank Jolly, of his excessive hearty loudness; John Rhubarb, of his hypochondria; and so on. The project meets with Mr. Spectator's amused approval.

The *Spectator*'s valuation of self-control, along with the stress it lays upon sociability,

> is part of a larger movement of manners in Western Europe from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, a movement which Norbert Elias has dubbed "the civilizing process." In this movement, there is an increase in the degree and scope of self-restraint called for in a number of matters, which include . . . our "behavior at table," our "attitude toward the natural functions," "blowing one's nose," and "spitting." (Leites 69)

The new emphasis on self-restraint reflects two related principles:

> First, each of us is called upon to show an interest in the well-being of others by restraining the extent to which we make our bodies, our smells, our dirt, and more generally, our feelings, present to them. Second, we are called upon to reduce our self-involvement, our concern with our own bodies and feelings, and increase our concern for, and interest in, what is of general value to the company of which we are a part. (Leites 69-70)

The Spectator as a whole promotes self-restraint. One of the primary means

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[39] Steele wrote No. 429; Addison, No. 440.

by which it does that is the example of Sir Roger de Coverley. He both exemplifies self-restraint, and, within his fictional world, enforces it.

One would think that eccentricity in general is proof of the *absence* of self-restraint, the indulgence of odd personal whims. However, in Sir Roger's case at least, he does in fact practice great self-control. For all the Knight's supposed oddity, Steele specifies that "his Singularities proceed from his good Sense, and are Contradictions to the Manners of the World, only as he thinks the World is in the wrong" (No. 2; 1:7). That is, he knows and controls his differences from the norm, enacting only those that have some social value. All of his departures from social norms--his benevolence, his sentimentality, his anachronism--must be acknowledged as ultimately in society's interest (as defined by Addison and Steele). Take as one brief example his eccentric behavior in church: "Sometimes he will be lengthening out a Verse in the Singing-Psalms half a Minute after the rest of the Congregation have done with it; sometimes, when he is pleased with the Matter of his Devotion, he pronounces *Amen* three or four times to the same Prayer" (No. 112; 1:461). First, the deviation from the norm is of minor scope and consequence. Second, his eccentric responses seem to stem from an honorific naturalness and depth of feeling (see above); he says "Amen" extra times because he is especially moved by the sermon. Here is further proof of his amiable sentimentality. To respond as he does sets an example of deep, spontaneous religious feeling that still stops well short of "enthusiasm," which was anathema to the dominant culture of eighteenth-century Britain. His eccentricity, then, ultimately has a social end, strengthening the church.

This is an important point, for as Addison makes clear in No. 576, "Singularity is laudable, when, in Contradiction to a Multitude, it adheres to the Dictates of Conscience, Morality, and Honour. . . . Singularity in Concerns

of this Kind is to be looked upon as heroick Bravery, in which a Man leaves the Species only as he soars above it" (4:569). But as for those "who are remarkable for their Singularity in things of no Importance, as in Dress, Behaviour, Conversation, and all the little Intercourses of Life": in "these Cases there is a certain Deference due to Custom; and notwithstanding there may be a Colour of Reason to deviate from the Multitude in some Particulars, a Man ought to sacrifice his private Inclinations and Opinions to the Practice of the Publick" (4:570). Eccentricity for its own sake, performed out of self-indulgence, has no value and ought not to be practiced; one ought to follow the crowd in all but its "vicious" customs (e.g., party passion; overrefined, "unnatural" manners; insufficient benevolence). But there is a distinction drawn between that kind of eccentricity and eccentricity like Sir Roger's, which deviates from "improper" customs for the good of society. Addison and Steele suggest that the latter kind, which requires discrimination and self-restraint, ought to be encouraged.

A tendency of Sir Roger's that is perhaps more obvious than his self-restraint is his insistence upon that quality in others. His eccentricity is enabled by his upper-class status; manners are changed from the top down. Only he is allowed to deviate from the standard: he "will suffer no Body to sleep in [church] besides himself; for if by chance he has been surprized into a short Nap at Sermon, upon recovering out of it he stands up and looks about him, and if he sees any Body else nodding, either wakes them himself, or sends his Servant to them" (1:461). Generally speaking, "As Sir ROGER is Landlord to the whole Congregation, he keeps them in very good Order" (No. 112; 1:461). "At his coming to his Estate he found his Parishioners very irregular" (1:460), but he systematically changed that. He taught them proper physical self-control, providing the means to make it possible: "in order to

make them kneel and join in the Responses, he gave every one of them a Hassock and a Common-prayer Book; and at the same Time employed an itinerant Singing-Master, who goes about the Country for that Purpose, to instruct them rightly in the Tunes of the Psalms" (1:460-61). During a service, writes Mr. Spectator, one John Matthews, who "is remarkable for being an idle fellow," "was kicking his Heels for his Diversion"; "I was . . . surprized to hear my old Friend, in the Midst of the Service, calling out to [him] to mind what he was about, and not disturb the Congregation" (1:461). Matthews does not show the proper degree of self-control, so Sir Roger corrects him. He keeps careful watch over who attends: he "sometimes stands up when every Body else is upon their Knees, to count the Congregation, or see if any of his Tenants are missing," and "every now and then inquires how such an one's Wife or Mother, or Son, or Father do whom he does not see at Church; which is understood as a secret Reprimand to the Person that is absent" (1:461). In short, he demands total self-control of his tenants: get yourself to the service, sit there quietly, kneel when you're supposed to, and don't sing out of tune.[40]

Thus, Addison and Steele employ Sir Roger de Coverley in several important cultural functions. The Knight registers the complexity of eighteenth-century responses to madness. A kind of Quixote Lite, he exemplifies a new state, eccentricity, in which both reason and limited, purposeful unreason can coexist. He embodies the increasingly important value of sentimentality. And he models, and even more so, demands the kind of self-control central to the "civilized" society of the Enlightenment. In doing all this, by shedding the "artificial" manners of the upper classes and

[40] It is hard for us twentieth-century readers not to see the despotic aspect of these demands. Veblen's acidic comments upon the subject of "devoutness" seem relevant here: "[T]his devout attitude marks a type of human nature which is more in consonance with the predatory mode of life . . . It is in large measure an expression of the archaic habitual sense of personal status--the relation of mastery and subservience" (216).

supposedly revealing his "natural," good self, he appeals to a broad cross-section of society.

iii. Martinus Scriblerus, Cracked Head[41]

Martinus Scriblerus, on the other hand, represents a darker side of the Enlightenment--the unreason lingering on despite the rage for reason. Sir Roger's eccentricity exemplifies a controlled unreason that is paradoxically more reasonable than reason; his deviations are for the betterment of society, which ultimately makes them acceptable to his reason-obsessed society. He produces a cultural space where being different means being especially good. The negative example of Scriblerus reinforces the same limitations of eccentricity and unreason that Addison and Steele would insist upon, but from the other side. That is, Scriblerus and Coverley bear close resemblance in several important respects. But Scriblerus's oddities push him beyond the desirable space inhabited by the likes of Sir Roger, into the realm of clearly ridiculous unreason. Addison and Steele's descriptions of Sir Roger (and of their social values) show that eccentricity is desirable *if* it is of a particular subtle, limited, socially constructive type. The Scriblerus Club's descriptions of Martinus Scriblerus make the same point negatively--they satirize a man gone too far into unreason, the *opposite* of the ideal. The satire serves as a warning: don't go *this* far.

The Memoirs of the Extraordinary Life, Works, and Discoveries of

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[41] The appellation comes from Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*. In the chapter "The Great Fear," he cites Louis-Sébastien Mercier's description of a puzzling eighteenth-century avatar of unreason: "very good people . . . who have warm hearts, eager for the public good; but unfortunately they have *cracked heads*; that is, they are short-sighted, they do not know what century they are in, nor what men they are dealing with; more unbearable than idiots, because with pennies and false lights they start from an impossible principle and reason falsely therefrom" (201; emphasis in original). The description fits Scriblerus most aptly, as is discussed below.

Martinus Scriblerus were the joint creation, beginning in 1714,[42] of several of the most politically and literarily influential men in England: Alexander Pope; Jonathan Swift; Doctor John Arbuthnot, physician to Queen Anne; Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford and Mortimer, and Lord Treasurer; Thomas Parnell; and John Gay. As Charles Kerby-Miller notes, it is impossible to decipher exactly who in the Club wrote or suggested which parts. John Gay, who acted as secretary for Club meetings, did not make attributions. Aside from the thematic links between the *Memoirs* and the *Spectator*, there were a number of other direct ones. For instance, Swift had been friends with Steele and Addison, but split with them after joining the Tory party. By January 1710/11, Swift was hatching a plan "to form a group of Tory wits that would eventually match in reputation and influence Addison's band of Whig writers" (Kerby-Miller 3); the plan had to be postponed, however, because the spectacular success of *The Spectator* put success in such a rivalry out of reach. In 1713, Swift accepted Pope's proposal to form the Scriblerus Club largely for just this reason, "the opportunity which Pope's schemes provided of winning over Pope and his follower Gay from their connections with Addison and Steele. If such a rising young poet as Pope were to change his allegiance publicly, the balance of prestige in London literary circles would shift" (Kerby-Miller 22).

My point in tracing all these party machinations and rivalries is that the eccentric, in addition to arising out of a broad cultural need for the madness/reason dichotomy to be softened, also arose out of petty political bickering. The texts in which appear Sir Roger de Coverley and Martinus Scriblerus, founding examples of the eccentric, were produced in significant part to outdo the political opposition. Eccentricity, then, has no holy, pure

[42] For purposes of comparison, *The Spectator* ran from March 1, 1710/11 through December 6, 1712, then resumed between March 18 and December 17, 1714.

origin, as Foucault argues concepts never do; instead, eccentricity's origins are divisive, hostile, and competitive.

Despite the party fighting, there are several interesting points of conjunction between the Scriblerus Club and *The Spectator*. For instance, in spite of his political and personal differences with Addison and Steele, Swift may have contributed to the *Spectator*: he most likely suggested the idea for No. 50 and wrote a paragraph of No. 575 (Bond, *Spectator* 1:lvi). Parnell, who maintained good relationships with the *Spectator*'s editors, wrote Nos. 460 and 501, two frequently anthologized "dream-visions." Pope, who also had less animus against the *Spectator*'s editors than Swift, surely wrote parts of Nos. 378, 406, 532, and 527, and probably wrote Nos. 452 and 457 (Bond, *Spectator* 1:xlviii). In No. 457, Pope introduced the plan of the Scriblerus Club:

> [T]here are several Authors in *France, Germany,* and *Holland,* as well as in our own Country, who Publish every Month, what they call *An Account of the Works of the Learned,* in which they give us an Abstract of all such Books as are Printed in any Part of *Europe*. Now, Sir [Mr. Spectator], it is my Design to Publish every Month, *An Account of the Works of the Unlearned.* Several late Productions of my own Country-men, who many of them make a very Eminent Figure in the Illiterate World, Encourage me in this Undertaking. (*Spectator* 4:113-14)

"An Account of the Works of the Unlearned" pretty well describes the works later ascribed to Scriblerus, the best known of which include *Peri Bathos: Of the Art of Sinking in Poetry* (1728); *Annus Mirabilis: Or, The Wonderful Effects of the approaching Conjunction of the Planets Jupiter, Mars, and Saturn* (1722); the *Memoirs* (1741), of course; and best known of all, Pope's

Dunciad Variorum (1729).

The Scriblerus Club formed in 1714, meeting on Saturdays when all the members were in London (which was by no means all the time). From the start they planned to ridicule into nonexistence all forms of unreason. The attack was to have three phases:

> The principal work of the club was to be a full dress biography of their hero in which they would introduce him to the public and lay the foundation for any future exploits they might devise. In addition, they planned to publish a series of works by their hero either under his own name or under pseudonyms. And finally, as a sort of cream of the jest, they proposed from time to time to claim as his work various publications, discoveries, and projects advanced by others they wished to ridicule. (Kerby-Miller 29)

Like *The Spectator*, the putative works of Scriblerus were to engage directly with real social problems; the authors hoped to change not merely taste but also society. The Scriblerians hoped by means of satire to create in readers a finer discrimination of the ridiculous, the unreasonable:

> By the double process of putting out apparently serious works by their hero under his own name and other names, and at the same time claiming for him things actually done by real people, they planned further to obscure the already dubious line between authentic and spurious publications . . . [T]he critical would learn to scan every new production in the learned and literary world that seemed in any way ridiculous with a skeptical eye, ready to charge it with being another work by the mysterious Scriblerus. (Kerby-Miller 29-30)

The plan never went quite as drawn, however. The main problem was the

order of Scriblerus's works: whereas the plan called for his biography *first*, to lay the foundation (or more accurately, to loosen it--to make readers more skeptical), in fact the *Memoirs* were the last of the Scriblerian works published. Although they were composed mostly just after the Club's formation in 1714,[43] they were first *published* in Pope's *Miscellanies* in 1741, after his "drastic" editing ("what we now have of the *Memoirs* is only a fraction of the materials piled up for it"--Kerby-Miller 78) and under Pope's name. Without the *Memoirs* to introduce Scriblerus's ridiculous character *before*, for example, *Peri Bathous* (1728) or *The Dunciad Variorum* (1729), the works attributed to him had much less impact than they might have. Readers had to infer from Scriblerian texts that Scriblerus's learning is a joke, which was not as easy for the Club's contemporaries as it is for us today.

This was the very reason Scriblerus was created--because "true" and "false learning," learning based upon sound reason, or not, and serving useful functions, or not, were hard to tell apart. Science and pseudo-science tended to look equally bizarre or valid, depending upon one's view. "The impetus which produced the great advance in science also gave rise to much that was useless and ridiculous. . . . New systems and theories based upon inadequate evidence and unsound in reasoning were offered in a steady stream, while projectors, proprietors of magic nostrums, and quacks of many sorts imposed upon the public" (Kerby-Miller 34). But not only new ideas were suspect; in addition, "the follies of a former time continued to flourish with apparent health" (34). For instance:

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[43] The *Memoirs* took further shape in three later periods: "the Pope-Arbuthnot-Gay revival in 1716-18, . . . the second revival during and following Swift's visits [to England] in 1726 and 1727" (Kerby-Miller 57), and Pope's editing in early 1741. Most of the original brainstorming and compilation of ideas took place in 1714; the later meetings mostly revised and/or cut out the original material. I emphasize this point to emphasize the *Memoirs'* close contemporaneity and competition with *The Spectator*, which in turn emphasizes the eccentric's divisive, chaotic origins.

> In the days of Queen Anne there still were learned men who believed that the world had declined since ancient times and that the modern could not hope to equal the wonders created during the youth of mankind . . . [T]he philosophy still being taught was Aristotelian logic and metaphysics, though for more than a generation there had been a general recognition that this type of reasoning had become sterile; the small amount of science being taught was Cartesian in character, though some of the men that taught it were themselves Newtonians; and classical learning was heavily burdened by pedantry and antiquarianism. (34)[44]

As a remedy for this general confusion, the Scriblerians concocted their scheme for making readers more critical. A critical, skeptical reader would be less likely to swallow unreason of any vintage.

To illustrate briefly the mélange of old and new, of cracked-headed and reasonable that prevailed in early-eighteenth-century Great Britain: Sir Isaac Newton, author in 1687 of *Principia Mathematica*, spent much of his career searching for the philosophers' stone, the means of turning base metals to gold. Whereas now we can easily laugh at the latter pursuit, to many of his contemporaries the law of gravity made just as little, or as much, common sense. In the same vein, at the end of the seventeenth century and beginning of the eighteenth, John Partridge published an annual almanac which offered vague, *National Enquirer*-like predictions ostensibly based upon scientific observation of the positions of stars and planets. For example, for January 1690, Partridge predicts, "At the New [Moon] there were no material Rays nor Positions, and therefore I judge, that things are preparing for some"; for June

[44] See the discussion above regarding how the *Spectator*'s (and the dominant culture's) conception of the totally readable self reflects Cartesian science.

of that year, "a Soldier for his Merit, receives considerable Honor and Preferment, but I think, he does not keep it without some Blemish by ill report; and it is well if he doth not deserve it too" (qtd. in *Merlini* 6, 9). The almanac was so popular and widely trusted--partly because its vagueness, like that of twentieth-century horoscopes, made a wide variety of eventualities seem to fit the predictions--that it drew several responses, both serious and satiric. For instance, the anonymous pamphlet *Merlini Liberati Errata, or, the Prophecies and Predictions of John Partridge,* published in 1692, systematically attacks the almanac's language (suggesting, e.g., that the accidentally violent phrase "run the country through" be replaced by "run through the country"), astrological accuracy, predictive accuracy, and patriotism. Under the name of Isaac Bickerstaff, Swift published no fewer than three pamphlets attacking Partridge: *Predictions for the Year 1708,* which satirically adopts Partridge's own form to ridicule it, and predicts Partridge's death; *The Accomplishment of the First of Mr. Bickerstaff's Predictions* (1708), which reports the astrologer's death; and *A Vindication of Isaac Bickerstaff* (1709), which insists that whatever Partridge himself might say, he is indeed dead. Such attacks attempted to caution a public which authors like Swift perceived to be too willing to believe any "scientific" report.[45]

The same difficulty in distinguishing the reasonable from the ridiculous existed in the area we now call scholarship--editing and commenting upon texts. Some of the Scriblerians attacked what they saw as quacks there, too, again hoping to instill reason and discrimination in readers. Pope, for instance, awarded Lewis Theobald the dubious distinction of King of the Dunces in the *Dunciad* (1729) and *Dunciad Variorum* (1729), because "Tibbald" had published a heavily footnoted, more "scholarly"

[45] See Book 3 of *Gulliver's Travels* for further, more wide-ranging attacks by Swift upon the new science.

edition of Shakespeare's works *after* Pope's own appreciative edition appeared in 1725. Pope's goal was to contribute to the appreciation of Shakespeare; Theobald's, to "restore" Shakespeare textually. Pope found that pedantic, countering with the *Dunciad Variorum*, which in barbed jest was heavily and pedantically footnoted by Martinus Scriblerus. Similarly, Swift frequently ridiculed the critic William Wotton, who published a serious-minded, systematic explication of passages in Swift's *A Tale of a Tub*. He also targeted Richard Bentley, for overlooking the beauty and meaning of the Greek and Roman classics in favor of minutiae such as the Digamma.[46]

This was the intellectual atmosphere into which the Scriblerus Club planned to release their weapon against unreason, Martinus Scriblerus. Again, their scheme would have been even more effective had they released the *Memoirs* first, given the difficulty even a sophisticated, well-read person could easily have inferring Scriblerus's cracked-headedness *only* from texts such as *Peri Bathous*. Other people praised Grub Street poetry; why should one not believe *this* praise was unironic? Nevertheless, in the *Memoirs* they created a character who took the worst from both worlds, old learning and new, with the plan of ridiculing into exile both forms of unreason.

Certainly Martinus Scriblerus's name conveys his ridiculous character. As Kerby-Miller writes, "Since [the Scriblerus Club's] hero was to be above all a 'scribler,' they chose a last name for him by simply latinizing that much

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[46] Bentley proposed the former existence of a Digamma, which resembled the modern English capital F, in an attack upon Charles Boyle's 1695 edition of the letters of Phalaris. Swift, among others, was incredulous that Bentley could spend so much time and effort on meaningless scholarly/editorial concerns such as that at the cost of understanding and appreciating the works themselves.

Bentley appears briefly in the *Memoirs*. The Club describes a nonsensical critical method--"*assembling parallel sounds*, either *syllables*, or *words*, [which] might conduce to the Emendation and Correction of *Ancient Authors*" (129)--and then ascribes it to Bentley: "[Scriblerus's] Terence and Horace are in every body's hands, under the names of Richard B—ley, and Francis H[a]re. And we have convincing proofs that the late Edition of Milton publish'd in the name of the former of these, was in truth the Work of no other than our Scriblerus" (129).

used term of contempt, and for a first name to match they selected that of Sir Martin Mar-All, the famous figure in Dryden's comedy, whose amiable absurdities had made 'Sir Martin' a common name for the comic blunderer" (30-31).[47] Martinus Scriblerus: "he who mars all and writes worthless texts." The description fits.

Scriblerus possesses the flaws of Don Quixote and Sir Roger de Coverley without their other redeeming qualities. Apparently the Scriblerians had Cervantes's novel in mind when they created Scriblerus; "Cervantes was a favorite author of Swift and probably of several other Scriblerians; and there are some resemblances between the two works" (Kerby-Miller 69). To begin with, Scriblerus, like Quixote (and Sir Roger, and even Mr. Spectator), descends from a very old landed family. His father Cornelius Scriblerus "traced the ancient Pedigree of the *Scribleri*, with all their Alliances and collateral Relations (among which were reckon'd Albertus Magnus, Paracelsus Bombastus, and the famous Scaligers, in old time Princes of Verona) and deduced even from the Times of the Elder Pliny to Cornelius Scriblerus" (95). As with Quixote and Sir Roger, Martinus's social position allows him the leisure, money, and license to pursue his learning. But in Martinus's case, the list of ancestors[48] is an embarrassment to people of reason, and it provides an indication early in the book of the unreason he inherits. Albertus Magnus, a medieval alchemist, had claimed to observe the soul of a loadstone escaping, a claim ridiculed by Addison in

[47] The most commonly accepted explanation for the origin of the name "Martinus" comes from Swift's letters to Stella: Oxford had been calling him "Dr. Martin, because martin is a sort of a swallow, and so is a swift" (cited in Kerby-Miller, 31). But as Kerby-Miller points out, "it does not seem likely that the Scriblerians would resort to so feeble a jest or that they would adopt any name which would link Swift with their learned fool" (31). Martin Mar-All makes more sense as a model: he spoils all his own plans--e.g., to have Millisent, whom he is wooing, stay in his house without his rival's or her father's knowledge--by forever speaking too freely to the wrong people.

[48] This information about Scriblerus's ancestors comes from Kerby-Miller's amazingly thorough notes to the *Memoirs*.

Spectator No. 56. Paracelsus Bombastus was a real person despite the name so fitting it looks like a joke; in the early sixteenth century Bombastus had boasted loudly of making gold, the eternal quest of alchemists. The Scaligers, Julius Caesar and Josephe Juste, self-proclaimed descendants of the Della Scala family of Verona, were as famous for their quickness to quarrel as for their learning. And the Elder Pliny, an incredibly prolix and indefatigable author, died as a result of his own scientific curiosity: he wanted to get a close look at Mount Vesuvius erupting, and did.

From Cornelius himself Martinus imbibes a foolish credulity in the classics.[49] (Martinus learns foolish *new* ideas on his own.) "Cornelius, it is certain, had a most superstitious veneration for the Ancients; and if they contradicted each other, his Reason was so pliant and ductile, that he was always of the opinion of the last he read" (*Memoirs* 124). Cornelius accepts literally, for example, Galen's prescription of goat's milk and honey for conceiving children; Aristotle's recommendation to copulate during westerly winds if a male child was desired; and Pliny's conjecture that cauterizing the spleen would improve one's running speed. He drums as much of this nonsense as he can into Martin's head as the boy grows up, limited only by his brother Albertus Scriblerus, who "was a discreet man, sober in his opinions, clear of Pedantry, and knowing enough both in books and in the world, to preserve a due regard for whatever was useful or excellent, whether ancient or modern. If he had not always the authority, he had at least the art, to divert Cornelius from many extravagancies" (113), including the plan to cauterize Martinus's spleen. If not for Albertus's explicitly reasonable influence, Martinus would have become even more ridiculous.

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[49] Veblen classifies learning, like hunting, manners, and devoutness, as a particularly leisure-class pursuit: "Knowledge for its own sake, the exercise of the faculty of comprehension without ulterior purpose, should, it might be expected, be sought by men [sic] whom no urgent material interest diverts from such a quest" (247).

Martinus's mother's side contributes more of the same cracked-headedness the father's side gives. She "was related to Cardan on the father's side, and to Aldrovandus on the mother's: Besides which, her Ancestors had been professors of Physick, Astrology, or chemistry, in German Universities, from generation to generation" (96). Jerome Cardan was famous for writing huge amounts and for stealing much of it. Aldrovandus, like the Elder Pliny, exhibited an incredible energy for gathering scientific knowledge; in *The Battle of the Books*, Swift refers to his massive, decades-consuming volume on natural history as "Aldrovandus's Tomb." Astrology was suspect, as the discussion of Partridge above shows, and "chemistry" largely meant "alchemy," which was at least as suspect as astrology. On both sides, then, Martinus's family tree bears several nuts. The inheritance of family traits, something upper-class families often boast about, is in Martinus's case the mark of doom. He inherits the family traits, all right--unfortunately for him.

Also like Quixote and Sir Roger, Scriblerus is sexually hapless. He even outdoes the other two in this way: whereas Quixote mentally transforms a plain farm girl into a haughty, ravishing princess, and Sir Roger carries a torch for the widow forty years running, Scriblerus falls in love with a side-show freak,[50] the "double mistress" Lindamira/Indamora. Apparently she, or they, are what we would now call Siamese twins,[51] but as far as Scriblerus could tell, she is one woman with two heads. He loves just one of them, Lindamira. His scientific curiosity contributes greatly to his feelings: "For how much soever our Martin was enamour'd on her as a beautiful

[50] This is an interesting point, given the fascination with freaks and the connection between freaks and eccentricity of the early 1800s. See Chapter 4.

[51] To settle the legal question of whether she was one woman or two, which would settle the question of whether or not Scriblerus's marriage to her/them constituted bigamy, a group of women was appointed to make a physical examination. "The Jury of Matrons having made their Report, and it appearing from thence that the Parts of Generation in Lindamira and Indamora were distinct" (162), they were pronounced two women joined.

Woman, he was infinitely more ravish'd with her as a charming Monster" (146-47). Alas for Martinus, he never gets to enjoy her physical charms, about which (the charms) he rhapsodizes, "[H]ow I wonder at the Stupidity of mankind, who can affix the opprobrious Name of Monstrosity to what is only Variety of Beauty, and a Profusion of generous Nature? If there are charms in one face, one mouth, one body; if there are charms in two eyes, two breasts, two arms; are they not all redoubled in the Object of my Passion?" (147). He marries Lindamira, but Mr. Randal, the sideshow's manager, has the pygmy Black Prince married to Indamora "while her Sister was *asleep*" (155). Then the Black Prince disputes the legality of Scriblerus's marriage in court, on the grounds that it is bigamy or adultery. Ultimately the marriage is annulled, never having been consummated, "as proceeding upon a natural, as well as legal Absurdity" (163). Scriblerus, like Coverley and Quixote, then remains a virgin all his life.

Scriblerus's sexual misadventures do much to reveal what is wrong with his singularity as the Scriblerus Club would have it. Sir Roger's haplessness is at the root of his fine qualities; his inability to speak his desire shows his heart to be good and pure, and the resulting disappointment makes him even better--kinder, more forgiving and benevolent. Scriblerus's case is very different. His desire is as grotesque as its object--"he was infinitely more ravish'd with her as a charming Monster"--and he has no trouble speaking it. This indicates a bizarre, kinky lewdness: what kind of man is turned on by a monster, and says so? In contrast with the case of Sir Roger, his disappointment does not redeem this quality. He demonstrates none of Sir Roger's compensatory sentimentality. In fact, he has much the opposite reaction: "perhaps his Disappointment gave him also a Dis-inclination to the *Fair Sex*, for whom on some occasions he does not express all the Respect and

Admiration possible" (164). Instead he sublimates his desire into further projects of bogus learning:

> And here it seems but natural to lament the unfortunate End of the Amour of our Philosopher. But the Historian of these Memoirs on the contrary cries out, "Happy, thrice happy day! celebrated in every language, learned and unlearned! . . . since to this we owe such immense discoveries, not only of Oceans, Continents, Islands, with all their Inhabitants, minute, gigantick, mortal and immortal, but those yet more enlarged and astonishing Views, of worlds philosophical, physical, moral, intelligible and unintelligible!" (166)[52]

True, his intentions are good: "under this macerated form [Scriblerus's] was concealed a Mind replete with Science, burning with a Zeal of benefiting his fellow-creatures, and filled with an honest conscious Pride, mixt with a scorn of doing or suffering the least thing beneath the dignity of a Philosopher" (91). But his studies, the sublimated form of his warped desires, have no reason in them. The Scriblerus Club makes the projects' ridiculous nature unmistakable by grouping them all together to fill the *Memoirs'* last chapter; the sheer bulk of nutty ideas, of scientific wild goose chases, makes it plain even to the most obstinate virtuoso that Scriblerus's learning is not in the least based upon reason. Scriblerus, unlike Sir Roger, is obviously daft. A few examples of his discoveries:

> [T]his Prodigy of our Age . . . by a Sagacity peculiar to himself, . . . hath discover'd Effects in their very Cause . . .
>
> He hath enrich'd Mathematics with many precise and

[52] The references to "immense discoveries" and "their Inhabitants" are to the people and places of *Gulliver's Travels*, one of many works attributed to Scriblerus in the *Memoirs*. Others include *A Modest Proposal* and the *Dunciad Variorum* (which was attributed to Scriblerus when it was published).

> Geometrical *Quadratures* of the *Circle.* He first discover'd the *Cause* of *Gravity,*[53] and the intestine *Motion* of *Fluids*. . . .
> He it was, that first found out the *Palpability* of *Colours;* and by the delicacy of his Touch, could distinguish the different Vibrations of the heterogeneous Rays of Light.
> His were the Projects of *Perpetuum Mobiles, Flying Engines,* and *Pacing Saddles;* the Method of discovering the *Longitude* by *Bomb-Vessels,* and of increasing the *Trade-Wind* by vast plantations of *Reeds* and *Sedges.* (166-67; emphases in original)

His putative works, similarly, are the productions of an obviously cracked head: for example, "A complete Digest of the Laws of Nature, with a Review of those that are obsolete or repealed, and of those that are ready to be renew'd and put in force" (167)--as if "natural law" operated like British civil law.[54]

Scriblerus, then, proves just as hapless sexually as Quixote or Coverley, but with none of their associated redeeming qualities. In both direct and sublimated forms, Scriblerus's desire shows him to be odd in an unreasonable, undesirable way. The "Sagacity peculiar to himself" truly is, in the modern pejorative sense of the word, peculiar. To add one final insult: Scriblerus even looks like the Don, looks being one of Quixote's least attractive attributes: "by the Gravity of his Deportment and Habit, [he] was generally taken for a decay'd Gentleman of Spain. His stature was tall, his visage long, his complexion olive, his brows were black and even, his eyes hollow yet piercing, his nose inclin'd to aquiline, his beard neglected and mix'd with grey" (*Memoirs* 91).

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[53] The joke here is that even Newton never claimed to understand the *cause* of gravity--only its existence and operation. Finding the cause of gravity was in the Club's time the equivalent of finding the philosophers' stone, or the perpetual-motion machine (which the Club also credited Scriblerus with discovering).

[54] See Chapter 4 for a further discussion of the concept of natural law.

Thus Scriblerus closely resembles both Don Quixote and Sir Roger de Coverley. Scriblerus, however, is in important ways Quixote's and Coverley's opposite. He is a "darkened mirror" of the Enlightenment, "a sort of double in which it both recognized and revoked itself" (Foucault, *Madness* 201, 202)--recognized the potential cracked-headedness of its new paradigms of reason; revoked the unreason that lived on despite British society's most strenuous efforts. Scriblerus represents the other side of limits embodied by the two Knights. His double likeness and unlikeness to them reinforces the argument made above: in the first half of the British eighteenth century, eccentricity was not generally valued for its own sake. Scriblerus's eccentricity was clearly not to be valued, for it had gone too far. However, Sir Roger's *was* to be valued, because it was cast as a consciously limited, self-controlled, socially beneficial form of unreason practiced by a generally sympathetic upper-class man who also insisted upon others' self-control. By the principles of the Cartesian science still dominant at the time, Sir Roger's true self was assumed to be plainly visible, and its readily, reassuringly apparent benevolence and sentimentality more than compensated for its oddity. Under these very limited terms, eccentricity was admitted to British society as a third option to the widely insisted-upon yet notoriously difficult-to-place binary of reason and madness.

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Chapter 3

Eccentricity as Disease and Cure

i. Colley Cibber's *Apology*: Not Accepted

During the second half of the eighteenth century--or more precisely, after 1740--British society fundamentally changed the way it viewed madness, reason, and what lay between, eccentricity. The passage of one law, the Vagrant Act of 1744, signifies much in this regard. As Roger Alan Hambridge[55] explains, the Act of 1744 mostly restated that of 1714, which had provided that "'furiously mad, and dangerous' lunatics" could be "safely locked up, in such secure place...as . . . justices shall...direct and appoint" (406), at the expense of madfolks' home parish. The new Act, however, added a provision for treatment; previously people thus confined were offered no treatment but work.[56] The goal had been primarily to hide them from the horrified eye of civilized society--except during Sunday visits. Treatment, though, implies that "cure" or improvement is widely thought possible, and it indicates a growing conception of madness as *disease*. Disease, as opposed to folly, is essentially blameless. Also, the concepts of disease and cure imply *gradations* of madness and sanity--a continuum or spectrum rather than a binary. The Vagrant Act of 1744 indicates that even then the liminal cultural space inhabited by the eccentric was expanding.

But this is not to say that the change occurred as quickly or dramatically as the passage of one law. Early-eighteenth-century conceptions of madness, reason, and eccentricity did not disappear without debate and outrage. Early in the century the rage for reason was such that Pope and Swift could say all

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[55] His Appendix V: "Lunacy, Legality, and Private Madhouses in the Eighteenth Century" explains the legislation relevant to confinement for madness in detail.

[56] See Foucault's discussion of the use of labor as treatment or salvation in the "Great Confinement" chapter of *Madness and Civilization*, 38-64. In *Visits to Bedlam*, Max Byrd points out that in Pope's imitations of Horace, he associates madness with willful idleness, and that the logical "treatment" of the time was to put the mad to work.

England was mad and confidently expect a grave nod in response. The Scriblerus Club could count upon the automatic satiric rejection of its folly-ridden eponymous antihero. Don Quixote, the half-mad-half-sane direct ancestor of the British eccentric, was rarely "anything other than a figure of mockery or, at best, a symbol of wrongheadedness in general" (Tave 154). Ideas so firmly entrenched could only be changed with time and effort--like the effort Addison and Steele exerted to make their quixotic hero Sir Roger de Coverley lovable and not merely ridiculous. They kept Quixote's uper-class status, which licensed his oddity socially, but converted the Don's elaborate madness to laudable "naturalness" of manner and sentimental benevolence; emphasized Sir Roger's self-control; and applauded his ability to get along with people of all classes and political parties--in short, valued his good heart despite his muddled head. To the twentieth-century reader Sir Roger's head seems scarcely muddled at all, but the Augustan standard for reason was more absolute. Any deviation whatever was considered willful (and therefore self-correctable) folly or madness, two essentially interchangeable terms. Sir Roger's widely beloved oddity may have helped change this conception, but not dramatically. Not yet.

An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber, published in 1740, challenges the Augustan conception more directly and totally. Cibber's autobiography registers growing discontent with that understanding of madness and the self--a discontent that took legal form in the Vagrant Act of 1744--and demands a new understanding, a broader tolerance of madness and singularity. By 1740 Cibber was very much a figure of the establishment: seventy-two years old, he was a retired popular playwright and theatrical manager who had, after decades of struggle, at last experienced financial success. As poet, he had been the royally appointed Poet Laureate for ten

years, dutifully cranking out odes upon the king's birthday and similar occasions. He therefore had immense popular, royal, and cultural authority, which was reflected in the sales of his book: despite its high price of a guinea, it sold out within a few weeks. A new edition costing five shillings appeared soon afterwards. Cibber himself made fifteen hundred pounds from the *Apology* in its first year alone.

Given Cibber's popularity and authority, his attack upon the prevailing understanding of folly and singularity carried considerable weight. And because the attack *did* carry so much weight, Fielding and Pope made attacks upon Cibber that are now better known than what they attacked. In *The Dunciad in Four Books* (1742) Pope famously dethrones Theobald (Tibbald) as King of the Dunces and replaces him with the Laureate. In the Preface to the *Dunciad*, speaking in the voice of Martinus Scriblerus, Pope ironically praises Cibber's vanity, as proof of laudable self-sufficiency; his bravery, for embracing his own follies; and his love, for keeping a whore. Pope supports all these attacks with direct quotes from the *Apology*, using Cibber's own words against him (as he had used other writers' words against them in the *Dunciad Variorum*). Fielding characteristically satirizes Cibber's *Apology* more subtly and indirectly. In Chapter I of *Joseph Andrews* (1742), he ironically lists the *Apology* as "an admirable Pattern of the Amiable" in a man (Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* was his pattern for a woman), observing sardonically, "The former of these which deals in Male-Virtue, was written by the great Person himself, who lived the Life he hath recorded, and is by many thought to have lived such a Life only in order to write it" (16). Then, much in the vein of Pope, Fielding critiques by mock applause:

> How artfully doth the former, by insinuating that he *escaped* being promoted to the highest Stations in Church and State,

> teach us a Contempt of worldly Grandeur! how strongly doth he inculcate an absolute Submission to our Superiors! Lastly, how completely doth he arm us against so uneasy, so wretched a Passion as the Fear of Shame; how clearly doth he expose the Emptiness and Vanity of that Fantom, Reputation! (16)

Even seven years later, Cibber's *Apology* stuck in his craw enough to prompt Fielding to specify that *Tom Jones* was "a history, and not a life; nor an apology for a life, as is more in fashion" (2.1; 87).

What was all the fuss about? One characteristic passage from the book's earliest pages should show several ways in which Cibber directly challenged and so offended the dominant culture.

> Now the Follies I frankly confess, I look upon as, in some measure, discharged; while those I conceal are still keeping the Account open between me and my Conscience. To me the Fatigue of being upon a continual Guard to hide them, is more than the Reputation of being without them can repay. If this be Weakness, *defendit numerus*, I have such comfortable Numbers on my side, that were all Men to blush, that are not Wise, I am afraid, in Ten, Nine Parts of the World ought to be out of Countenance: But since that sort of Modesty is what they don't care to come into, why should I be afraid of being star'd at, for not being particular? Or if the Particularity[57] lies in owning my Weakness, will my wisest Reader be so inhuman as not to pardon it? But if there should be such a one, let me, at least, beg him to shew me that strange Man, who is perfect! Is any one

[57] Note Cibber's play on the word "particular." In the phrase "not being particular," he means "not being ashamed or backward" about his shortcomings. In the next phrase, "Particularity" means "difference," "oddity" or even, to stretch a bit, "eccentricity."

> more unhappy, more ridiculous, than he who is always laboring to be thought so, or that is impatient, when he is not thought so? (5-6)

Here (as in the book at large) Cibber specifically defends folly, by name. Recall that the "equation of madness with folly had, of course, been a staple of satire since the time of Aristophanes; but satirists in the eighteenth century came to exploit the Stoic paradox[58] with special vehemence and ingenuity" (De Porte 55). Swift and Pope, among others, had claimed in their satires that everyone, or virtually everyone, is mad/given over to folly, which for them was a self-evidently bad thing. Pope saw in folly the horror of encroaching darkness, the awful image with which he ended all versions of the *Dunciad*. "But we must try *not* to be mad," concluded their line of thought. Cibber, however, uses the very universality of folly and the difficulty of fighting it that earlier writers deplored, to *defend* his own. Instead of saying that everyone has follies and it's a shame, he claims that everyone has follies so there's no reason he shouldn't.

Closely tied to this defense of folly is Cibber's subtle changing of the terms by which folly is discussed and understood. "If this be weakness," he writes, then *defendit numerus*. Not to forgive this "weakness" would be "inhuman." Syntax suggests that "this" refers to his finding the effort of hiding follies more difficult than rewarding. But the next phrase suggests that "this" means possessing the follies in the first place: "were all Men to blush, that are not Wise" only one in ten could hold up their heads. To betray folly (or just to possess it) is not necessarily to be mad, it is merely not to be wise. Later in the passage he removes the concept of folly even further

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[58] Namely, that "knaves and fools are mad, because every deviation from reason is a deviation into madness" (De Porte 55). For the British Augustans as for the classic authors they consciously emulated, madness = indulgence of passion = imperfect reason.

from the concept of madness: "shew me," he demands rhetorically, "that strange Man, who is perfect!" No one is, he indicates, and no one is "more unhappy, [and] more ridiculous" than one "who is always laboring to be thought so, or that is impatient, when he is not thought so." This sally conflates folly with imperfection, while deflating the seriousness and possibility of achieving perfection. Taken with his earlier reference to the unrewarding effort of hiding follies, the total effect is to suggest that a) everyone possesses and attempts to hide follies (i.e., imperfections) and thereby appear perfect; b) to hide them takes effort; c) the effort is not worth it, for it may fail and if perceived will make one appear hypocritical and ridiculous. Just in the brief space of this passage, then, Cibber shifts folly all the way from something awful to remove by self-correction to a kind of badge of honesty and normalcy--a long way from madness.

This take on folly suggests a very different view of the self from that evident in the *Spectator*. Addison and Steele posited a transparent self that is thoroughly visible in both physical appearance (e.g., "the over-much Visibility and Pertness of one Ear") and action (Sir Roger's generosity); goodness or badness will out. Cibber holds out the possibility of unknown, unseeable depths--those follies/imperfections the great mass of people conceal. Insofar as hiding one's follies is possible--and Cibber claims only that it is unrewarding, not impossible--one can dissemble one's very self. "And now you will say, the World will find me, under my own Hand, a weaker Man than perhaps I may have pass'd for, even among my Enemies," he writes (*Apology* 5). Without confession his true self would lie hidden; even those most concerned with descrying his faults could not see them. The performative quality of Cibber's life is only a professional exaggeration of everyone's circumstances--i.e., that everyone's public self is to some degree a

willed performance. He writes of himself, "A Man who has pass'd above Forty Years of his Life upon a Theatre, where he has never appear'd to be Himself, may have naturally excited the Curiosity of his Spectators to know what he really was, when in no body's Shape but his own" (6). *The Tryal of Colley Cibber*, a 1740 pamphlet attacking Cibber's *Apology* to which Henry Fielding may have contributed, responds, "tho' some imagined it would be confined only to the Theatre, yet certain it is that this valuable Work hath much greater Matters in View, and may as properly be stiled an Apology for the Life of One Who hath played a very comical Part, which, tho' Theatrical hath been acted on a much larger Stage than *Drury-Lane*" (qtd. in Fone xix).

In *The History of Sexuality*, Volume I, Foucault argues, "Since the Middle Ages at least, Western societies have established the confession as one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth" (58). "[O]ne confesses one's crimes, one's sins, one's thoughts and desires, one's illnesses and troubles; one goes about telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell. . . . One confesses--or is forced to confess. . . . [I]t is driven from its hiding place in the soul, or extracted from the body" (59). By revealing these hidden caches of shameful truth to an authority we "come clean," as in the Catholic sacrament of confession or on the couch of psychoanalysis. We feel relief, believing we have fulfilled the natural urge of revealing the worst about ourselves, the repressed, the secret.

> The obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, "demands" only to surface; that if it fails to do so, this is because a constraint holds it in place, the violence of a power

> weighs it down, and it can finally be articulated only at the price of a kind of liberation. (60)

However, Foucault argues, this urge to confess is *not* an inherent, natural, liberating urge; rather, the *need* to confess and the material we believe we *must* confess are produced as complementary parts of the same discourse. The concept of confession demands the concept of that which is confessed; the presumption that the hidden exists and must be revealed produces the hidden.

Cibber's *Apology* clearly illustrates Foucault's thesis. Cibber professes happiness at the thought of subjecting himself to readers' authoritative gaze: "I am content to be gaz'd at, as I am, without lessening my Respect, for those, whose Passions may be more soberly cover'd" (3). As confessor, he does not "soberly cover his Passions"; he submits them to the scrutiny of those who, as spectators, do not in turn reveal themselves. Confession--in the form of the *Apology*--seems only natural: "But why make my Follies publick? Why not?" (5). "[W]hy should I scruple (when it is so easy a Matter too) to gratify their [readers'] particular Taste, by venturing upon any Error, that I like, or the Weakness of my Judgment misleads me to commit?" (286). By the rules of confessional discourse, only through total revelation can Cibber show an accurate and complete picture of himself and thereby achieve absolution. He writes:

> [W]hether flat or spirited, new or common, false or true, right or wrong, [my reflections] will be still my own, and consequently like me; I will therfore [sic] boldly go on; for I am only oblig'd to give you my *own*, and not a *good* Picture, to shew as well the Weakness, as the Strength of my Understanding. . . . At worst, tho' the Impartial may be tir'd, the Ill-natur'd (no small number)

I know will see the bottom of me. (10)

"The bottom" here has two meanings: "all," as in "getting to the bottom of things," and "the worst," as in "the bottom of the barrel." Note, too, Cibber's use of the word "oblig'd": he feels *obliged* to show his bad side, just as Foucault argues we feel obliged to confess--even if the obligation seems to come from inside rather than out.

Cibber is well aware, even joyous, that confessing makes himself look worse; he exclaims, "With all my Heart! my Enemies will then read me with Pleasure, and you, perhaps, with Envy, when you find that Follies, without the Reproach of Guilt upon them, are not inconsistent with Happiness" (5). In this sentence Cibber suggests that it is the guilty *repression* of folly, rather than folly itself, that is "inconsistent with Happiness." Without our hiding follies and attaching to them "the Reproach of Guilt"--without relegating them to the realm of secret truth which must be confessed--they would cause no pain. In fact, he claims, everyone would be happier if they were only as revelatory and unrepressed as he:

> Nay, there are some frank enough to confess,[59] they envy what they laugh at; and when I have seen others, whose Rank and fortune have laid a sort of Restraint upon their Liberty of pleasing their Company, by pleasing themselves, I have said softly to myself,---- Well, there is some Advantage in having neither Rank nor Fortune![60] (15-16)

What Foucault writes regarding our understanding of "sexuality," Cibber

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[59] Note Cibber's use of this word to describe a generally secret, unacknowledged, shameful feeling shared by many.

[60] Here is an interesting reversal of the usual license granted by aristocracy. Eccentrics such as Sir Roger de Coverley and the Shandy men indulge their singularities under the financial and cultural protection of their status. Cibber claims to indulge his singularity under the protection of having no money or status to lose. Of course, Cibber greatly exaggerates his lack of access to money and power--he was Poet Laureate when he wrote the paragraph cited, for starters.

writes regarding folly: we would "naturally" like to confess these secrets but we repress them for fear of society's disapproval. And that which is repressed seems like natural desire unfulfilled; therefore, confession may make us look worse but feel better.

Along these lines--the ostensible naturalness and liberation of indulging folly--Cibber continues: "he that does not chuse to live his own way, suffers others to chuse for him. Give me the Joy I always took in the end of an old Song, *My Mind, my Mind is a Kingdom to me!* If I can please myself with my own Follies, have I not a plentiful Provision for Life?" (16). This passage makes plain what lies implicit in all of Cibber's defense of folly: that the authority of the inner, the private, is to be valued over the authority of the public. One rules the kingdom of one's own mind; one *is* ruled in public. So what if the public objects? It is the private that matters most. Here is a profound challenge to the Augustan preference for public consensus over private enthusiasms.

Again, though, Cibber justifies the subjective on the grounds of its naturalness. "If I am misguided," he believes, "'tis Nature's Fault, and I follow her, from this Persuasion; That as Nature has distinguish'd our Species from the mute Creation, by our Risibility, her Design must have been, by that Faculty, as evidently to raise our Happiness, as by our *Os Sublime* (our erected Faces) to lift the Dignity of our Form above them" (20). Folly is natural, even biologically determined. One cannot cast off one's follies, as Augustan society had presumed: "I can no more put off my Follies, than my Skin; I have often try'd, but they stick too close to me" (15), Cibber claims. If this is so, then to confess folly is merely to acknowledge one's true nature. It is society with its demand that one repress folly that is unnatural. This is a later, somewhat expanded version of Addison and Steele's argument

regarding Sir Roger de Coverley's manners: those, too, were "natural"--not strictly conventional, and in their very unconventionality, constant proof of his unaffected, instinctive, natural benevolence. On such grounds, folly even becomes a source of pride: "I own myself incorrigible: I look upon my Follies as the best part of my Fortune, and am more concern'd to be a good Husband of Them, than of That" (*Apology* 16).

What Cibber's alleged follies are hardly matters; in fact, I would challenge anyone who has read the *Apology* to state from memory precisely what they are. (Most of the book covers the subject described in the subtitle: "With an Historical View of the Stage During His Own Time." Cibber's defense of folly appears almost solely in the first chapter, as a kind of warning.) Still, just to clarify exactly what it is Cibber so strenuously defends, this is really his only specific statement on that subject:

> [E]ven [at school] I remember I was the same inconsistent Creature I have been ever since! always in full Spirits, in some small Capacity to do right, but in a more frequent Alacrity to do wrong; and consequently often under a worse Character than I wholly deserv'd: A giddy Negligence always possess'd me . . . And (whatever Shame it may be to own it) I have observ'd the same odd Fate has frequently attended the course of my later Conduct in Life. The unskilful openness, or in plain Terms, the Indiscretion I have always acted with from my Youth, has drawn more ill-will toward me, than Men of worse Morals and more Wit might have met with. My Ignorance, and want of Jealousy of Mankind has been so strong, that it is with Reluctance I even yet believe any Person, I am acquainted with, can be capable of Envy, Malice, or Ingratitude: (9)

The elements of confessional discourse delineated above are here: the secret self different from the public self ("a worse Character than I wholly deserv'd"); the shame and compulsion associated with revealing all ("whatever Shame it may be to own it"); the perceived repression from without ("unskillful openness . . . has drawn . . . ill-will toward me").

Boiled down, Cibber's follies[61] are really one folly, essentially the same one afflicting Sir Roger: he is too natural and benevolent for this world. He *will* speak his mind,[62] and he will not believe ill of his friends. Throughout the book he emphasizes this quality; he is determined "we see Cibber the wise, Cibber the generous, Cibber the patient. Whether he is quite literally giving the shirt off his back, or making up a deficit out of his pocket" (Fone xxii), his natural benevolence takes center stage.[63] Much like Addison and Steele did with Sir Roger (and the Scriblerus Club pointedly did *not* do with Martinus Scriblerus), Cibber gives his "particularity" the sanction of excessive goodness. He legitimizes eccentricity by making the eccentric--himself, in this case--not only different but actually *better* than the ordinary run of mortals. Even though Cibber makes relatively wild and shocking claims in favor of the eccentric in the *Apology*--that the subjective or private is to be valued over the public; that folly is not only not madness, but almost the opposite; that everyone has a little folly stashed away somewhere, and might as well show it--despite these claims, Cibber recognizes that peculiarity for its own

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[61] By his own account, of course.

[62] See, in that connection, *Apology* 17: "I find a strong impulse to talk impertinently; if therefore you are not as fond of seeing, as I am of shewing myself in all my Lights, you may turn over two Leaves together, and leave what follows to those who have more Curiosity, and less to do with their Time, than you have."

[63] His attack upon Fielding--calling him a "broken wit"--is a rare exception. Even there, though, he refers to Fielding only as "This enterprising Person . . . whom I do not chuse to name, unless it could be to his Advantage, or that it were of Importance" (155). Cibber's original readers apparently had no difficulty figuring out who he meant, despite the periphrasis, and Cibber's show of politeness and concern for the "broken wit" only support his case for his own benevolence.

sake was generally despised. That explains in large part why Cibber argues his case so directly and strenuously: in 1740, with Augustan values still solidly in place (if slipping inconspicuously out of date), he had to.

Pope responded the way Cibber's brash self-defense had anticipated. Partly, and obviously, Pope's chagrin was personal and professional: he hated the fact that Cibber rather than he had received the Laureateship. In the *Dunciad in Four Books*'s new advertisement,[64] for instance, Pope breathes a mock sigh of relief that Cibber has provided the *Dunciad*

> *a more considerable Hero*. He [i.e., I] was always sensible of its defect in that particular, and owned he had let it pass with the Hero it had, purely for want of a better; not entertaining the least expectation that such an one was reserved for this Post, as has since obtained the *Laurel*: But since that had happened, he could no longer deny this justice either to *him* or the *Dunciad*. (*Works* 709-10)

But as Pope goes on, this was only part of his complaint: "And yet . . . there was another motive which had still more weight with our Author: This person was one, who from every Folly (not to say Vice) of which another would be ashamed, has constantly derived a *Vanity*; and therefore was the *man in the world who would least be hurt by it*" (710). To be so unashamed of folly, so unmindful of self-correction for the good of society, is a species of "blasphemy" to the Augustan Pope: "And can we say less of this brave man's, who having told us that he placed 'his *Summum bonum* in those follies, which he was not content barely to possess but would likewise glory in,' adds, '*If I am misguided,* 'TIS NATURE'S FAULT, *and I follow* HER'" (714).[65] For

[64] Although initialed "W. W.," for William Warburton (Pope's friend), John Butt writes that the advertisement was probably written by Pope himself.

[65] I should note that Pope's quotation of Cibber adds all these capitals and emphases; they were not in the original text. Pope was upset.

Pope, the will to reason is natural, so Cibber's excusing unreason under Nature's name is precisely backwards. Cibber's spirited defense of the private over the public, and the aggravation of that offense by "solemnly protest[ing] that *he will never change or amend,*" outraged Pope so much that he declares the Laureate outlaw: "Having then so publickly declared himself *incorrigible,* he is become *dead in law,* (I mean the *law Epopœian*) and descendeth to the Poet [Solon] as his property: who may take him, and deal with him, as if he had been dead as long as an old Egyptian hero; that is to say, *embowel* and *embalm him for posterity*" (718). As Pope understands it, Cibber's anti-Augustan reasoning leads to a world in which people "Find Virtue local, all Relation scorn,/ See all in *Self,* and but for self be born" (*Dunciad* 4.479-80). Broad-based cultural standards will die out in favor of individual standards, which must by nature be different. No matter how different, or downright mad, the individual may be, each person becomes his or her own God, in effect--"Wrapt up in Self, a God without a Thought,/ Regardless of our merit or default" (4.485-86). In short, Cibber's reasoning would, if generally accepted (and not morally opposed by cultural guardians such as Pope), not only *countenance* universal subjectivity and individual difference but virtually *demand* it. To Pope Cibber's line of thinking is not about allowing for a little eccentricity, as it may seem to us today; it is about destroying all social bonds and standards. Chaos and "universal darkness," not the acceptance of whimsical oddballs, hang in the balance.

That is why Pope refuses Cibber's *Apology*. Pope perceives the profound implications of Cibber's new arguments concerning the self: to confess all, seemingly under compunction, to value everything told because

it is ostensibly true and natural[66]--to do so is fundamentally to alter the relation between the individual and society. For the early eighteenth century, the self was transparent and ultimately unimportant;[67] what mattered most was its deference to the larger social body, except perhaps in cases of special, socially approved virtue such as Sir Roger de Coverley's. But Cibber's line of thinking, which would become dominant by the end of the century, reverses that relation. If all selves are secret, then all public faces are performances. (Recall that Cibber was a lifelong actor and theater manager.) If all public faces are performances, then general hypocrisy reigns; what we show each other is affected, not "natural." And if general hypocrisy reigns, then social standards are bankrupt, based on lies. What is true and natural is what is private and subjective; therefore, the individual has precedence over society. Society is the lie, and the individual is the truth. In Cibber's *Apology* this view is implicit and emergent, but it becomes more explicit and gains broader support after the mid-eighteenth century.

ii. The Medicalization of Madness, the Apotheosis of Don Quixote, and the Crumbling of the Opposition

I have suggested that texts such as the *Spectator*, the *Memoirs* of Martinus Scriblerus, the *Dunciad* (in all its versions), and Cibber's *Apology* interact with their cultural surroundings: they voice opinions that are "in the air," so to speak, and may represent hegemonic views or challenge them; and at the same time, they make arguments of their own which can significantly

[66] Cibber's defense of the "naturalness" of folly throws light on the paradoxical quality of "natural" manners. Sir Roger de Coverley's manners, for instance, are applauded for their naturalness, and Cibber boasts about the naturalness of his own. But manners are by definition social conventions, even the most "natural" manners. "Being oneself" as per Cibber is as much a convention as the Augustan self-abnegation he argued against.

[67] With Cibber (and later writers, particularly Laurence Sterne) to contrast with early-eighteenth-century authors, a correlation becomes clear: the more complex and hidden the self is understood to be, the greater that self's value.

influence the opinions of the culture at large. The texts discussed here are important causes *and* effects of the discourse of eccentricity.

I make this observation here because it seems so plainly true at mid-eighteenth century. From that time to the end of the century, there was an increasing tendency to understand madness as a medical, not a moral malady; Don Quixote gradually gained respectability; and eccentricity was increasingly valued for its own sake. These cultural forces interact with and strengthen each other; they form a complex system of causes and effects. Quixote's newly perceived valor, as expressed in texts of the time,[68] wins eccentric people new respect, and vice-versa. The medical model of madness lends countenance to the personal quirkiness of literary characters--they are understood to be "just naturally that way"; they cannot be blamed for what is physically beyond their control. And so on. That individual authors and broad cultural forces both influence each other is particularly plain in mid-eighteenth century, especially where this complexly intertwined trio of issues is concerned.

Stuart M. Tave argues convincingly that "the ridiculous *and lovable* Don Quixote was a creation of the eighteenth century, mostly the later eighteenth century" (151; emphasis added). Before that, as noted in the previous chapter, Quixote was almost solely ridiculous. Pope, for instance, could only appreciate him slightly, and at two removes. In a letter to Lyttelton in 1739, Pope writes that his friend Dr. George Cheyne[69] is "so very a child in true Simplicity of Heart, that I love him; as He loves Don Quixote, for the Most Moral & Reasoning Madman in the world. He is, in the Scripture language, an *Israelite in whom there is no Guile,* or in Shakespear's, *as foolish a good kind of Christian Creature* as one shall meet

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[68] See especially *Tristram Shandy* and *Launcelot Greaves,* discussed below.

[69] See below. That Cheyne should be an important medicalizer of the concept of madness *and* love Quixote, is most significant.

with" (qtd. in Tave 155; emphasis in original). As Tave puts it, "Pope loves Cheyne, who, himself a Quixote, loves Quixote" (155). That seems as close as Pope could come to loving Quixote himself. As William Warburton noted at the time of the *Memoirs'* publication, Pope and the Scriblerus Club wrote them *"in the manner of Cervantes"* (qtd. in Tave 153; emphasis in original)--that is, as obviously and exclusively satire. If the *Memoirs* are "Cervantic," then the Club's reading of Cervantes indicates no admiration or sympathy whatever for the Don; they certainly have none for the quixotic Scriblerus.

But Quixote's fortunes changed significantly after the 1740s, with the rise of sentimentality (a new sensibility of which the quixotic Sir Roger gives a foretaste in the 1710s). In the second half of the eighteenth century, as Edward L. Niehus observes, readings of Quixote "tended to be replaced by softer and more tolerant interpretations . . . [which] frequently evolved into sentimentality or even pathos. And from this point it would not be far to the Romantic view of the Quixote as idealistic or tragic hero" (232). Frances M. Bothwell del Toro makes a similar point: "a new interpretation of Don Quixote was gradually presented which was to be accepted by many toward the end of the eighteenth century and almost universally by the nineteenth. The Don was becoming something of a mirror of all men and, even more gradually, a hero" (16-17). The Don came to be loved for his good heart despite his cracked head. He

> flourished in a world where morality was located in goodness of heart not action; and . . . he had noble desires and an assortment of gentlemanly virtues. As his good impulses came to weigh more heavily than the crazy unreality of his perceptions and actions, he became an amiable mixture of oddity and humanity, . . . not merely the object of mirth. (Tave 158)

For example, in the 1744 pamphlet *Essay towards Fixing the True Standards of Wit*,[70] Corbyn Morris likens Don Quixote to Falstaff[71] and to Sir Roger de Coverley. All three, Morris argues, suffer humiliation and disaster in the course of attempting great things. But Don Quixote is not *only* a comic butt, for after his ridiculous failures, "he rises again and forces your Esteem, by his excellent Sense, Learning and Judgment, upon any Subjects which are not ally'd to his Errantry; These continually act for the Advancement of his Character" (39). And most importantly, his honorable ideals always shine through his shortcomings: "The *Foibles* which he possesses, besides giving you exquisite Pleasure, are wholly inspir'd by these worthy Principles" (38-39). In the early 1750s, Henry Fielding--who had written his own sympathetic version of Quixote in 1733[72]--praised Charlotte Lennox (author of *The Female Quixote*, 1752) and Cervantes equally, for taking care "to preserve the Affection of their Readers for their principal Characters, in the midst of the Follies of which they are guilty." Arabella and the Don, writes Fielding, "are accordingly represented as Persons of good Sense, and of great natural Parts, and in all Cases, except one, of a very sound Judgement, and what is much more endearing, as Persons of Great Innocence, Integrity and Honour, and of highest Benevolence" (qtd. in Tave 159). They are at least as admirable as they are silly. Laurence Sterne and Tobias Smollett, too, considerably

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[70] This essay provides an interesting instance of Augustan standards on the wane. As its title indicates, it pursues the very Augustan goal of fixing "the true standard" absolutely and lastingly. At the same time, it expresses a very un-Augustan admiration of Don Quixote.

[71] In the letter from Pope to Lyttelton just cited, Pope likens Cheyne to Falstaff, as well.

[72] Namely, *Don Quixote in England*. In Fielding's version of the Quixote story, the heretofore satirized becomes the satirist. He is as mad as in Cervantes's novel, but every Brit he meets seems even madder, and he says so. When Dr. Drench calls Quixote mad to his face, Quixote replies, "I have heard thee, thou ignorant wretch, throw that word in my face, with patience. For alas! could it be proved, what were it more than almost all mankind in some degree deserve?" Then he begins naming names. Sir Thomas Loveland responds, "Ha, ha, ha! I don't know whether this knight, by and by, may not prove us all to be more mad than himself" (*Works* 11:69-70).

improved the Don's status (and by extension, the eccentric's), as discussed below. By 1781, it was possible for John Bowle to write in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, of Cervantes:

> Sure I am, that good-nature and candour, charity, humanity, and compassion, for the infirmities of man in his most abject state, and consequently an abhorrence of cruelty, persecution, and violence, the principal moral he seems to inculcate in his great work, were the glorious virtues and predominant good qualities of his soul, and must transmit his name to the latest ages with every eulogium due to so exalted a character. (Qtd. in Tave 160)

The idea that not satirical finger-pointing but values such as "good-nature," "compassion," and "abhorrence of cruelty, persecution, and violence" were the "predominant good qualities" of Cervantes and, by extension, of his novel, was fundamentally different from the standard reading of *Don Quixote* at century's beginning. In 1785, William Wallbeck wrote even more admiringly of the Don in his translation of De Florian's *Life of Cervantes*:

> His very failings, (if by so harsh a name we should choose to distinguish the ebullitions of Philanthropy,) rendered him but more amiable. Even when his too ardent and generous feelings betray him into ridiculous excesses,--and we are tempted to laugh at him, it is impossible to withhold from him our love, and pity. (Qtd. in Tave 162)

And James Beattie observed in 1783 that the Don is a man "whom it is impossible not to esteem for his cultivated understanding and the goodness of his heart" (qtd. in Niehus 238). In the course of the eighteenth century, then, Quixote was transformed from fool to hero. The benevolent Don "became a man with an inner light that shone through his seemingly cracked

head, an imagination that opened a more immediate glimpse of the possibilities of human greatness than a merely logical understanding could attain" (Tave 161). And concomitantly, as the Don gained respect, so did the eccentric, his genealogical descendant.

Much as popular views of Quixote altered over the course of the eighteenth century, so did popular understandings of madness. Not that the latter happened suddenly, or only after 1740; certain earlier texts had claimed medical bases for madness. These texts were instances of the emergent conception that would at mid-eighteenth century become dominant.[73] Thomas Willis concluded back in 1664, in *Cerebri Anatome,* that the prevailing system of humors[74] must be flawed because treatments (emetics, purges, and bleedings) administered flawlessly according to that theory seemed useless or actually harmful. This observation only gained much serious credence when it was made by William Battie almost a hundred years later. Willis proposed in place of the humoral system the concept of "animal spirits," which were "rarefied vapors commonly believed to circulate in the vessels of the brain" (De Porte 7). In a normal person these spirits circulate through the whole body in their proper channels. However, various forces--diet, strong emotions, heredity--can drive the spirits out of those proper channels, causing mental disorders. Nicholas Robinson's conception of mind and body in *A New System of the Spleen* (1729) bears resemblance to Willis's system: nerves control behavior and thought because they are the conduits of information between the brain and the rest of the body; if they are disordered, then behavior and thought will be, too. (Robinson takes the idea to its

[73] For a concise but full overview of pre-1740s views of madness, see De Porte's Chapter 1, "Abnormal Psychology in England 1660-1760." That chapter led me to these examples.

[74] Black bile, yellow bile, blood, and phlegm. Literary and medical references to the humors, and treatments based upon this understanding, did not generally disappear until around the end of the eighteenth century.

literalistic, logical end: he claims that some people "talk well but write poorly" because when their excessively springy brain nerves receive ideas, they can grip the ideas well enough to discharge them in the form of "Vollies of choice Epithets, or smart Repartees," but cannot "retain them in that natural Order necessary to supply the Discourse with Distinctness and Clearness" [qtd. in De Porte 9].) George Cheyne's *The English Malady* (1733) essentially endorsed Robinson's understanding of the brain and nerves, cautioning those with particularly sensitive nerve fibers not to indulge in passions or other sensations which would excite them. Furthermore, Cheyne, who perhaps desired to flatter his numerous wealthy and aristocratic patients (or who perhaps did so unawares), argues that nervous disorders mainly afflict "those of the liveliest and quickest natural Parts, whose Faculties are the brightest and most spiritual, and whose Genius is most keen and penetrating" (qtd. in Byrd, *Bedlam* 127). Although such views were not immediately embraced by British culture at large, they had their impact. They participated in a discourse that more and more spoke of madness as an illness--something imposed undesired upon the mad from without (not willfully, from within), by mundane, mechanistic forces (not by God), to which no blame attached, and which could under many circumstances be cured or improved. The proper response to willful madness is willing reason instead; the proper response to faulty nerve fibers is a strengthening program and the avoidance of shock.

In 1750 William Battie,[75] then supervisor of Bethlehem Hospital, became exasperated with the system he nominally controlled, and he resigned. (Perhaps, too, he felt undercompensated; he moved on to found St.

[75] Byrd speculates that Battie's name is the origin of the English word "batty," meaning "a bit mad" (*Bedlam* 44). The *OED* neither confirms nor denies this speculation, defining "batty" only as "Of or belonging to a bat, bat-like."

Luke's, a private, for-profit mad-hospital.) He cited as his reasons, first, the "inhumane" practice of exhibiting patients like animals in a zoo,[76] and second, doctors' systematic cruelty to patients under the name of treatment--blisterings, beatings, cold-water dunkings, emetics, purges, and above all, confinement. He set about changing the way the mad were understood and treated. In so doing, he articulates ideas very similar to Willis's, Cheyne's and Robinson's; the difference is, Battie's society was more ready to accept them, partly as a result of the earlier works.

Battie's *Treatise on Madness*, published in 1758, was his major contribution to that effort. This text, emblematic of the increasingly medical conception of madness after midcentury,[77] sees madness as an essentially physical ailment that is limited and whose symptoms (and often its causes, too) are treatable. To begin with its physical nature: Battie argues that flaws in the "medullary matter," the nerve fibers centered in the brain and branching out through the body, are the ultimate cause of madness. As Battie understands it, all sensation causes some pressure on the nerves/medullary matter. The difference between "true" and "false" perception--i.e., reason and madness--is the difference between properly functioning and malfunctioning

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[76] Byrd reports that after Battie's resignation, Bethlehem "significantly abolished the practice of opening its door to sightseers" (*Bedlam* 133). Just how "significantly" the practice was abolished is not clear; Byrd does not specify, and estimates of the number of visits (see, e.g., De Porte and Foucault) cover the eighteenth century as a whole and then up to 1815, when visits were discontinued altogether. The visits did at least live on in art, although they may or may not have been curtailed in life. Hogarth returned in 1763 to add the Brittania coin to the final plate of *Rake's Progress*--the numerous titillated visitors in that engraving remain unchanged. In 1794 Richard Newton made a well-known engraving titled "A Visit to Bedlam," which depicts four men peering into small Bedlam cell-windows at three inmates. Two visitors appear enraged at an inmate giving them the fig, and the two other visitors express shock at another inmate's hat--a chamberpot.

[77] Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic* famously discusses the rise of medicalization in the eighteenth century and afterwards. In that work he shows how the body came to be understood as totally knowable, transparent. The body, yes: I argue here that in popular understanding the self--the somewhat intangible personality, as distinct from the wholly tangible physical body--becomes *more* mysterious and elusive as the eighteenth century progresses, and that this conception indirectly affected conceptions of eccentricity.

nerves. Improperly functioning nerves undergo pressure that in turn causes perception in the brain of objects that do not exist. Because the brain merely registers the impulses of the nerves, false ideas are accurate responses to *inaccurate* nerve impulses. Battie explains:

> Now no external cause whatever can be supposed capable of exciting delusive any more than true perception, except such cause acts materially upon the nerve thereby disordered, and that with force sufficient to alter the former arrangement of its medullary particles. Which force necessarily implies impulse and pressure in delusive Sensation, in the same manner and order as it does in the perception of objects really corresponding thereto. (44)

The similarity between Battie's conception of nerves and perception and the theories of Cheyne and Robinson is plain. For Battie, malfunctions of the nerves can either be classified as "Original Madness," which is "solely owing to an internal disorder of the nervous substance" (mainly congenital defects), or as "Consequential Madness," which "is likewise owing to the same nervous substance being indeed in the like manner disordered, but disordered *ab extra;* and therefore is chiefly to be attributed to some remote and accidental cause" (43-44). Obviously a congenital madness is inherited, and weak nerve fibers, or a liability to consequential madness, can be, too. Whether heredity or circumstance (or both) is to blame for consequential madness, the significance of this new understanding of mental illness to the understanding of eccentricity is tremendous: madness is not blameworthy, and that which is not blameworthy is not unacceptable. Madness after 1740 is not a lapse of reason but merely a physical misfortune largely beyond one's control, like a strained ankle. Eccentricity--minor madness--can be explained

away in physical terms, as Sterne spends much of *Tristram Shandy* doing.

As for madness's new limitation: Augustan Britain defined madness as the deviation from reason, which meant there was little that could *not* be called madness. Battie, in contrast, seeks to limit significantly that which can *truly* be called madness. He writes, in the opening chapter of the *Treatise*,

> Madness hath moreover shared the fate common to many other distempers of not being precisely defined. Inasmuch as not only several symptoms, which frequently and accidentally accompany it, have been taken into the account as constant, necessary, and essential; but also the supposed cause, which perhaps never existed or certainly never acted with such effect, has been implied in the very names usually given to this distemper. No wonder therefore is it, whilst several disorders, really independent of Madness and of one another, are thus blended together in our bewildered imagination, that a treatment, rationally indicated by any of those disorders, should be injudiciously directed against Madness itself, whether attended with such symptoms or not. (3)

The only way to define madness clearly and accurately is by its essence. Symptoms such as anxiety and insensibility cannot be a part of that essence, because they are present or absent in wildly varying degrees in different cases. For example, "Witness the many instances of happy Mad-men, who are perfectly easy under what is esteemed by every one but themselves the greatest misfortune human nature is liable to" (5). Similarly, not all madfolks are insensible; the opposite is often true. So for Battie, the essence of madness is its worst case:

> [N]o one ever doubt[s] whether the perception of objects not

> really existing or not really corresponding to the senses be a certain sign of Madness. Therefore *deluded imagination,* which is not only an indisputable but an essential character of Madness, . . . precisely discriminates this from all other animal disorders: or that man and that man alone is properly mad, who is fully and unalterably persuaded of the Existence or of the appearance of any thing, which either does not exist or does not actually appear to him, and who behaves according to such erroneous persuasion. (5-6)

Anything less is just a symptom,[78] probably treatable. This understanding of madness is both similar to and different from the Augustans'. Similar, in that Battie appeals to public perception over private, in a double sense: he bases his definition upon observations that "no one ever doubts," i.e., allegedly universal opinion (not his own); and the difference between the individual's perception and the perception of others is considered the very essence of madness. Different, though, in the specifically medical way this perceptual difference is understood: the individual's faulty understanding is

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[78] On the subject of madness and its symptoms, and in light of Chapter 2, cf. the following telling exchange in Fielding's *Don Quixote in England*:

> DR. DRENCH. If this madman be not blooded, cupped, sweated, blistered, vomited, purged, this instant, he will be incurable. I am well acquainted with this sort of frenzy; his next paroxysm will be six times as strong as the former.
> MR. BRIEF. Pshaw! the man is no more mad than I am.—I should be finely off if he could be proved *non compos mentis*; 'tis an easy thing for a man to pretend madness, *ex post facto.*
> DR. DRENCH. Pretend madness! Give me leave to tell you, Mr. Brief, I am not to be pretended with; I judge by symptoms, sir.
> MR. BRIEF. Symptoms! Gad, here are symptoms for you, if you come to that.
> DR. DRENCH. Very plain symptoms of madness, I think.
> MR. BRIEF. Very fine, indeed; very fine doctrine! very fine, indeed! A man's beating of another is a proof of madness. So that if a man be indicted, he has nothing to do but to plead *non compos mentis*, and he's acquitted of course: so there's an end of all actions of assaults and battery at once. (*Works* 11:68)

Here in microcosm are the views of madness competing at midcentury: the Augustan, which saw madness as a condition possible to will away by reason (or will to be present); and the new medical, which saw madness as involuntary illness, difficult to fake, transparent to the doctor's diagnostic gaze.

not willful, as in cases of religious enthusiasm, but rather the innocent, undesired effect of bad nerves.

This narrower definition for madness, like madness's less blameworthy status, makes eccentricity more acceptable. When, as in the early part of the century, madness and reason are sharply divided, and the awful wastelands of madness menace the (much smaller) happy realm of reason, there is very little room in between for the eccentric. In such a geography he is almost bound, statistically, to be an exile. But when the geographic proportions shift, almost to the point of reversing--true madness now occupying only a small corner--the eccentric has more social latitude in which to move freely. Also, to drop the geographic metaphor, when only the most delusional are considered truly mad, slight madness is not really madness at all. Under those conditions, the minor madness of eccentricity is barely noticeable, let alone objectionable.

Finally, Battie (et al., after 1740) understood madness to be medically treatable, *most* of the time, and he sought to fit the cure precisely to the illness. Original madness, which Battie argues is relatively uncommon, causes him to throw up his hands: "Original Madness, whether it be hæreditary or intermitting, is not removable by any method, which the science of Physick in its present imperfect state is able to suggest" (61). "Consequential Madness," on the other hand, "is frequently manageable by human art" (72). Therefore, "our endeavours are to be employed in preventing removing or weakning [sic] those other external accidents before enumerated, which by occasioning intermediate pressure are the remoter causes of Consequential Madness" (73). (His means of doing so bear close resemblance to the same Bethlehem treatments he objected to: for instance, in cases of insensibility and "Idiotism" [congenital brain malfunction] he

recommends "general evacuations," "constant discharges of the fluids from the head and neck by perpetual blisters, setons, and issues," "vomits, cathartics, errhines, and all sorts of tolerable irritation," and "the concussive force of the cold-bath or sea-water" [92]. It was the nonmedical nature of treatments at Bethlehem, their nonspecific, nonscientific application, rather than the treatments in themselves, to which Battie objected earlier.) His goal is to counteract the causes of pressure on the medullary substance by opposite influences. Excessively stimulated fibers require relaxation, preferably by such gentle means as wine or opium; excessively lax fibers require stimulation, preferably by exercise and occupation. Only extreme cases of insensibility require the doctor to "shake the whole solid frame" (92) by purges, etc., thereby decongesting the fibers. Like Willis, he seeks to apply to illnesses only those cures that his experience--to which he appeals again and again in the *Treatise*--shows him will work.

Battie does not object to confinement *per se* any more than other traditional treatments; in fact, he claims that in treating mental patients, "confinement alone is sometimes sufficient, but always so necessary, that without it every method hitherto devised for the cure of Madness would be ineffectual" (68). His justification for confinement (within doors only, in most cases, not in chains) is, again, medical:

> Madness then, considered as delusive Sensation unconnected with any other symptom, requires the patient's being removed from all objects that act forcibly upon the nerves, and excite too lively a perception of things, more especially from such objects as are the known causes of his disorder; for the same reason as rest is recommended to bodies fatigued, and the not attempting

to walk when the ancles are strained.[79] (68)

As Cheyne had argued earlier, patients were to be kept from straining their already-fragile nerves, which unrestricted access to stimuli out in the world would risk.

Curability demands sympathy at the same time it takes the horror out of madness:

> Madness is, contrary to the opinion of some unthinking persons, as manageable as many other distempers, which are equally dreadful and obstinate, and yet are not looked upon as incurable: and that such unhappy objects ought by no means to be abandoned, much less shut up in loathsome prisons as criminals or nusances [sic] to the society. (Battie 93)

This is especially true in cases of minor madness--such as eccentricity. At the same time, the concept of curability *demands* a cure, even in cases of eccentricity. Oddballs may seem less odd and more sympathetic than previously, but the urge to *cure* them remains. Individuality and conformity are inculcated at the same time: all but the worst cases of madness are forgivable and curable, so eccentricity gains license; but cure is presumed possible and therefore desirable. Madness is, after all, an illness now. Foucault uses the word "normalization" to describe this paradoxical effect upon individual difference:

> In a sense, the power of normalization imposes homogeneity; but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialities and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another. It is easy to understand how the power of the norm functions within a system of formal

[79] Note the comparison between brain and ankles. For Battie they are all bodily fibers; madness is nothing special, no more than an accidental, physical ailment.

> equality, since within a homogeneity that is the rule, the norm introduces, as a useful imperative and as a result of measurement, all the shading of individual differences. (*Discipline and Punish* 184)

Just as the concept of necessary confession accompanies the concept of that which is confessed, the concept of curability, of restoring to normal, accompanies the concept of individual difference. Curability simultaneously demands acceptance for eccentricity and seeks to abolish it.

That is precisely why eccentrics have never been taken seriously. The British eccentric is the direct descendant of Don Quixote, which means that eccentricity has always been understood as a dollop of madness. Madness, in turn, has been experienced as illness by Western societies since the mid-eighteenth century. Thus, eccentricity is commonly understood as a minor illness, the psychological equivalent of a common cold--a minor ailment that many (or even most) people "catch" sooner or later. Eccentricity is not serious enough *as* illness to instill deep pity or concern; the only response that remains is the seemingly natural desire to cure the minor illness. Eccentricities can only be taken seriously *as symptoms*, and not very seriously then; that is, the *content* of the eccentricity, the oddity itself, is to be humored or tolerated at best. One does not value a cough *qua* cough; by the same principle, one does not value oddity *qua* oddity. One *does*, however, note the presence of the cough/oddity and begin plotting how to remove it and restore the afflicted body to health. There is no essential difference between, say, the delusive bearing of paper mitre and wooden triple cross by the Bethlehem "pope" in the *Rake's Progress*, and the compulsive wargaming of Toby Shandy; both are symptoms. The difference, a quantitative not qualitative one, is that the former symptom indicates greater illness. One does not take

seriously the actual content of a madman's ravings, but the fact that he is raving--that he has lost his health and reason--makes us look to our own safety. When a mere eccentric mounts his hobbyhorse, we take his prattle no more seriously than we do the madman's raving, and since the eccentric is harmless, we also seek a way to dismount him.

As is the case with any new discourse, the altered understanding of madness (and implicitly, by extension, eccentricity) of which Battie's *Treatise* is emblematic did not become hegemonic overnight. There was inevitably a transition period. The final tipping of the balance toward the new paradigm has to be the madness of King George III. In June 1788, "for the first time the fifty-year-old King lost his reason" (Macalpine and Hunter xv). His symptoms lasted steadily from June 1788 until February 1789, then returned briefly in 1801, 1804, and from 1810 until his death in 1820. He presented what had heretofore been considered unmistakable symptoms of true madness, even by the now-limited definition articulated by Battie and other physicians: delusions, delirium, and mania. King George was subjected to that famous modern icon of madness, the straitjacket. However, few besides his primary physicians, Drs. Francis Willis, Richard Warren, and Henry Reynolds[80] were actually willing to diagnose madness--the patient was, after all, the *king*! In such a case only a physically based diagnosis would do; to say that the king's symptoms were the effects of a bodily ailment seemed infinitely less damaging and heretical than the reverse, that the king's fever

[80] Although these men did ascribe madness to the British king, they essentially accepted the medical model; they were *physicians*, after all. They approached the madness as an illness that was curable--by symptom-treatments such as blistering, confinement, and purges. The recent movie *The Madness of King George* (1995) depicts the painful regimen pretty thoroughly.

was a symptom and effect of his madness.[81] Thus, Dr. Robert Jones, among others, criticized the royal treatment program on the grounds that the doctors should be *strengthening,* not purging (and straitjacketing) the king, because the illness was "neither more nor less than a nervous fever" (qtd. in Macalpine and Hunter 100), and the symptoms resembling madness were merely results of that bodily fever. Jones was outraged by the "use of the word *insanity,* as applying to his Majesty's disease," for in

> the inferior conditions of life, the expression alluded to is equivalent to the destruction of a man's credit and happiness for ever. But in the more exalted state of a monarch, it not only affects the credit and importance of the nation he governs, but must fall upon his offspring: and the more especially, as this disease is supposed, without any ground for such a supposition, to be *hereditary.* (Qtd. in Macalpine and Hunter 101)

Other physicians followed suit: Dr. William Rowley distinguished between fevers and madness and pronounced the king's disorder "positively a *symptomatic* or *febrile delirium*" (qtd. in Macalpine and Hunter 103; emphasis in original); Dr. William Pargeter wrote, "Quid est insanitas? Insanitas est, delirium sine febre--Erat aegro febris--ergo, Aeger non erat insanus [What is insanity? Insanity is delirium without fever--He (the king) was ill with a fever--therefore, the patient was not insane]"[82] (qtd. in Macalpine and Hunter 107). The high stakes involved in George III's

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[81] Ida Macalpine and Richard Hunter, from whose thorough *George III and the Mad-Business* I cite the information and examples regarding George's madness, seem to want to eradicate that heresy once and for all. In their introduction, for instance, they scoff at the "false image of 'mad King George'" (xv), "the picture every schoolboy learns, which every textbook teaches, and which pervades, more or less subtly, every study of his long and complex reign" (xi); they emphasize that "the King was fifty years old when he first became deranged, and all periods of derangement added together up to his seventy-third year hardly amounted to six months in all" (xii); and they denigrate medical science, which, they claim, could now properly diagnose and treat the king.

[82] The translation is mine.

diagnosis, as articulated by Jones, demanded that the affliction be considered in physical, not mental terms. Eventually this consideration was extended more broadly, to those "in the inferior conditions of life," as well.

But again, it took time and considerable cultural conflict for British society to reach this position. The career of Samuel Johnson roughly spans the period in question,[83] and it provides a microcosmic view of the whole messy conflict--the lingering Augustan ideals ceding ground unwillingly to the new medicalizing, normalizing discourse. One *expects* to find Augustan ideals in Johnson's work; he is, after all, often called the "last Augustan," and with good reason.[84] Like Swift and Pope, he expresses so intense a preference for the public/general over the individual/subjective that it might be called a horror of the latter. The astonomer in Johnson's *Rasselas* (1759) exemplifies what Johnson saw as the logical (actually, mad) end of subjectivity. The astronomer follows his own subjective reasoning to a clearly irrational conclusion--that he controls the globe's weather by force of will. "I cannot prove it by any external evidence . . . It is sufficient that I feel this power, that I have long possessed, and every day exerted it," he confesses[85] to Imlac (Johnson, *Works* 404). Like the religious enthusiasts so loathed by the Augustans in general, the astronomer needs no further proof. Solipsistic reasoning is probably wrong no matter how internally consistent. What Johnson said of Bishop Gilbert Burnet could stand for his opinion of all

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[83] Boswell records Johnson's earliest published work as a translation of Lobo's *Voyage to Abyssinia*, in 1735 (when Johnson was 26). Johnson wrote steadily and voluminously until his death in 1784 (at age 75).

[84] See Byrd, inter alia: "Like Pope, like Swift, Samuel Johnson belongs temperamentally and intellectually to the Augustan generation; indeed he represents the culmination of that Augustan vision of madness we have been tracing" (*Bedlam* 88).

[85] "[S]ome painful sentiment pressed upon his mind. He often looked up earnestly towards the sun, and let his voice fall in the midst of his discourse. He would sometimes, when we were alone, gaze upon me in silence with the air of a man who longed to speak what he was yet resolved to suppress" (*Works* 402). Finally, with great reluctance, as if the truth forces itself out ineluctably, he confesses his "power" to Imlac.

individualists: "He was like a man who resolves to regulate his time by a certain watch; but will not inquire whether the watch is right or not" (Boswell 510).

Johnson mistrusted solipsism so because, like a good Augustan, he deeply mistrusted the imagination; he saw them as inextricably bound together *and* bound to madness. To Pope's generation, imagination was virtually the opposite of reason, and therefore anathema. A solitary person cannot always be busy, Johnson explains in the reasonable voice of Imlac, and in the intervals of unemployment, imagination or fancy is apt to seize the mind. Then,

> some particular train of ideas fixes the attention, all other intellectual gratifications are rejected, the mind, in weariness or leisure, recurs constantly to the favourite conception, and feasts on the luscious falsehood whenever she is offended with the bitterness of truth. By degrees the reign of fancy is confirmed; she grows first imperious, and in time despotic. Then fictions begin to operate as realities, false opinions fasten upon the mind, and life passes in dreams of rapture or of anguish.
>
> This, sir, is one of the dangers of solitude . . . (*Works* 406)

The absence of society's steadying influence leads to overindulgence in imagination, and as he told his friend Mrs. Burney, "madness . . . is occasioned by too much indulgence of imagination" (Boswell 1225). Johnson attributed William Collins's madness to excessive imagination fed by his youthful reading: "He had employed his mind chiefly upon works of fiction and subjects of fancy, and by indulging some peculiar habits of thought was eminently delighted with those flights of imagination which pass the bounds of nature" (*Life of Collins* 328). This led to Collins being "assailed

by...insanity" (328). Johnson assigned the same cause to his own "unsettled turn of mind" (Boswell 36).

If solitude sickens, then conversely, company cures. After some weeks of association with Imlac, Pekuah, and Rasselas, the astronomer returns to reason. Their company (and the reality check it offers) keeps at bay the wolves of madness that are never far from his solitary door: "'If I am accidentally left alone for a few hours,' said he, 'my inveterate persuasion rushes upon my soul, and my thoughts are chained down by some irresistible violence, but they are soon disentangled by the prince's conversation, and instantaneously released at the entrance of Pekuah'" (*Works* 412). Note Johnson's strong images of power and confinement: madness "assails" Collins; imagination acts like a "despotic" ruler; solipsistic madness "chains down" one's thoughts.[86] Society, by contrast, brings freedom. Johnson found this especially true for himself, as Boswell records:

> Whenever he was not engaged in conversation, [self-reproachful] thoughts were sure to rush into his mind; and, for this reason, any company, any employment whatever, he preferred to being alone. The great business of his life (he said) was to escape from himself; this disposition he considered as the disease of his mind, which nothing cured but company. (105-106)

Personal experience and Augustan tradition taught him to shun the private (insane) and seek the public (sane).

This last quotation with its language of "disease" and "cure" shows the new medical understanding of madness partially insinuated into Johnson's

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[86] See also *Rambler* No. 85 (8 Jan. 1751): "It is certain that any wild wish or vain imagination never *takes such firm possession of the mind*, as when it is found empty and unoccupied" (*Yale Works* 4:86; emphasis added).

Augustan conceptions. He is caught between the old-fashioned suspicion that madness can be willed away by the exercise of reason, and the gloomy certainty that madness attacks the body from without and that one can only try to treat its symptoms. For instance, as Nicholas Williams points out, Johnson blurs physical and mental diagnoses of Collins's ailments: "His life was assailed by...dreadful calamities, disease and insanity" (*Life of Collins;* qtd. in Williams 24). He does not exclusively accept either the old reasonable or the new medical explanation; he runs the two together.

On the one hand, he believed that Collins had spoiled his mind by indulging his imagination since youth, and "may yet recover," "by a very great temperance, or more properly abstinence" (Boswell 196). He thought that madness could be prevented, recommending that "those who have heated imaginations live [near Bethlehem Hospital], and take warning" (1225-26). And in a letter to Boswell in 1776 he reproves him for being melancholy, as Boswell puts it, with "a good deal of severity and reproof, as if it were owing to my own fault, or that I was, perhaps, affecting it from a desire of distinction" (782).

But on the other hand, and at the same time, Johnson understood mental illness in modern medical terms. At twenty, "overwhelmed with a horrible hypochondria, with perpetual irritation, fretfulness, and impatience; and with a dejection, gloom, and despair, which made existence misery" (Boswell 47), he sought the advice of Dr. Swinfen, "a physician in Lichfield, his godfather" (48). He had tried to cure himself by force of will, "walk[ing] to Birmingham and back again, and tr[ying] many other expedients, but all in vain" (48), so he sought medical treatment. After this experience, he believed, "To attempt to *think them down* [distressing thoughts] is madness"

(690).[87] In the letter cited just above he instructs Boswell, "Read Cheyne's *English Malady;* but do not let him teach you a foolish notion that melancholy is a proof of acuteness" (782). The rest of the book, which argues for purely physical origins of "the English malady," he finds fit to recommend. In his next letter to Boswell, Johnson apologizes for his earlier reproaches: "If you are really oppressed with overpowering and involuntary melancholy, you are to be pitied rather than reproached" (783). He frequently evinces a view of mental illness as something beyond one's own control that attacks the body; he referred to the depression that plagued him all his life[88] (and often harassed Boswell) as periodic assaults by the "black dog" (Boswell 1042).

Boswell himself, thirty years Johnson's junior, born the year Cibber's *Apology* was published, accepts the medical explanation wholesale. Boswell confidently declares Johnson's melancholy a direct bodily inheritance from Johnson's father, in whom, "as in the most solid rocks veins of unsound substance are often discovered, there was . . . a mixture of that disease, the nature of which eludes the most minute inquiry, though the effects are well known to be a weariness of life, an unconcern about those things which agitate the greater part of mankind, and a general sensation of gloomy wretchedness" (27). The "disease" is identified in terms of its symptoms, in language much like a medical textbook's. Boswell's definition of true madness--as distinct from less serious mental illnesses such as Johnson's--is virtually identical to Battie's:

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[87] Still, it must be emphasized that his Augustan conceptions were not utterly *replaced.* In the same conversation cited here Johnson said, "To have the management of the mind is a great art, and it may be attained in a considerable degree by experience and habitual exercise" (690).

[88] Madness as topic was apparently never far from his mind. Even in such an innocuous exercise as discussing apocryphal sayings with Boswell, the first two that entered the conversation were *Quos Deus vult perdere, prius dementat* (Those whom God would destroy he first makes mad) and *Semel insanivimus omnes* (We have all been mad once) (Boswell 1207).

> If . . . a man tells me that he is grievously disturbed, for that he *imagines* he sees a ruffian coming against him with a drawn sword, though at the same time he is *conscious* it is a delusion, I pronounce him to have a disordered imagination; but if a man tells me that he *sees* this, and in consternation calls to me to look at it, I pronounce him to be *mad*. (49)[89]

For Boswell, as for the best-regarded medical authorities of his day, only "disordered imagination" or hallucination is madness. Anything else is a minor illness (such as melancholy), and therefore treatable.

To return now to eccentricity specifically: Johnson's comments on eccentricity display essentially the same conflict of old and new values as do his comments on madness. (As they should, the former subject being a subset of the latter, in a way, and in any case tightly connected.) On the one hand, Johnson famously sneered at "singularity." Hester Thrale Piozzi, his longtime friend and benefactor, writes, "Mr. Johnson was indeed unjustly supposed to be a lover of singularity. Few people had a more settled reverence for the world than he, or were less captivated by new modes of behaviour introduced, or innovations on the long-received customs of common life." In fact, she continues, he once said plainly, "Let us all conform in outward customs, which are of no consequence, to the manners of those whom we live among" (464). Boswell records similar Johnsonian expressions on the subject:

> BOSWELL. "Is it wrong then, Sir, to affect singularity, in order to make people stare?" JOHNSON. "Yes, if you do it by

[89] Boswell credits one Professor Gaubius of Leyden with this explanation. Boswell offers it as proof that although Johnson always feared going mad, and sometimes "was too ready to call [his] complaint by the name of *madness*" (49), he in fact was only ailing. For, Boswell explains (much in the vein of Battie), "there is surely a clear distinction between a disorder which affects only the imagination and spirits, while the judgement is sound, and a disorder by which the judgement itself is impaired" (49).

> propagating errour: and, indeed, it is wrong in any way. There is in human nature a general inclination to make people stare; and every wise man has himself to cure of it, and does cure himself. If you wish to make people stare by doing better than others, why, make them stare till they stare their eyes out. But consider how easy it is to make people stare by being absurd. I may do it by going into a drawing-room without my shoes." (Boswell 405)

Johnson goes on to cite the example of the pseudo-Moor in *The Spectator*, who lived completely by reason--e.g., wearing clothes that were more comfortable than those in fashion, eating only when hungry rather than when custom dictated, etc.--and as a result was declared insane and institutionalized. Johnson begins on the subject of the contemptible ease with which one may be thought "singular," then proceeds to an example of the possibly dire consequences.

Part of him was all for such consequences, on the grounds that the public must be valued over the private or subjective. No matter that public conventions "have grown up by chance, been started by caprice, been contrived by affectation, or borrowed without any just motives of choice from other countries" (*Adventurer* No. 131, 5 Feb. 1754; *Yale Works* 2:483); no matter that "outward customs" in themselves "are of no consequence." In fact, those are good reasons *to* conform: if it doesn't matter anyway, why not? Nonconformity or singularity, he argues, causes conflict: "All violation of established practice, implies in its own nature a rejection of the common opinion, a defiance of common censure, and an appeal from general laws to private judgment"--the individual against society, implicitly criticizing it with every singular act. Singularity is furthermore "in its own nature universally and invariably displeasing: in whatever respect a man differs

from others, he must be considered by them as either worse or better." If better, "approbation of his practice must necessarily condemn him that gives it" (2:485); if worse, he only pleases others insofar as he makes them feel superior. Either way, equality and mutual respect dissipate. And always, the very fact of individual difference annoys, for "nothing out of the common order of nature can be long borne" (*Rambler* No. 115, 23 Apr. 1751; *Yale Works* 4:250). As he famously said of *Tristram Shandy*, a novel that both enacts and requests tolerance for eccentricity, "Nothing odd will do long. *Tristram Shandy* did not last" (Boswell 696).

But at the same time, Johnson seems to recommend tolerance for singularity. Even though he does not find it inherently laudable--quite the opposite--in the same *Adventurer* essay in which he tries to quash it, he at least recognizes its now-general self-licensing quality. He acknowledges that "humourists" (i.e., eccentrics) receive no "other reprehension from mankind, than that it is his way, that he is an odd fellow, and must be let alone" (*Yale Works* 2:484). (Again, the eccentric is never taken seriously *as* an eccentric. His oddity, his *symptoms*, may meet with tolerance, but being symptoms, they are inherently unwelcome. One tolerates eccentricity as one tolerates another's cough.) He does not blame society for responding this way; the observation is his proof that eccentricity is not inherently valuable, that it is *tolerable* merely. Some other statements he made, though, demonstrate more actual sympathy--at least indirectly--than this grudging recognition. For instance, in *Rasselas* he makes the extraordinary claim that

> if we speak with rigorous exactness, no human mind is in its right state. . . . All power of fancy over reason is a degree of insanity; but while this power is such as we can control and repress, it is not visible to others, nor considered as any

> depravation of the mental faculties: it is not pronounced madness but when it comes ungovernable, and apparently influences speech or action. (*Works* 405-406)

Discussing his friend Christopher Smart, for whose plight he felt great sympathy, Johnson said, "Madness frequently discovers itself merely by unnecessary deviation from the usual modes of the world" (Boswell 281).[90] These two statements together indicate a real sympathy that the Augustan side of Johnson would perhaps prefer not to feel. I have been arguing that from the beginning eccentricity has been understood as minor madness. Johnson understands eccentricity that way, too: he claims everyone is a little mad and that only through singularities or eccentricities--"unnecessary deviation from the usual modes of the world"--does the minor madness reveals itself. An eccentric is a person who is just a little less successful than most at hiding the general disease. Thus this icon of reason, who feared going mad above all else, betrays sympathy for the eccentric, backhand.

One brief anecdote should strengthen this point. Johnson was conscious of his own eccentricity, and in one amusing incident, he refused to explain it away. (Remember, part of the discourse of eccentricity is the conception of the self as hidden, complex, and unfathomable.) Boswell writes:

> It seems he had been frequently observed at the Club to put into his pocket the Seville oranges, after he had squeezed the juice of them into the drink which he made for himself. Beauclerk and Garrick talked of it to me, and seemed to think that he had a

[90] Cf. Boswell 1088: "Many a man is mad in certain instances, and goes through life without having it perceived: for example, a madness has seized a person of supposing himself obliged literally to pray continually—had the madness turned the opposite way and the person thought it a crime ever to pray, it might not improbably have continued unobserved." Here, too, is the assertion of general madness and the idea that singular behavior betrays it—which, as discussed above, indicates backhanded sympathy for the eccentric.

> strange unwillingness to be discovered. . . . I saw on his table the spoils of the preceding night, some fresh peels nicely scraped and cut into pieces. . . . "And pray, Sir, what do you do with them? You scrape them, it seems, very neatly, and what next?" JOHNSON. "I let them dry, Sir." BOSWELL. "And what next?" JOHNSON. "Nay, Sir, you shall know their fate no further." BOSWELL. "Then the world must be left in the dark. It must be said (assuming a mock solemnity,) he scraped them, and let them dry, but what he did with them next, he never could be prevailed upon to tell." JOHNSON. "Nay, Sir, you should say it more emphatically:--he could not be prevailed upon, even by his dearest friends, to tell." (603)

Perhaps he expected to be thought eccentric either way--eccentric for keeping such an odd thing a secret, or eccentric for doing whatever he confessed he did with the orange peels.

As with the subject of madness as medically treatable disease, Boswell's ideas on the topic of eccentricity are very much in accordance with the growing general tolerance. He lists Johnson's oddities, many of them physical in nature, with scrupulous, almost reverent care:

> [He had] an anxious care to out or in at a door or passage by a certain number of steps from a certain point, or at least so as that either his right or his left foot, (I am not certain which,) should constantly make the first actual movement when he came close to the door or passage.[91] . . . That the most minute singularities which belonged to him, and made very observable parts of his

[91] Today this would be considered a symptom of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. It is astonishing how strongly the mere mention of eccentricities--particularly in a cluster--stimulates the desire to diagnose if not to cure.

> appearance and manner, may not be omitted, it is requisite to mention, that while talking or even musing as he sat in his chair, he commonly held his head to one side towards his right shoulder, and shook it in a tremulous manner, moving his body backwards and forwards, and rubbing his left knee in the same direction, with the palm of his hand. In the intervals of articulating he made various sounds with his mouth, sometimes as if ruminating, or what is called chewing the cud, sometimes giving a half whistle, sometimes making his tongue play backwards from the roof of his mouth, as if clucking like a hen, and sometimes protruding it against his upper gums in front, as if pronouncing quickly under his breath, *too, too, too* . . . [He also] used to blow out his breath like a Whale. (342-43)

Boswell fully recognizes that in naming all of Johnson's singularities (a word he uses often, always in a neutral or positive sense), he provides an opening for the "sneering jocularity" (343) of Johnson's enemies. However, Boswell desires to "write, not his panegyrick, which must be all praise, but his Life" (22). His Life requires completeness of description--"that the most minute singularities . . . may not be omitted"--for two reasons. First, even the most minute singularities matter simply because they belonged to Johnson, the great man. In other words, Boswell has determined that Johnson was a great man (he did so before they even met); that general judgment being made, "singularities" do not vitiate it. Singularities are merely parts, or shades, of the general portrait. They provide necessary clues to Johnson's complex, only partially accessible self. Second, and as a corollary of the first reason, singularities become almost honorary in themselves. Johnson would not be Johnson without his singularities. In a sense, they prove his greatness.

Boswell finds one of Johnson's most prominent singularities--his self-contradictoriness--honorific and important enough to feature in the grand summary paragraph of the *Life*. Johnson's self-contradictoriness gives proof of the greatness of his mind:

> Man is, in general, made up of contradictory qualities . . . In proportion to the native vigour of the mind, the contradictory qualities will be the more prominent, and more difficult to be adjusted; and, therefore, we are not to wonder, that Johnson exhibited an eminent example of this remark which I have made upon human nature. (1399)

Boswell, then, finds Johnson's eccentricity not only essential but even praiseworthy in itself, as signifier of mental acuity.

Boswell and Johnson represent in microcosm the profound changes taking place after 1740 in British attitudes toward madness and eccentricity. In the self-contradictory way made so much of by Boswell, Johnson, the last of the old-guard Augustans, simultaneously evinces old-style disgust and new-style tolerance for those qualities. In Johnson's career one gets a glimpse of the gradual society-wide change, of the competition between two paradigms. By Boswell's time, the old paradigm has been squeezed aside by the new.

iii. Sir Launcelot Greaves, Quixotic Hero

One of the clearest examples of the new paradigm is Tobias Smollett's novel *The Life and Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves*, which was first published in 1760-61, serially. In this novel the main elements discussed above are plain to see: the Quixote figure inspires at least as much admiration and love as derisive laughter; to the degree that he is mad, his affliction is portrayed in essentially medical terms; and his eccentricity is portrayed as

largely acceptable and admirable. This novel was published just two years after Battie's *Treatise* and nearly thirty years before King George III's madness, so its stance on these issues was not yet fully hegemonic; *Launcelot Greaves* is as much a cause as a result of the new paradigm, then nascent.

That this is so is reflected in the novel's publishing history. As Peter Wagner notes, *Launcelot Greaves* was not received well critically at first; critics tended to dismiss it as a poor imitation of Cervantes, and even the *Critical Review,* edited by Smollett himself, only praised the novel's characters. *Greaves* did not sell nearly as well as Smollett's earlier novels *Roderick Random* (1748), *Peregrine Pickle* (1751), or *Ferdinand Count Fathom* (1753), nor as well as his *Complete History of England* (1757-58) or translation of Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1755). However, unusually, *Launcelot Greaves* actually came more into demand as the century progressed--and as the point of view it represented grew to dominance.

As Niehus observes, Smollett includes Quixote figures repeatedly in his works: for example, Matthew Bramble and especially Lieutenant Obadiah Lismahago in *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771); Commodore Hawser Trunnion in *Peregrine Pickle*; and in *Ferdinand Count Fathom,* Theodore, King of Corsica and Sir Mungo Barebones (whose name certainly suggests Cervantes's Quixote physically). These Quixotes are presented with varying degrees of sympathy, Lismahago probably with the greatest. Certainly, considering also his translation of Cervantes's novel, Smollett was profoundly influenced by *Don Quixote*. According to Paul-Gabriel Boucé, Smollett was working on a translation as early as 1748, which he claimed to have finished in 1751, four years earlier than the actual publication. And as Michael Charles Craddock shows, Smollett very directly influenced receptions of *Don Quixote.* In addition to continuing the quixotic tradition in

his own original novels, Smollett translated *Don Quixote* with considerably greater earthiness and colloquiality than Motteux had early in the century; he made the Don even more directly accessible and sympathetic for the British reader.

Smollett also created two female Quixotes: Miss Williams, in *Roderick Random*, whose excessive reading of romance novels leads her to experience life like the heroines she studies; and Narcissa's aunt (never otherwise named), whose excessive reading of all kinds (novels, philosophy, science, etc.) merely turns her into a scatterbrained pedant--or sometimes, as she believes, a cat.

The first of these, Miss Williams, resembles Lennox's *Female Quixote*, a novel published four years after *Roderick Random*. Lennox's heroine Arabella, too, grows mad by Battie's standard--her "deluded imagination" causes her to interpret all experience into the terms of her beloved romantic novels. That is, she as woman rightly possesses absolute power over her admirers; lifelong absolute chastity is absolutely required of her, and of course of her suitors; and the strictest strictures of courtly love must be obeyed without complaint. But Arabella, like Miss Williams and Narcissa's aunt (and unlike Sir Roger de Coverley), represents the ridiculous side of Quixote: the entire goal and action of Arabella's story is to *cure* her female quixotry. She is only fit for society and marriage after being reasoned out of her delusion by the rather Johnsonian Doctor, in the penultimate chapter--which, because of the "cure," the author herself dubs "the best Chapter in this History" (368).

Arabella's case demonstrates the most important reasons why, at least through the eighteenth century, the eccentric was thought of strictly as male. For one, her readings in romance lead her to value sexual chastity above all

else, and to interpret all experience in terms of its potential threat to that chastity. When Quixote does this, eighteenth-century British society finds it funny; but when Arabella does it, it's more or less expected, only normal. The abnormality comes in the degree--and in a culture which admired *Clarissa* and her obsession with chastity, it's a minute degree indeed. Fielding can count on a big laugh at the story of how "Mr. *Joseph Andrews* was . . . enabled to preserve his Purity in the midst of such great Temptations" (*Joseph Andrews* 16), because a man need not worry about such a silly thing; in fact, a man who did worry would be considered silly, or even a little mad. But a woman *had* to worry; her culture demanded it of her, by the rules of the sexual double standard.

Furthermore, Lennox's title reveals the incoherence of the concept: A *female* Quixote? But Quixote is *male*, and the eighteenth-century eccentric is explicitly and directly modeled after *him*. Arabella is "quixotic" in the negative sense--she shares his delusion--and is thus unadmirable. But her being female precludes her sharing Quixote's admirable qualities. The female part in romances, which she lives out, consists in staying virtuous, not in actively *doing* admirable things as male romantic heroes such as Quixote do. In playing the chaste female part she does little more than her social duty--which takes us back to the first reason the eighteenth-century eccentric is male.

In any case, to return to Smollett and *Launcelot Greaves*: Smollett increases the Don's respectability in this novel by actually splitting him into two characters. One, the title character, embodies all Quixote's best qualities; the other, Captain Crowe, embodies "all the grotesque elements comprised in the adventures and even in the character of Don Quixote" (Boucé 98). This makes quixotry admirable in two ways. First, the admirable Quixote figure

shows the social and sentimental good a quixotic idealist can accomplish; he demonstrates that quixotism is not inherently ridiculous, but can even be a powerful positive force. Second, the bad Quixote figure reinforces the first point: Captain Crowe looks ridiculous not because he imitates Quixote (via Greaves) but because he does it badly. Everything indicates that Crowe's goal of emulating Greaves (= Quixote) is worthy in itself. For as Beattie wrote in 1783, "Smollett's design was not to expose him [Quixote] to ridicule; but rather to recommend him to our pity and admiration. He has therefore given him youth, strength, and beauty, and arrayed him in an elegant suit of armor" (qtd. in Niehus 238). Greaves shines all the more brightly for the darkness of his double.

Greaves represents Quixote's newly prominent admirable side. Like the Don (and his successor Sir Roger de Coverley), he is upper-class--*Sir* Launcelot Greaves--member of an old family, and son of "Sir Everhard Greaves, who possessed a free estate of five thousand a year in [his] county, and was respected by all his neighbours, as much for his personal merit as for his family fortune" (56). For Smollett, upper-class status was still needed to license eccentricity. When, for instance, Captain Crowe decides to set up as a Quixote, Smollett makes him look ridiculous by putting the contrary reasoning into his mouth: "[C]an'st tell, whether a man without being rated a lord or a baron, or a what d'ye call um, d'ye see, may'nt take to the highway in the way of a frolick, d'ye see? . . . if so be as I can't at once be commander, mayhap I may be bore upon the books as a petty officer or the like d'ye see" (88). Crowe's repetition of meaningless epithets ("d'ye see"), in addition to his inability to speak without resorting to seafaring jargon ("commander," "petty officer"), signals Crowe's mistakenness--the answer to his question is, no, not with the same honor reserved for lords and barons and what d'ye call

ums. As Timothy Crabshaw, the Sancho Panza figure, observes, "[A]'n't vor such small gentry as [Crowe] to be mad: they mun leave that to their betters" (101-102).

Crabshaw's observation is especially true in light of the paternalistic nature of crusading benevolence, the particular form Greaves's quixotry takes. As Robert Markley points out, the righting of wrongs and inequalities requires the *existence* of social wrongs and inequalities. That is, without a class system that makes Greaves a knight (by title as well as by profession) and a man wrongly imprisoned by Justice Gobble, a shopkeeper (see Chapter 11), Greaves's crusading would not accrue honor because it would be unnecessary. A society more egalitarian than Smollett's would render paternalistic, aristocratic benevolence obsolete.

In Paul-Gabriel Boucé's words, "Launcelot is young and handsome which is certainly not the case with Don Quixote" (94). Smollett describes Greaves this way: "His age did not seem to exceed thirty: he was tall, and seemingly robust; his face long and oval, his nose aquiline, his mouth furnished with a set of elegant teeth white as the drifted snow; his complexion clear, and his aspect noble. His chestnut hair loosely flowed in short natural curls; and his grey eyes shone" (49). His appearance "tends to inspire awe rather than laughter" (Niehus 238), and even "set[s] many a female heart a palpitating" (*LG* 63). Crowe, in contrast, resembles Quixote all too closely. His ridiculous, makeshift, and "very strange suit of armor"[92] (175) contributes greatly to his ludicrousness: his helmet is

> one of the caps used by the light horse, with straps buckled under his chin, and contrived in such a manner as to conceal his whole

[92] Though Quixote has an ancient family suit of armor that he scours for use, he has no helmet, so he must fashion one out of beaverboard. The helmet is broken in "combat" immediately, and is replaced with "Mambrino's Helmet" (a barber's basin).

> visage, except the eyes. Instead of a cuirass, mail, greaves, and the other pieces of complete armour, he was cased in a postilion's leathern jerkin, covered with thin plates of tinned iron: his buckler was a potlid, his lance a hop-pole shod with iron, and a basket-hilt broad sword, like that of Hudibras, depended by a broad buff belt, that girded his middle. His feet were defended by jack-boots, and his hands by the gloves of a trooper. (175-76)

This armor, made up of implements proper to lower-class functionaries--rank-and-file soldiers, postilion, cook, hops-farmer--betrays Crowe's essential unfitness for the aristocratic calling of knight-errant. His ridiculous appearance, next to Greaves's striking appearance, makes Greaves look all the better.

Greaves succeeds in love, ultimately, desiring and at last actively winning the hand of Aurelia Darnel, who, like him (and unlike Dulcinea) comes from an aristocratic family. Greaves equally succeeds in his idealistic social goals: in just over two hundred pages, he manages not only to free Aurelia from the clutches of her grasping uncle Anthony Darnel, who confines her (legally) at a private madhouse in order to take away her inheritance; he also manages to defy, replace, redress, and extract an apology from an evildoing magistrate; restore a long-lost son to the wrongly imprisoned friend of his late mother; turn King's Bench prison into "a comfortable asylum for the unfortunate" (*LG* 206); and arrest Mr. Bernard Shackle, bringing his shady mad-confinement business to a halt.[93] All this in addition to a plethora of small or individual acts of benevolence: bestowing much-needed money upon penniless poet Dick Distich, bringing together

[93] In light of the changing attitudes toward madness, this last is a telling detail.

Thomas Clarke and Dolly Cowslip in marriage, and on and on. In fact, Greaves does not fail at *any* of the numerous benevolent acts he attempts, and unlike the original Quixote, he does no harm to innocents (Quixote makes various innocent monks, mourners, and sheep pay for his delusions). Furthermore, as Boucé points out, the evils Greaves fights are real. Crowe, on the other hand, is completely ineffectual. When he goes knight-erranting without Greaves's guidance, he is mistaken for a highwayman and beaten so badly by "a rabble of men and women, variously armed with flails, pitchforks, poles, and muskets" (175) that his head inside its crazy helmet swells grotesquely and the helmet must be cut off. The best Crowe ever manages is not interfering with Greaves's good works.

Most importantly, perhaps, Greaves is a sentimental figure to a degree not even approached by other characters in the novel. *Launcelot Greaves* was published squarely in the middle of sentimentality's heyday, as identified by Janet Todd--namely, "from the 1740s to the late 1770s" (9). As she describes the discourse,[94] sentimental works' simple plots exist primarily to provide a series of affecting scenes to which the hero or heroine can react benevolently and admirably. The hero exemplifies the proper way to feel and to respond to those feelings.

Launcelot Greaves very much embodies that literary discourse; the focus is very much on how the hero *feels* in a series of emotion-producing scenes. As Markley explains, sentimentality is performative: one shows one's sentimental response by means of physical behaviors--tears, quickened pulse, gasps, swoons, sighs, blushes. By the rules of sentimental discourse, such

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[94] Limited space preclude a deeper discussion of this somewhat complex topic; I acknowledge that I am giving the barest thumbnail sketch of sentimentality, for which purpose Todd's book serves well. Other excellent recently published books which deal with sentimentality in greater depth include *The Poetics of Sensibility* by Jerome McGann and *Sentiment and Sociability* by John Mullan.

physical signs are taken to demonstrate a deeply feeling, sensitive heart. The more remarkable the physical response, the more sentimental the heart; the more sentimental the heart, the better its possessor.[95] By these criteria, Greaves is a sentimental man among sentimental men. As Wagner notes, even his name can be read as a sentimental pun: Launcelot *Grieves.* Sentimental scenes and intense sentimental responses on Greaves's part abound. For example, when the reader first meets him, Greaves is treated to a lecture about the necessity of a knight-errant's choosing a lady-love for inspiration; he "started at this discourse. He turned his eyes on the surgeon [Ferret] with a fixed regard: his countenance changed: a torrent of tears gushed down his cheeks: his head sunk upon his bosom: he heaved a profound sigh; and remained in silence with all the external marks of unutterable sorrow"[96] (53-54). Soon we learn that Greaves grieves for the loss of his beloved Aurelia. To give just one more example, a scene evidently intended to prove Greaves's benevolence, which appears just a few pages later: some years before the action of the novel, young Launcelot[97] discovers that a family of tenants on his father's land has had its cows seized for rent and is now starving. Launcelot calls this dire fact to the attention of his innocent father (the bailiff did it), upon which the father, fairly benevolent in his own right, replaces the cows with two of his own best and gives the family free rent for life. Smollett then writes: "This was a very affecting scene. Mr Launcelot

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[95] See Todd on this point, as well.

[96] There is something suspicious about that phrase "with all the external marks." In an ironist such as Fielding it should be read ironically, without hesitation; i.e., the ironist would be emphasizing that Greaves *looks* sorrowful but really is not. In this largely unironic book, though, I take it to mean two things. First, Smollett emphasizes the diagnostic potential of Greaves's response--that just as illness can be diagnosed by means of physical signs, so can deep feeling. And second, there is perhaps a hint of the sense of mystery about the self so prevalent in Sterne (and in Cibber)--the idea that only through external, physical signs can we even partially understand another's complex, hidden self.

[97] The fact that Launcelot is young--probably not yet of majority age--indicates, too, that his benevolence is "natural," "innate," and therefore all the better.

took his father's hand and kissed it, while the tears ran down his cheeks; and Sir Everhard embraced his son with great tenderness, crying, 'My dear boy! God be praised for having given you such a feeling heart'" (59-60). Again and again in the novel, Greaves, the admirable Quixote figure, demonstrates the goodness of his heart with a veritable barrage of groans, sighs, and tears. His sentimental benevolence carries on the best tradition of his predecessors, the Spanish Don Quixote and the British Sir Roger de Coverley.

Greaves's performative benevolence further solidifies the connection between benevolence and eccentricity--a connection that still tends to hold today. The connection between benevolence and eccentricity exists in Quixote's adventures, but, as discussed above, until well into the eighteenth century most readers glossed over the former to focus upon the latter. Addison and Steele made the connection explicit in Sir Roger: his benevolence and his eccentricity spring from the same source, his disappointment in love. Furthermore, given his time's intolerance for even minor madness, his benevolence was necessary (and was insisted upon) to countenance his eccentricity. And now in Greaves, again, disappointed love engenders both benevolence and eccentricity, and although the same intensity of justification is not *required* culturally, his time's literary-cultural taste for sentimentality does *encourage* Smollett to lay Greaves's good deeds on thick. Thus a connection that began because the two qualities happened to exist in Quixote solidified under the pressure of literary and cultural forces into a cultural tradition, into a habitual and seemingly natural association of two originally unrelated characteristics.

Greaves's minor madness or eccentricity does have the same cause as

Sir Roger's, disappointment in love,[98] but this cause and its effects upon Greaves take on the aspect of the new medical model of madness. That Smollett was a physician is most telling in this regard. Additionally, "Smollett was acquainted with the work of Dr Battie, and made use of some of his ideas to have a 'scientific' explanation for Launcelot's insanity" (Wagner 13). Greaves himself--with no sign of irony or demurral on Smollett's part--diagnoses his own condition in terms essentially identical to Battie's. When Ferret scoffs, "What! . . . you set up for a modern Don Quixote?"

> The Knight, eying this censor with a look of disdain, replie[s], in a solemn lofty tone: "I am neither an affected imitator of Don Quixote, nor, as I trust in heaven, visited by that spirit of lunacy so admirably displayed in the fictitious character exhibited by the inimitable Cervantes. I have not yet encountered a windmill for a giant; nor mistaken this public house for a magnificent castle: neither do I believe this gentleman to be the constable; nor that worthy practitioner to be master Elizabat, the surgeon recorded in Amadis de Gaul, nor you to be the enchanter Alquife, nor any other sage of history or romance. -- I see and distinguish objects as they are discerned and described by other men. I reason without prejudice, can endure contradiction, and, as the company perceives, even bear impertinent censure without

[98] That is why, in the passage cited above, Greaves bursts into tears. The last advice he needed was to find a lady-love for inspiration. He was all set to marry Aurelia Darnel, but a last-minute politically motivated family quarrel canceled the wedding. "It was then we began to think Mr Launcelot a little disordered in his brain, his grief was so wild, and his passion so impetuous. He refused all sustenance, neglected his person, renounced his amusements, rode out in the rain, sometimes bare headed, strolled about the fields all night, and became so peevish, that none of the domestics durst speak to him, without the hazard of broken bones" (72). In short, he displays all the *symptoms* of (curable) illness. Afterwards, much like Sir Roger de Coverley, he disdains finding another mate--which, too, demonstrates the steadfastness and depth of his heart.

> passion or resentment. I quarrel with none but the foes of virtue and decorum, against whom I have declared perpetual war, and them I will every where attack as the natural enemies of mankind." (50)

In other words, he does not suffer from "deluded imagination"; his perceptions match other people's. He is not antisocial, but the opposite, engaged in performing valuable social reform. He cannot be mad because he doesn't display the essential symptoms of madness, as Quixote did. Q.E.D.

To the degree that he can be considered mad, though, his madness is communicated in medical terms. Smollett takes issue with the *improper* use of medical jargon, such as Dr. Kawdle's blathering justification of Greaves's unwarranted confinement in Shackle's private mad-hospital:

> [Y]our disorder is . . . not absolute madness--no--not madness--you have heard, no doubt, of what is called a weakness of the nerves, sir,--tho' that is a very inaccurate expression; for this phrase, denoting a morbid excess of sensation, seemes to imply that sensation itself is owing to the loose cohesion of those material particles which constitute the nervous substance, inasmuch as the quantity of every effect must be proportionable to its cause . . . (230)

But Smollett does appear to subscribe to the medical principles here garbled and misapplied. For instance, he makes clear that Greaves's illness is at least partially genetic, or, as understood at the time, that it runs in Launcelot's family: his mother "was very whimsical, expensive, and ill-tempered, and, . . . a little--upon the--flighty order--a little touched or so" (56); his great uncle was a "lunatic, . . . had cut his throat from ear to ear, and was found dead on the communion table" (81). Additionally, Greaves's derangement betrays

itself through ostensibly unmistakable physical symptoms; for example, "his eyes shone with such vivacity, as plainly shewed that his reason was a little discomposed" (49). At one point, he feels tempted to diagnose *himself* mad as would befit his rapture: reunited with Aurelia, "he sat down by her; he pressed her soft hand in his; he began to fear that all he saw was the flattering vision of a distempered brain" (163). Such wondrous visions could not be real; to see them would mean his imagination was deluded; he does see them; ergo, he must be going mad. In the same scene, Aurelia fears driving him mad and takes appropriate precautions: "The tenderness of this communication was too painful to be long endured. Aurelia industriously interposed other subjects of discourse, that his attention might not be dangerously overcharged" (164). By the medical model, such overcharging was truly considered to be a danger. In fact, the derangement Greaves suffers up to this point is an effect of precisely this, Battie's ninth class[99] of secondary causes of mental illness, "*viz. unwearied attention to any one object,* as also *love, grief, and despair*" (Battie 85; emphasis in original). Obsession with disappointed love literally cracks Greaves's brain. Requited love proves to be his cure, the cause of illness being removed--according to medical principles. Smollett writes:

> On a candid scrutiny of his own heart, [Greaves] found himself much less unhappy than he had been before his interview with Aurelia; for, instead of being as formerly tormented with the pangs of despairing love, which had actually unsettled his understanding, he was now happily convinced that he had

[99] Battie identifies twelve in all, ranging from "Internal exostoses of the cranium" (i.e., pressure on the brain) and similar strictly physical causes (e.g., "Material objects external to the body, *viz.* poisons, medicines, and vinous spirits"), to gluttony and idleness (*Treatise* 78-79). Of the twelve causes, only gluttony, idleness, and "unwearied attention to any one object" have an arguably psychological (as distinct from purely physical) quality; however, Battie focuses upon their tangible, *physical* effects upon the body and mind.

> inspired the tender breast of Aurelia with mutual affection . . . (171)

Note the objective language here: Greaves, physician-like, makes "a candid scrutiny of his own heart." He acts as both patient and examining physician, and finds his own symptoms much improved. The cause of illness removed, his symptoms easing away, it is not long before that other effect of his illness, chivalry, begins to seem less desirable. He accordingly resolves

> to lay aside his armour at some distance from the metropolis: for, ever since his interview with Aurelia, his fondness for chivalry had been gradually abating. As the torrent of his despair had disordered the current of his sober reflection, so now, as that despair subsided, his thoughts began to flow deliberately in their antient channel. (175)

Note here the physical description of mental processes--thoughts "flowing in their antient channel"--which also recalls the anatomical theories of Willis and Robinson. In any case, Smollett provides a doubly happy ending: with Aurelia and Launcelot reunited, Launcelot's love is returned and, by the same means, he is cured. Not defeated and punished like Quixote--in fact, quite the opposite--but cured and rewarded. His benevolence remains, however, for it is not benevolence *per se* but specifically quixotic benevolence, acts of goodness performed in armor and outside the law, that indicated illness. For their joint, postmarital benevolence Launcelot and Aurelia are "admired, esteemed, and applauded by every person of taste, sentiment, and benevolence; [and] at the same time beloved, revered, and almost adored by the common people, among whom they suffered not the merciless hand of indigence or misery to seize one single sacrifice" (254).

In *Launcelot Greaves,* Smollett balances the demands of society and the

individual. Wagner accurately describes the novel as Greaves's search for "a reasonable solution accommodating his public duties (moral, social political) on the one hand, and his private inclinations (love) on the other hand. Exaggeration on either side will invariably produce mental or social madness" (16). On the side of the individual, Smollett does much to countenance Greaves's eccentricity: he gives Greaves medical and sentimental excuses for his derangement; he makes the form that derangement takes, crusading benevolence, the object of universal gushing gratitude and awe; and he emphasizes Greaves's admirable qualities to the degree that "the character ends up being more of a tedious bore than a delightful eccentric" (Niehus 241). Additionally, Greaves, who is the only character who seems fully to recognize and attempt to reform social evils, exemplifies the "device of 'not understanding'" described by Mikhail Bakhtin (164). That is, Greaves performs the valuable function of standing outside a given set of social conventions and, from that critical, detached, and therefore unusually observant point of view, noticing what is wrong with them. As "a man who neither participates in nor understands" his own society, he is, paradoxically, particularly qualified to reform it" (Bakhtin 164).

At the same time, on the side of society, Smollett portrays the quixotry that constitutes Greaves's individual difference as madness and then cures it; that is, he *normalizes* Greaves. Greaves's eccentricity, his symptoms, are shown not to be valuable in themselves but instead--by the rules of medical discourse--flaws to be eradicated (like Arabella's in *The Female Quixote*). He must be dismounted from his hobbyhorse. For all its railing against various British institutions (internecine party politics, unjust confinement of the sane as mad, abuse of law by crooked magistrates, etc.), *Launcelot Greaves* is a fundamentally conservative text. Its structure and accomplishment is the

adjustment of Greaves to the prevailing system, which he never radically attacks. What he attacks are *abuses* of the prevailing system. After his symptoms recede, he begins to work within it. For instance, immediately after determining to hang up his armor, he decides "to wait with patience, until the law should supersede the authority of her guardian, rather than adopt any violent expedient which might hazard the interest of his passion" (*LG* 175). True, he has a personal stake in working within the legal system--namely, "the interest of his passion"--but that has not stopped him before, and besides, he always succeeded when taking matters into his own hands.

Thus, *Launcelot Greaves* demonstrates the self-limiting logic, the built-in dialectic, of the newly medicalized discourse of madness and eccentricity. Eccentricity cast as minor mental illness simultaneously justifies and seeks to cure itself. It insists upon its own right to exist, particularly when associated with honorific qualities such as sentimental benevolence, while at the same time it insures that it is neither taken seriously nor allowed much latitude. It maintains its position on the borders of respectable, hegemonic society, moving neither too near the center nor too far away.

iv. "Vive la Bagatelle": *Tristram Shandy*, the View from Hobbyhorseback, and the Elusive Self

Any study of eccentricity *must* cover *Tristram Shandy*, for this novel, first published in installments by Laurence Sterne between 1760 and 1767,[100] is surely the best known, most direct, and most thorough apology for eccentricity in all of British literature. Sterne's novel was from the start wildly popular, even--ironically enough--among survivors from Pope's circle

[100] According to Ian Watt, two volumes appeared in each of the years 1759, 1761, 1762, and 1765, and the ninth and last volume in 1767. The first publication date is often listed as 1760 because the two volumes published in 1759 were cut and revised extensively, but were restored when published in greater numbers in 1760.

(e.g., Lord Bathurst). It remained so until the Victorian age, since which time many *bien-pensant* critics such as William Makepeace Thackeray have objected to its lewdness and its lack of seriousness. Thackeray called Sterne a "mountebank," a "worn-out old scamp," and a "foul satyr" who was "vain, wicked, witty and false." F. R. Leavis brushed off Sterne's work as "irresponsible (and nasty) trifling" (qtd. in Watt xxxi). However, when Johnson dismissed the novel in 1776, he was speaking wishfully, because it did indeed "last."

Like Smollett *et al.*, Sterne clearly reads *Don Quixote* with sympathy and admiration, encouraging a similar response to his quixotic characters; he demonstrates that he possesses a medical or physical understanding of the mind, though he does infuse that understanding with occasional doses of irony; and more directly than any other eighteenth-century writer (including Cibber), he pleads the acceptability, even the virtues, of eccentricity. In doing this Sterne subverts the already-waning Augustan standards and Augustan epistemology, which, as I have shown, depend so much upon a preference for the social over the individual. In Sterne's Shandean world, the subjectivism implicit in John Locke's philosophy is taken to (and perhaps past) its logical limit: all people are limited to the view from atop their own hobbyhorse; they must attempt to communicate, to reach each other's elusive inner selves, across the intervening gap.

In covering the issues already discussed at length above, I will try not to belabor these points, which any reader of *Tristram Shandy* (or of this study, by now) would know well, but instead, try primarily to focus upon how very directly Sterne makes these arguments. That he does so, again, indicates both how widely these positions were already accepted by the time of Sterne's writing, *and* how strenuously he exerts himself to *have* them accepted.

To begin with Sterne's treatment of Quixote: as plainly as Smollett admires Quixote's character, Sterne expresses his admiration even more plainly. Del Toro notes that Sterne possessed in his library the 1743 edition of Motteux's translation of *Don Quixote,* and that he probably read only that version rather than the original Spanish. One might say that the spirit of Cervantes--as Cervantes was interpreted by mid- to late-eighteenth-century readers, most of whom also read Cervantes *via* Motteux--presides over *Tristram Shandy;* if it does, it is because Sterne reverently and directly invokes that spirit:

> GENTLE Spirit of sweetest humour, who erst didst sit upon the easy pen of my beloved CERVANTES: Thou who glided'st daily through his lattice, and turned'st the twilight of his prison into noon-day brightness by thy presence--tinged'st his little urn of water with heaven-sent Nectar, and all the time he wrote of Sancho and his master, didst cast thy mystic mantle o'er his wither'd stump, and wide extended it to all the evils of his life-- . . . --Turn in hither, I beseech thee! (780)

The spirit Sterne calls upon is not the same "Cervantick" spirit in which the Scriblerus Club composed the *Memoirs;* Sterne's spirit spreads sunshine and eases pain, it does not seek and punish enemies. In fact, on this subject, Sterne explicitly distances himself from Pope's personally attacking style: "Pope and his Portrait are fools to me . . . [T]ill gods and men agree together to call it by the same name--the errantest TARTUFFE, in science--in politics--or in religion, shall never kindle a spark within me, or have a worse word, or a more unkind greeting, than what he will read in the next chapter" (657). Those words: "Bon jour!--good-morrow!" etc. (657).

Sterne's narrator, Tristram, admires poor Yorick, the Shandy family's

clergyman, because Yorick is so good-hearted he is reduced to riding a bony, Rosinante-like horse--he can never refuse giving his horse to a needy family, and rather than dribble away money which could do more good spent otherwise, he determines to ride a horse no one would ever want. Tristram writes:

> I have the highest idea of the spiritual and refined sentiments of this reverend gentleman, from this single stroke in his character, which I think comes up to any of the honest refinements of the peerless knight of *La Mancha,* whom, by the bye, with all his follies, I love more, and would actually have gone further to have paid a visit to, than the greatest hero of antiquity. (23)

There is nothing ambiguous about that praise for Quixote. His "follies" are buried in a brief, qualificatory clause; what Tristram (and the implied author Sterne, who on this point is indistinguishable from his narrator) emphasizes is the Don's "honest refinements." To liken Yorick to Quixote is high, unironic praise.

Sterne also explicitly compares Toby and Walter Shandy to Quixote, and makes them--especially Toby--admirable, as well. As De Porte observes, "Sterne leaves us no doubt that comparisons to the knight of La Mancha are intended" (113). Walter, for instance, holds to his odd hypotheses--here, the importance of names--with truly quixotic vigor: "The Hero of *Cervantes* argued not the point with more seriousness,--nor had he more faith,--or more to say on the powers of Necromancy in dishonouring his deeds,--or on DULCINEA's name, in shedding lustre upon them, than my father had" (58). When praising the thoroughness of Ernulphus's curse, Walter speaks "with the most *Cervantick* gravity" (200). Toby is said to have "almost as many . . . books of military architecture, as Don *Quixote* was found to have of chivalry,

when the curate and barber invaded his library" (102). And Tristram, prefiguring the subject of the last two volumes, promises that "the amours of my uncle *Toby* . . . are of so singular a nature, and so Cervantick a cast" (400) that they will make his book successful. Despite their quixotic eccentricities, though, Walter and Toby's best qualities receive the emphasis, as in the passage praising Quixote cited above. For instance, Tristram often marvels at the agonies his father suffers out of concern for him when Walter's intricate plans go awry--when the conception goes badly, when Tristram's nose is flattened by forceps, when he is misnamed, and when he undergoes inadvertent circumcision by way of window-sash cord. True, Walter's distresses are "some of the oddest and most whimsical," because they come from "reading the oddest books in the universe" (256), but what matters--to Tristram, to Sterne, and to the time's connoisseurs of sentimentality--is that he *feels* them, and feels them sharply. He truly loves his son; he is "frank and generous in his nature" (132). Toby is even more obviously intended to be admirable. As De Porte writes, "Toby is a perfect example of what the eighteenth century was coming to see as a quixotic madman. He does outlandish things which others do not do, and therefore seems unbalanced; yet he is devoid of the base passions which animate most men and has virtues which most men lack, so that in a sense he is sane and they mad" (116). Toby is obsessed with siegecraft--with perpetually recreating battles in his back yard--which is something most people do not do, but he practices and teaches to young Tristram universal benevolence:

> --Go,--says he, one day at dinner, to an over-grown [fly] which had buzz'd about his nose, and tormented him cruelly all dinner-time,--and which, after infinite attempts, he had caught at last, as it flew by him;--I'll not hurt thee, says my uncle *Toby* . .

> . I'll not hurt a hair of thy head . . . go poor Devil, get thee gone, why should I hurt thee? . . . I was but ten years old when this happened; . . . [T]his I know, that the lesson of universal good-will then taught and imprinted by my uncle *Toby,* has never since been worn out of my mind . . . I often think that I owe one half of my philanthropy to that one accidental impression. (130-31)

Toby brings out the best in Walter, too: frequently, when Toby's obsession annoys Walter, "the generous (tho' hobby-horsical) gallantry of my uncle *Toby,* [brings] him into perfect good humour . . . in an instant" (243). Tristram feels moved by Toby's benevolence to gush, "[M]y heart stops me to pay to thee, my dear uncle *Toby,* once for all, the tribute I owe thy goodness.--Here let me thrust my chair aside, and kneel down upon the ground, whilst I am pouring forth the warmest sentiments of love for thee, and veneration for the excellency of thy character, that ever ever virtue and nature kindled in a nephew's bosom" (265). For Sterne, Toby's hobbyhorsical "flaw" matters much less, in the end, than his goodness of heart. This is also true in Walter's case, just as it is in Don Quixote's. Sterne continues and further solidifies the tradition of associating eccentricity with benevolence; once again, the latter excuses the former, apparently manifesting itself as an inherent *part* of eccentricity.

Sterne expresses a medical understanding of the mind as directly as he tells his admiration for Quixote. De Porte, for one, acknowledges, "Sterne's psychology is indeed highly physiological" (125). In fact, *Tristram Shandy* begins with several statements regarding the physical nature of the mind's operation: Tristram refers to the importance of heredity to "the happy formation and temperature of [a child's] body, perhaps [to] his genius and the

very cast of his mind," and to

> the animal spirits, as how they are transfused from father to son . . . whose business it was to have escorted and gone hand-in-hand with the *HOMUNCULUS*, and conducted him safe to the place destined for his reception . . . Now, dear Sir, what if any accident had befallen him in his way alone? . . . [and] in this sad disorder'd state of nerves, he had laid down a prey to sudden starts, or a series of melancholy dreams and fancies for nine long months together.--I tremble to think what a foundation had been laid for a thousand weaknesses both of body and mind, which no skill of the physician or the philosopher could ever afterwards have set thoroughly to rights. (1-3)

The belief in heredity's importance is perfectly in keeping with the foremost medical authorities of Sterne's day. The reference to "animal spirits" is slightly outdated; it was largely discredited in favor of "fiber" theory by the time *Tristram Shandy* was published. And the concept of the homunculus, which has roots in the Middle Ages, is clearly intended ironically--as Sterne signals by acknowledging that the homunculus appears "low and ludicrous" nowadays, and by jokingly insisting that "he consists, as we do, of skin, hair, fat, flesh, veins, arteries, ligaments, nerves, cartileges, bones, marrow, brains, glands, genitals, humours, and articulations . . . in all senses of the word, as much and as truly our fellow-creature as my Lord Chancellor of England" (2-3). Thus, by using more or less outdated medical explanations for the workings of the mind, Sterne pokes some fun at his time's increasingly medical view of that subject. However, the overall impression he gives is one of endorsing the new discourse. For example, Tristram worries in an apostrophe to Toby that Toby's obsessive military reading will "exasperate thy

symptoms,--check thy perspirations,--evaporate thy spirits,--waste thy animal strength,--dry up thy radical moisture,--bring thee into a costive habit of body, impair thy health,--and hasten all the infirmities of thy old age" (104). In other words, the danger Tristram foresees is that Toby will crack his brain (and body) upon books just like Don Quixote did, in the dangerous "unvaried attention to one object" Battie warned against.[101] Mental overexertion and obsession will cause serious damage to the materials of body *and* mind; or to put it another way, the brain is just another part of the body, and as such, subject to much the same perils, which Sterne describes as "symptoms." He explains the very process of thought in physical terms: "millions of [thoughts], as your worship knows, are every day swiming [sic] quietly in the middle of the thin juice of a man's understanding, without being carried backwards or forwards, till some little gusts of passion or interest drive them to one side" (197). Sterne takes the position, finally, that "A man's body and his mind, with the utmost reverence to both I speak it, are exactly like a jerkin, and a jerkin's lining;--rumple the one--you rumple the other" (189).

The newly medicalized discourse underlying *Tristram Shandy* means that in this novel, as in the case of *Launcelot Greaves*, eccentricity possesses its own self-limiting logic. On the one hand, it demands acceptance for itself--here, very directly. Tristram defiantly dedicates his account of his life and opinions (partly) to the moon, age-old folk source of *luna*cy. He reverently recommends Toby's tolerant philosophy as example--"This world surely is wide enough to hold both thee and me" (131); he asks, rhetorically, "so long as a man rides his HOBBY-HORSE peaceably and quietly along the King's

[101] Thus does monomania become associated accidentally with eccentricity, even to the point of seeming to be an essential sign of it. As the tradition of eccentric literature continues in Sterne, he, like Smollett, Addison, Steele, Cervantes, *et al.* before him, makes his eccentrics obsessed to the point of madness with *one* subject. As in the case of benevolence, what began by chance--because Quixote happened to be obsessed with chivalry--solidifies by literary and cultural tradition into an apparent commonplace truth.

highway, and neither compels you or me to get up behind him,--pray, Sir, what have either you or I to do with it?" (12). He insists upon his right (and anyone's right) to set his own rules, in passages such as this outburst: "The duce of any other rule have I to govern myself by in this affair--and if I had one--as I do all things out of all rule--I would twist it and tear it to pieces, and throw it into the fire when I had done-- . . . [I]s a man to follow rules--or rules to follow him?" (337). He claims that eccentricity is timeless, universal,[102] and no shame at all: "[H]ave not the wisest of men in all ages, not excepting *Solomon* himself,--have they not had their HOBBY-HORSES?" (12). "I keep a couple of pads myself," Tristram writes, "upon which, in their turns, (nor do I care who knows it) I frequently ride out and take the air;--tho' sometimes, to my shame be it spoken, I take somewhat longer journies than what a wise man would think altogether right" (12-13).[103] Eccentricities are valuable in that they keep us from worse occupations: "[L[et them ride on without any opposition from me; for were their lordships unhorsed this very night,--'tis ten to one but that many of them would be worse mounted by one half before to-morrow morning" (13). And finally, in a reverse twist on the idea that

[102] Now, Sterne's plea for universal self-determination or freedom from social rules should be taken *cum grano salis*, because, like his predecessors in the literature of eccentricity, Sterne really only extends this privilege to those in the upper classes. The last word of the novel's full title is neither accidental nor unimportant: *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. Look, for example, at the relationship between Corporal Trim and Uncle Toby. Trim actually makes the original suggestion that Toby reenact battles in his (Toby's) back yard; however, it is Toby alone who becomes obsessed with the wargames (Trim participates willingly enough, but remains capable of thinking about other subjects--his sexual desire for the Widow Wadman's servant Bridget, for instance), Toby who habitually mounts a hobbyhorse, Toby who possesses the means to *maintain* the hobbyhorse in the first place (i.e., to purchase the books, maps, and newspapers necessary; to devote land he owns to miniature models of battlefields). Sterne's *language* is inclusive, but his *examples* indicate that eccentricity is still the privilege of the elite. Also, again in the tradition of his predecessors, Sterne's quixotic eccentrics are male. The Widow Wadman and Mrs. Shandy, the only female characters developed in this novel, are thoroughly normal by the standards of their time. In fact, next to the bizarre men in their lives, they look uninterestingly grey.

[103] Cf. the discussion of Cibber's *Apology* above. Despite the defiance with which Tristram acknowledges his hobbyhorsical habits, as departures from societal norms and/or symptoms of minor illness, those habits feel like shameful things that seemingly must be confessed under duress.

eccentricity is a minor mental illness to be cured, he even claims that eccentricity possesses curative powers itself. The adoption and care of hobbyhorses proves curative to both Walter and Toby. Tristram likens the effects upon his father of considering the Catholic-theological question, "*Whether the mother be of kin to her child*" (390), to "the anointing of a broken bone" (394). For a while, at least, Walter is able to forget his troubles and be "hugely tickled with the subtleties of these learned discourses" (394). Toby benefits even more and longer from his hobbyhorse. He originally takes up the study of battlements to ease his mind of its perplexity in regards to explaining how he received his wound; "[H]is recovery depending, as you have read, upon the passions and affections of his mind, it behoved him to take the nicest care to make himself so far master of his subject, as to be able to talk upon it without emotion" (101). "The more my uncle *Toby* drank of this sweet fountain of science, the greater was the heat and impatience of his thirst" (102); he continues to gather military knowledge greedily and to heal physically, until one day, impatient any longer to put off Trim's suggestion that they reenact battles in Toby's backyard, Toby quits his bed and leaves for Shandy Hall. By raising his spirits and giving him an activity to look forward to pursuing when he becomes well, Toby's hobbyhorse actually cures him. Tristram even claims his book, embodiment of hobbyhorsery that it is, cures its readers. "'[T]is wrote . . . against the spleen," he writes,

> in order, by a more frequent and a more convulsive elevation and depression of the diaphragm, and the succussations of the intercostal and abdominal muscles in laughter, to drive the *gall* and other *bitter juices* from the gall bladder, liver and sweet-bread of his majesty's subjects, with all the imicitious passions which belong to them, down into their duodenums. (360)

The language is jocular, a slightly satirical exaggeration of medical jargon, but in context of the whole novel (e.g., alongside Toby's case), the message appears sincere. Sterne really seems to mean it when he writes, "True *Shandeism,* think what you will against it, opens the heart and lungs, and like all those affections which partake of its nature, it forces the blood and other vital fluids of the body to run freely thro' its channels, and makes the wheel of like run long and chearfully round" (401). In *Tristram Shandy,* then, eccentricity justifies its right to exist on the familiar grounds of universality, the right to self-determination, and harmlessness, as well as on the new ground of curativity. The novel says of eccentricity in general what Walter says of his odd hypotheses before he begins to believe them: "*vive la Bagatelle*" (60).

If one lays stress on the last word of that phrase, though, the other side of eccentricity's inherent dialectic becomes clear. A "bagatelle" is--and was during Sterne's time--"A trifle, a thing of no value or importance" (*OED*). Eccentricities, oddities, hobbyhorses, call them what you will--in *Tristram Shandy,* as elsewhere, they are bagatelles. They can be borne, as Sterne asks us to do, but they are finally worthless. For example, take Walter's hypotheses: whenever he expresses a particularly strange one, good-natured Toby seeks to avoid the conflict he would inevitably cause by disputing with the vehement Walter. (Vehement adherence to his hypotheses is part of Walter's hobbyhorse.) Therefore, Toby "would never offer to answer this by any other kind of argument, than that of whistling half a dozen bars of *Lillabullero*" (78). He spends a lot of the novel whistling *Lillabullero,* expressing puzzled and distressed tolerance of Walter's bizarre ideas. Toby, Tristram, and Mrs.

Shandy[104] clearly do not value the hypotheses for themselves any more than they would value bodily illness in Walter for itself; the best they can muster is mere endurance. Sterne writes of Walter's love of hypotheses like an illness or infection that begins as harmless but worsens, and he warns others of its dangers:

> I mention this . . . as a warning to the learned reader against the indiscreet reception of such guests, who . . . at length claim a kind of settlement there,--working sometimes like yeast;--but more generally after the manner of the gentle passion, beginning in jest,--but ending in downright earnest. (60-61)

Similarly, Toby's singleminded devotion to siegecraft causes frequent fits of annoyance in Walter, particularly when some phrase in the current topic of conversation reminds Toby of his hobbyhorse and he begins to ride. With all the clarity of hindsight, describing Toby still confined to bed and reading his military books, Tristram/Sterne warns the doomed Toby against that perilous pursuit:

> [S]top! my dear uncle *Toby*,--stop!--go no one foot further into this thorny and bewilder'd track,--intricate are the steps! intricate are the mases [sic] of this labyrinth! intricate are the troubles which the pursuit of this bewitching phantom, KNOWLEDGE, will bring upon thee.--O my uncle! fly--fly--fly from it as from a serpent. (103)

Sterne asks us to live and let live, to refrain from dismounting others from their harmless hobbyhorses. But that is precisely the point: by eccentricity's

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[104] The one small hint of eccentricity in Mrs. Shandy--her unfortunate association of the ideas of sexual congress and clocks, and her consequent interrupting the former to inquire about the latter--causes no end of consternation in Walter and Tristram. In fact, Tristram begins the book with a despairing wish that his mother and father "had minded what they were about when they begot me" (1) rather than thought about clocks.

own self-limiting dialectic, eccentricity has a decidedly unpleasant aspect that must *be* tolerated. "Amused tolerance" is Foucault's phrase for such a response, in *Madness and Civilization*. One tolerates the off-putting symptoms;[105] one is amused by the exotic form of the hobbyhorse; but one does not rejoice in others' hobbyhorse-riding *per se*. Vive la bagatelle, but in a sense, eccentricity is a mere bagatelle.

As Mikhail Bakhtin observes, however, eccentricity is also more than that:

> [*I*]*nternal man*--pure "natural" subjectivity--could be laid bare only with the help of the clown and the fool, since an adequate, direct (that is, from the point of view of practical life, not allegorical) means for expressing his life was not available. We get the figure of the *crank* (*cudak*), who has played a most important role in the history of the novel: in Sterne, Goldsmith, Hippel, Jean Paul, Dickens and others. A personalized eccentricity, "Shandyism" (Sterne's own term), becomes an important means for exposing the "internal man" and his "free and self-sufficient subjectivity"--means that are analagous to the "Pantagruelism" that had served in the Renaissance to reveal a coherent external man. (164)

In portraying eccentrics, Sterne (like other writers of the literature of eccentricity, including Smollett, Boswell, and Cibber) inculcates the concept of universal subjectivity: the idea that in a sense, we all live in our own worlds; that we all possess individual, subjective realities which are largely

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[105] On the subject of eccentricity as minor madness, and consequently, of hobbyhorses as symptoms, cf. Byrd, "Continuities." He distinguishes the "literal degradation of [earlier] eighteenth-century insanity--the shocking excremental squalor" from "Sterne's vision, which *domesticates folly to mere eccentricity or humor*, . . . harmless single-mindedness" (515; emphasis added).

mysterious and inaccessible. I emphasize that this was a new, powerful *assumption* or *conception*, not necessarily the objective truth. (In fact, I would argue, in keeping with my introductory chapter, that it is *not* true--that as Foucault would have it, the self is always a construction, not a naturally occurring entity of any kind.) This new assumption indirectly affected conceptions of eccentricity by soliciting greater tolerance for individuality, individual difference (based on ineluctably unique perception and experience), and eccentricity. I have argued that the Cartesian assumption of total externality and readability lasted up to the time of Sir Roger de Coverley; in the second half of the century, though, the Shandean vision of universal subjectivity largely replaced it.

This relativistic vision is essentially Lockean. In his hugely influential *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, John Locke argues, first, that ideas are not innate. (This subject takes up all of Book I.) If truths were innate they would also be universally shared; we would all recognize and agree upon their truthfulness from birth. However, continues Locke, our ideas are direct consequences of our experiences. The particular and necessarily individual stimuli to which we are exposed provide our ideas; then, the particular ideas we possess combine with each other and with new (and again, necessarily individual) ideas to form our knowledge. Everyone's knowledge and ideas must therefore be unique, since they are built from scratch--inscribed upon the *tabula rasa*[106] of our minds--out of inherently unduplicable stimuli. Complicating this process is the fact that we frequently associate or link ideas, sometimes "naturally" and "reasonably" and sometimes not. The association of ideas can be strengthened or weakened over time.

Although Locke tries in Book 4 to control the relativist implications of

[106] Although that phrase is often attributed to Locke, he never actually used it. Still, it is an accurate description of his model of learning.

the *Essay*'s first three books, appealing primarily to those buttresses of Augustan society, reason and popular opinion, the damage is already done. In debunking innate ideas (Descartes's argument), he removes the main grounds for universality of thought and experience; then he replaces this universal system with a vision of the mind as fundamentally individual and eminently fallible. And this system of universal subjectivity is the epistemology underlying *Tristram Shandy*. Sterne is upfront about it, making frequent direct references to Locke and Lockean concepts--for instance, favorably (and unironically) recommending "*Locke*'s Essay upon the Human Understanding" to the reader, because it is a valuable "history-book . . . of what passes in a man's own mind" (98). A syllogism incorporating elements of Bakhtin, Locke, and Sterne explains the epistemology underlying *Tristram Shandy*. 1. Eccentricity is subjectivity--i.e., to explore and explain the workings of the eccentric mind is to posit and reify subjectivity itself (Bakhtin). 2. Everyone is eccentric, more or less (Sterne). 3. Therefore, everyone possesses individual subjectivity (Locke).

To return to Bakhtin's point: in a sense, for Sterne the hobbyhorse *is* the man. At least, Sterne writes,

> doubtless there is a communication between them of some kind, and my opinion rather is, that there is something in it more of the manner of electrified bodies,--and that by means of the heated parts of the rider, which come immediately into contact with the back of the HOBBY-HORSE.--By long journies and much friction, it so happens that the body of the rider is at length fill'd as full of HOBBY-HORSICAL matter as it can hold;--so that if you are able to give but a clear description of the nature of the one, you may form a pretty exact notion of the genius and

character of the other. (86)

A hobbyhorse is not merely a limited set of odd behaviors or thoughts but rather a total, idiosyncratic way of viewing the world. Thus, when one attacks another's hobbyhorse, as Walter attacks Toby's, "in striking the horse, [one] strike[s] the rider too" (552-53). What is true of Walter is always true of any eccentric--i.e., if everyone is eccentric, of any person:

> The truth was, his road lay so very far on one side, from that wherein most men travelled,--that every object before him presented a face and section of itself to his eye, altogether different from the plan and elevation of it seen by the rest of mankind.--In other words, 'twas a different object,--and in course was differently considered . . . (456)

This is going Locke one better. As discussed above, Locke argued that experience in the form of sensory perception determines ideas, and ideas determine knowledge. Sterne, however, emphasizes the irrational, subjective elements and implications of Locke's philosophy: the association of ideas, and the idea that one shapes experience to fit one's existing hobbyhorse (rather than the other way around).

The association of ideas is an important philosophical point in *Tristram Shandy*. Characters are forever suffering the ludicrous consequences of associating the oddest sets of ideas; it happens so much that Sterne seems to suggest this is *the* primary way we organize experience and live life. The best and certainly most voluminous example is probably Tristram's writing itself: he defies predictability and structure, organizing his text strictly on the principle of association, writing whatever pops into his mind. One thing reminds him of another, and another, and very quickly the narrative is far away from where it was just a page before; then he must fret,

for example, that "things have crowded in so thick upon me, that I have not been able to get into that part of my work, towards which, I have all the way, looked forwards, with so much earnest desire" (400). Other examples include Mrs. Shandy's association of sex with clocks; Walter's association of the name "Tristram" with a huge host of disagreeable ideas; and the Widow Wadman's gradually advancing association of Toby with her household.

This last example shows the other important way in which Sterne stretches Lockean philosophy to emphasize subjectivity: for Sterne's characters, ideas (e.g., the Widow's association of Toby with her house) determine experience (Toby should be her husband, so she pursues him), rather than the other way around, as Locke would have it. As Tristram sums up the idea, "It is the nature of an hypothesis, when once a man has conceived it, that it assimulates [sic] every thing to itself as proper nourishment; and, from the first moment of your begetting it, it generally grows the stronger by every thing you see, hear, read, or understand" (177). Once such an hypothesis has established itself, by whatever rational or irrational means, "*Euclid*'s demonstrations, could they be brought to batter it in breach, should not all have power to overthrow it" (383). Walter, for instance, will tolerate no arguments against the hypotheses by which he lives (e.g., the value of large noses, the determining power of names), for

> he had spared no pains in picking them up, and the more they lay out of the common way, the better still was his title. . . . Accordingly he held fast by 'em, both by teeth and claws,--would fly to whatever he could lay his hands on,--and, in a word, would intrench and fortify them round with as many circumvallations and breast-works, as my uncle *Toby* would a citadel. (264)

Not only does Walter go out of his way to pick up odd ideas, rather than passively receiving ordinary ideas from ordinary experience; he then defends those bizarre ideas at all costs, and orders his experience to fit them rather than the Lockean reverse. When Tristram's nose is flattened, rather than observe Tristram and learn through observation what kind of person he is turning out to be, Walter concludes Tristram's ruined nose will ruin the child, interprets every new event as proof of that dire omen, and sets to work writing the massive and never-finished *Tristrapaedia* to salvage what he can of Tristram's life.

Sterne's world, then, is a very subjective one. As Byrd puts it, "Each character perceives the life around him through a narrowly subjective filter" (*Bedlam* 114). This "filter" is the view from hobbyhorseback, which is doubly determinative: everyone possesses his[107] hobbyhorse, and can only see and experience life as it appears from there; *and*, this hobbyhorse being in a sense one with its rider, everyone protects it, whatever odd shape it may possess. Such a world could potentially be very lonely. For one thing, hobbyhorses--total world views--cannot really be shared. Trim's interest in siegecraft is the only instance of shared hobbyhorsery in the novel, and even his interest, as I argue above, does not have nearly the depth or obsessive quality of Toby's. Normally, hobbyhorses are strictly an individual, subjective phenomenon. For all Toby's introducing siegecraft into conversation, the subject never arouses the slightest spark of interest in Walter; in fact, Walter "thought it the most ridiculous horse that ever gentleman mounted, and indeed unless my uncle *Toby* vexed him about it, could never think of it once, without smiling about it" (248). Conversely, Walter tries ineffectually to interest Toby in his hypotheses:

[107] Still "his," the idea of eccentricity still being associated with men only.

> [W]hen my father's imagination was heated with the inquiry, . . . nothing would serve him but to heat my uncle *Toby*'s too.
>
> My uncle *Toby* would give my father all possible fair play in this attempt; and with infinite patience would sit smoaking his pipe for whole hours together, whilst my father was practising upon his head, and trying every accessible avenue to drive *Prignitz* and *Scroderus*'s solutions into it.
>
> Whether they were above my uncle *Toby*'s reason,--or contrary to it,--or that his brain was like *damp* tinder, and no spark could possibly take hold,--or that it was so full of saps, mines, blinds, curtins, and such military disqualifications to his seeing clearly into *Prignitz* and *Scroderus*'s doctrines,--I say not, (279)

but the fact remains, Toby simply cannot be brought to comprehend nor care.

A world peopled with hobbyhorsemen calling unsuccessfully to each other to share the ride is potentially an isolated, mysterious world. Selves are hard to descry and to understand from a distance. "WE live in a world beset on all sides with mysteries and riddles" (776), laments Tristram. We could easily see and understand each other's selves if "the fixture of *Momus*'s glass"[108] were set up in every human breast; "But this . . . is not the case of the inhabitants of this earth;--our minds shine not through the body, but are wrapt up here in a dark covering of uncrystalized flesh and blood; so that if we would come to the specifick characters of them, we must go some other way to work" (83). As the rest of *Tristram Shandy* demonstrates, the "other way to work" is sympathetic understanding, exemplified especially by Toby.

[108] As the *OED* notes, Momus was the "Greek . . . god of ridicule . . . hence, a fault-finder, a critic." That the access we do *not* have is also a critical, fault-finding view is important to Sterne's would-be benevolent tolerance: he suggests that it is just as well we cannot see each other's selves clearly, for if we could, we would just find fault.

De Porte observes that

> the isolation of the characters, their inability to communicate verbally, would imply an intolerably bleak view of human relationships were there not the compensation of sympathetic understanding. Walter and Toby can hardly exchange a single idea; yet they are united by a bond of affection. No matter how much they provoke one another, they are always ready to be reconciled on a show of sentiment . . . (149)

Sentiment or sympathetic understanding *does* "shine through the body," as discussed above--by means of tears, sighs, facial expressions, and kind gestures. That is why Toby's (and the eccentric's) sentimental benevolence is so important, so insisted upon; it helps bridge the interpersonal gap which eccentricity's subjectivity produces. We instinctively understand the language of the heart as expressed in the language of the body, suggests Sterne: "There are some trains of certain ideas which leave prints of themselves about our eyes and eye-brows; and there is a consciousness of it, somewhere about the heart, which serves but to make these etchings the stronger--we see, spell, and put them together without a dictionary" (413). For instance, when Toby annoys Walter into a coughing fit by mounting his military hobbyhorse, he "leap'd up without feeling the pain upon his groin,--and, with infinite pity, stood beside his brother's chair, tapping his back with one hand, and holding his head with the other, and from time to time, wiping his eyes with a clean cambrick handkerchief, which he pull'd out of his pocket" (249). The gestures immediately and accurately communicate Toby's benevolence to Walter, who instantly drops his complaint: "The affectionate and endearing manner in which my uncle *Toby* did these little offices,--cut my father thro' his reins, for the pain he had just been giving

him,--May my brains be knock'd out with a battering ram or a catapulta, I care not which, quoth my father to himself,--if ever I insult this worthy soul more" (249-50).

Sterne, then, contributes significantly to the cultural changes taking place in the second half of the eighteenth century. Like Smollett (and Johnson and Boswell, among others), he helps make quixotic eccentricity, understood as a form of minor, treatable madness, socially respectable. He takes Lockean philosophy as far as it will stretch, and then some, in positing universal subjectivity. And he takes away the alienating potential of that subjectivity by showing how to bridge the (ostensibly) newly produced gaps between people.

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Chapter 4

The Romantic Era: Science Marches On--Over the Eccentric

By the Romantic era, the eccentric had existed in Great Britain for a whole century. During those years, by means of individual works and broad cultural changes such as those described in earlier chapters, the concept became widespread and definite enough that it gained a name: "eccentric" was first used as a noun applied to a person, as in "the eccentric," by Walter Scott in 1832. Without elaboration--perhaps intuiting that the word would be well enough understood not to require any--Scott refers in the introduction to *St. Ronan's Well* to "[m]en of every country playing the eccentric." "Eccentric" had been used since the mid-sixteenth century, but in an astronomical or geometrical sense, describing planets, orbits, ovals, and ellipses.[109]

There is room for debate about which generally comes first, a concept or a particular usage: does usage disseminate a concept, or must a concept be widely shared before it can be expressed in words? In this case, the latter must be true; as earlier chapters have shown, a coherent concept of "the eccentric" certainly originated and evolved long before it had a name. During the eighteenth century the eccentric was assigned specific attributes--male, higher than middle-class, quixotic, monomaniacal, sexually hapless, benevolent, sentimental, and "natural" in manners--but the figure remained nameless. No term, even "Quixote" (as in "a Quixote"), was applied consistently. The coining of "the eccentric" in 1832 only fixed a cultural process long a-making, labeling a figure and an idea that had by then become second nature.

The eccentric of 1832, though, differed significantly from the eccentric

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[109] During the Romantic era, the word took on a mechanical signification as well: "A circular disc fixed on a revolving shaft, some distance out of centre, working freely in a ring." The *OED* records examples of this sense from 1827 and 1838.

of the late eighteenth century. What was fixed by the new noun was a changed figure, thanks to the Romantic era's two major developments relevant to the genealogy of eccentricity. One such development was the (somewhat paradoxical) movement of science, increasingly viewed as technical, specialized, "fact"- and experiment-based knowledge, into all realms of life. The other, complexly linked with the first, was the advent and huge popularity in Great Britain of the "physiologies,"[110] which are collections of brief, often caricatural, verbal and pictorial sketches of interesting, unusual, and/or eccentric[111] characters. Together, these forces made the eccentric even more patently harmless; broadened the variety of possible eccentrics, but also systematized and objectified that variety; and assigned to their own codifying approach the unassailable authority of "natural law." By the beginning of the Victorian era, science and the physiologies had rendered the eccentric considerably less admirable and powerful in British culture than he had been forty years earlier.

i. Eccentricity and the Physiologies: The Importance of Being Harmless

I borrow the term "physiologies" from Walter Benjamin. In *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism,* he describes a "special literary genre" that blossomed briefly in Paris in the early 1840s:

> These books consist of individual sketches which, as it were, reproduce the plastic foreground of those panoramas [e.g., *Le Diable à Paris, Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*] with their store of information. Numerous authors contributed to these

[110] The term "physiologies" here would perhaps more accurately be replaced by the term "freak books." I use the former because, as explained below, physiologies are really later, evolved forms *of* freak books; the later term "physiologies," then, stands for the whole historical species.

[111] "Eccentric" in the specialized sense developed in previous chapters; "eccentric" more or less after the tradition of Tristram Shandy and Roger de Coverley.

> volumes. . . . In this literature, the modest-looking, paperbound, pocket-size volumes called "physiologies" had pride of place. They investigated types that might be encountered by a person taking a look at the marketplace. From the itinerant street vendor of the boulevards to the dandy in the foyer of the opera-house, there was not a figure of Paris life that was not sketched by a *physiologue*. . . . After the types had been covered, the physiology of the city had its turn. There appeared *Paris la nuit, Paris à table, Paris dan l'eau, Paris à cheval, Paris pittoresque, Paris Marié.* When this vein, too, was exhausted, a "physiology" of the nations was attempted. Nor was the "physiology" of the animals neglected . . . (35-36)

The French physiology, then, depicted familiar, common types--the dandy, the street vendor--in a would-be amusing fashion, in just a few pages. Being "amusing" entailed being uncontroversial, apolitical (to the average, rapidly scanning eye), witty, humorous, and fairly superficial. The subject matter was specifically not unusual; in fact, much of the pleasure of consuming physiologies lay in the recognition of one's own powers of recognition: "*I* know that type!" And to elicit that response, the subject matter had to be familiar to its petit-bourgeois audience;[112] it had to serve up well-known stereotypes and generalizations. As a genre, then, the physiologies shared many of the salient characteristics of seventeenth-century British "characters," which are discussed earlier in this study.

Benjamin's description of French physiologies is a rare clue to the existence and significance of *British* physiologies; hence the description's prominence here. After their (British) heyday in the first half of the

[112] Benjamin: "It was a basically petty-bourgeois genre" (36).

nineteenth century, they sank into oblivion without a bubble. Benjamin notes, "In 1841 there were seventy-six new physiologies. After that year, the genre declined" (35). In the British case, this is a massive understatement. A fair amount of interesting work has been done on the Romantic sketch--for instance, Richard C. Sha's recent article addressing the sketch's generic unclassifiability. However, the physiology is an uncommon manifestation or subcategory of the sketch, and critically speaking, it is a forgotten one. No critic I could discover, including Sha, discusses the British physiology specifically. As valuable as Benjamin's analysis would be ordinarily, it therefore becomes doubly so.

His analysis works equally well with British physiologies, even those that appeared decades earlier; and his observations get at precisely what matters most about them, culturally and in terms of eccentricity. I'll discuss what that is momentarily. First, though, I will establish that British physiologies do resemble the French, in order to demonstrate Benjamin's relevance here. Then I will show that unlike the French version, the British physiology did not suddenly appear around 1840. It has a history that extends back to the turn of the century; thus, when I discuss its cultural significance, I refer to the entire Romantic period--forty years, not four. For these reasons, I will now compare British to French physiologies, sketch the nature and history of the British version, and *then* return to the British physiology's cultural and eccentric significance.

To see how similar British physiologies are to French, examine, say, some of the former that are flogged in the "Nickleby Advertiser."[113] (This

[113] All references to the "Nickleby Advertiser" are to the University of Pennsylvania Press's edition of *Nicholas Nickleby*. Only pages of Dickens's novel are numbered; pages of the "Advertiser" are not, although they are dated.

was the collective name for advertising pages[114] attached to monthly installments of *Nicholas Nickleby*, the novel published by Charles Dickens between April 1838 and October 1839.) There, leading publisher Chapman and Hall invites the public to buy and peruse *Sketches of Young Ladies* and *Sketches of Young Gentlemen;* Robert Tyas offers the new collection *Heads of the People: Portraits of the English.* These prove upon examination to be physiologies exactly after the Parisian plan. (Or just before it, by Benjamin's chronology.) *Heads of the People,* for instance, offers eight-page verbal sketches, with accompanying pictures, of such familiar London types as "The Diner-out," "The 'Lion' of a Party," "The Fashionable Physician," "The Factory Child," "The Family Governess," "The Cockney," and "The Street-Conjuror." Twenty-two different authors[115] describe the ostensible essence of forty-eight familiar figures--not *a* but *the* fashionable physician, *the* Cockney--in a bantering, glib tone. Controversy is not to be found; for instance, in the portrait of the factory child, Douglas Jerrold makes a conventional appeal to the bourgeois reader's conventional pity, but does not criticize the economic conditions that caused the child to *need* to work. In the same vein, Jerrold's "lion" of a party is not a lion of a particular party that is then singled out as the target of satire; rather, *the* politician's (i.e., any politician's) supposedly essential self-importance and untrustworthiness are the comic butts.[116]

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[114] Those who lament the proliferation of advertising as a very recent development may be surprised to see the "Nickleby Advertiser": its pages very nearly equal in number those of the novel it accompanies, usually about thirty per month to the novel's thirty-two.

[115] One of the authors listed, and to whom the single sketch "Captain Rook and Mr. Pigeon" (a card sharp and his dupe) is attributed, is William Makepeace Thackeray. The next chapter of this study addresses the significance of popular and influential Victorian authors'--e.g., Thackeray and Dickens's--creation of wholly one-dimensional characters. In this sketch, for instance, the characters are given individual names but stand for a whole type; they must therefore be (and are) without complexity or contour.

[116] See, too, the sketch of "The Cabinet Minister": "He wants no attribute of the diabolical being, except the cloven foot and a tail." (353). This because he is *the* Cabinet Minister--not *a* Minister belonging to a specific political camp.

Superficiality and political inoffensiveness are the rule in *Heads of the People* and its siblings, just as in the French physiologies. The portraits are so innocuous, in fact, that the volume even claims it can reconcile inhabitants of the two perennially warring countries: the book is "to be seen gazing from the windows of French shopkeepers, at our 'natural enemies'--a circumstance not likely to aggravate the antipathy which Nature had, for some mysterious purpose, implanted in the breasts of the Briton and the Gaul" (iv). The tone, content, and approach of *Heads of the People* closely matches those of the other physiologies advertised with it. Innocuous, familiar-type-based, brief, superficial, apolitical, written by many authors: in a word, French.

British and French physiologies do, however, differ significantly in their respective origins. Citing Eduard Fuchs, Benjamin notes,

> the beginning of the physiologies coincided with the so-called September Laws, the tightened censorship of 1836. These laws summarily forced a team of able artists with a background in satire out of politics. If that could be done in the graphic arts, the government's manoeuvre was bound to be all the more successful in literature . . . (36)

In short, the French physiologies had an abrupt, pinpointable beginning in the late 1830s as an effect of government censorship. To satirize with any kind of sharp edge, and especially to satirize politicians, suddenly became much riskier; artists and writers therefore turned their talents to purposely uncontroversial, apolitical subjects--namely, their fellow Parisian citizens. "Innocuousness was of the essence," in great part due to political circumstances (Benjamin 36).

British physiologies, on the other hand, have earlier, more evolutionary, and less directly political origins. Britons, typically, claimed

they invented the genre first. For example, Tyas's advertisement in the Oct. 1, 1839 (i.e., final) "Nickleby Advertiser" boasts, "Not only is the work [*Heads of the People*] translated into French, and published weekly in Paris, but Frenchmen, copying its purpose as applicable to themselves, have put forth 'Les François, ou Mœurs Contemporaines,' in precisely the same vein as the English original."

In any case, the British physiology was not so much invented as it evolved out of the "freak books"[117] of the 1800s, 'teens and twenties. I use the term "freak books" because it most succinctly describes their typical subject matter and approach. See, for instance, the self-description of *The Eccentric Mirror*,[118] first published in 1807, which stands well for the entire genre:

> [A] series of lives of such individuals of either sex, as have been distinguished by any extraordinary circumstances from the mass of society. They embrace authentic biographical accounts of persons remarkable for longevity, unusual size, strength, singular habits and manners, adventures, virtues and vices, in

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[117] This term is mine; certainly no freak book billed itself that way.

On the subject of freaks, Leslie Fiedler's *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self* remains a worthwhile and intriguing study twenty years after it was written. Fiedler apparently read several of the same freak books I did, although he names none. Several of his accounts relate the same details in the same order and emphasis as are found in Romantic-era sources. It must be said, though, that he seems much more interested in displaying human oddities than in examining what the proliferation of collections of oddities might mean. And when he does discuss oddities' significance, the significance he finds is fundamentally personal, individual rather than cultural:

> What monsters men have needed to believe in they have created for themselves in words and pictures when they could not discover them in nature. And it is with that psychic need, then, that we should begin; seeking prototypes neither in history or anthropology, nor in embryology or teratology, but in depth psychology, which deals with our basic uncertainty about the limits of our bodies and our egos. (27)

[118] The edition cited here is that of J. and J. Cundee, 1813, primarily because, frankly, it was the only one available. However, internal evidence—e.g., frequent references to "current" dates that were actually current for the original edition, page numbers (according to the *National Union Catalog*) that match the original edition's, and the widespread practice of plagiarizing or just reprinting earlier editions of physiologies—indicates that the 1813 Cundee edition cited serves just as well in terms of textual accuracy.

> short of all such as have gained celebrity or notoriety, by deviating in a remarkable degree from the ordinary course of human existence. [The collection] reflects the image of the most surprising human phenomena, of the greatest prodigies, in every age and in every country, that have commanded the particular notice of their contemporaries . . . (1:iii-iv)[119]

As this description would indicate, the subjects are various in their "deviations." There are misers of unimaginable wealth who chose to live in squalor; the world's fattest man, Daniel Lambert; dwarves and giants; cross-dressing women who passed as men, usually in one of the British armed forces, and one transvestite man, "Elizabeth" Russell, whom Samuel Johnson thought was a woman; self-taught arithmetical prodigies; daring seamen; participants in labyrinthine court intrigues; the extraordinarily absent-minded; actors and actresses; a "spotted negro"; famous historical figures including Joan of Arc and Jonathan Swift; a man named Mr. Mathew famed for extravagant hospitality, whom Swift once visited; and so on. Subjects are mostly British, but do include--for the sake of comprehensiveness, apparently--a few French (e.g., Victor of Aveyron), Americans (Jemima Wilkinson), Poles (Joseph Boruwlaski), Jamaicans (Charles Martin), Russians (Jemeljan Pugatschew), Italians (Sixtus V), and

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[119] *The Eccentric Mirror* is paginated, well, eccentrically. Each of its four volumes is about 360 pages long; but other than the roman-numbered pages of the preface in Volume 1, the rest of each volume follows an odd system. Although the collection was apparently never published except as an entire bound collection, its pagination suggests a sewing-together of installments. The pages are numbered from 1 to about 36; often the latter number is higher, sometimes lower, depending upon the length of the portraits in the set. Because of this odd system, by which a single volume could for example have several page 20s, citations *not* from the preface include volume, portrait name, and page number.

I should add, too, that for reasons of clarity and organization I am purposely saving discussion of this title and ones like it--titles containing the word "eccentric"--for the second half of this chapter. There I further discuss how and why the term moved, within just a few decades, from referring to any "deviation...from the ordinary course of human existence" to indicating specifically *the* eccentric.

citizens of a few other nations. Many subjects lived or had lived in large cities, usually London. Most were still living at the time of the freak books' publication or had died during the eighteenth century, but a very few such as Joan of Arc had lived in earlier centuries. Her story, though, is the only one I have found that goes back in history beyond the English Renaissance. Most date from after the Restoration. Recency is definitely the rule.

Such is the freak books' subject matter. Their approach can be summed up in one word: exhibition. The title of one early collection is very telling in this regard: *The Wonderful and Scientific Museum, or, Magazine of Remarkable Characters.* This collection was published in 1803, three years after the first freak book, *Wilson's Wonderful Characters*.[120] What is the function of items in a "wonderful and scientific museum" but to be on exhibit? Later titles, too, indicate the spectacular (in both senses) nature of the freak books' subjects: *Portraits and Lives of Remarkable and Eccentric Characters* (1819), which manages to suggest both exhibitedness ("Portraits" are made to be gazed at) and deviance ("Remarkable and Eccentric"); *The Eccentric Magazine; or, Lives and Portraits of Remarkable Persons* (1812), which suggests a panoply of oddity, a "magazine" in the sense of storehouse or wide array, in addition to its subjects' deviance and exhibitability; and *Life and Sketches of Curious and Odd Characters* (1833), which doubly emphasizes its subjects' oddity with the adjectives "Curious" *and* "Odd," in addition to the word "Sketch," which again emphasizes the subjects' being placed on exhibit. See, too, the end of *The Eccentric Mirror*'s long subtitle: "The whole

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[120] (First as far as I could discover.) As a note below explains, Dickens knew *Wilson's Wonderful Characters*. This collection hung around longer than most; it was still in print, in a seventh edition, in 1850. This was a new "edition" in name only; as with most of the freak books, the production of new editions entailed no or extremely minimal change, usually just the changing of the publication date and the unjustified tacking-on of "new and improved" claims. Many collections appeared in multiple editions within a year, reflecting the fact that they were so popular they kept selling out, being reprinted, and selling out again.

exhibiting an interesting and WONDERFUL DISPLAY OF HUMAN ACTION in the Grand Theatre of the World" (emphasis in original). Speaking of exhibition, many portraits make direct reference to subjects' being *o n* exhibit, literally, for money. For example, Daniel Lambert (fat man), Joseph Boruwlaski (dwarf), John Richardson Pimrose Bobey ("spotted negro"), and Thomas Topham (strong man) apparently all lived on the proceeds of self-exhibition for long portions of their lives. Thomas "Old" Parr became an exhibit willy-nilly: he was "in danger to have been stifeled [sic]," "they came in such multitudes . . . (so greedy are the vulgar to hearken to, or gaze after novelties)" (*Mirror* 1: "Thomas Parr" 3). The freak books' exhibitions only perpetuated a position many of its subjects already knew well.

Granted, *The Eccentric Mirror*, for one, begins its preface with a statement of lofty educational purpose: "It has been justly observed by the prince of British poets, that 'The proper study of mankind is MAN.' It is with a view to promote and facilitate this important study, that the Editor of these volumes presents [them] to the public" (1:iii). However, later in the collection it betrays the freak books' real attitude and approach: "Portraits of such persons, with some general traits of their character, are gratifying, not so much from any useful lesson to be derived from their history and adventures, as for their being objects of curiosity" (2: "Bampfylde Moore Carew" 1). To be on display, to be gazed at, to be strange and therefore interesting: that is the freaks' function. Hence the engraved portraits. *The Eccentric Mirror* offers twelve portraits per volume, collected at the beginning of each. Later books such as *Portraits and Lives* offer "*correct portraits of each character*" (1:iv; emphasis in original). That is to say, the tendency to exhibit, to display "monsters" (from the Latin *monstrare*, to show), only increased over the period. It was not enough that freaks' lives be told; they had to be

seen.

Such are the freak books, physiologies' direct ancestors. The freak books are remarkably similar to each other. Their titles, to name one connection, are *so* similar as to render them almost indistinguishable. Arranging several titles so they maximally overlap makes the point most plainly: *Wilson's Wonderful Characters; The Wonderful and Scientific Museum, or, Magazine of Remarkable Characters; The Eccentric Magazine; or, Lives and Portraits of Remarkable Persons; The Eccentric Mirror; Lives and Portraits of Remarkable Characters, Drawn from the Most Authentic Sources; Portraits and Lives of Remarkable and Eccentric Characters; Biographical Sketches of Eccentric Characters* (1832); and *The Life and Sketches of Curious and Odd Characters* (1833).

A second connection among the freak books is, again, their subject matter and approach. The similarity goes beyond publishers' selecting the same stories and telling them again and again in the same ways, although that happened, too. For example, the stories of Lord Rokeby with his long beard and cold-water bathing, Thomas Parr of incredible old age, Bampfylde

Moore Carew of the thousand disguises, and John Elwes[121] and his wretched miserliness appear in virtually every freak book. The life stories were apparently chosen originally for their oddity, their interesting deviance, then later collections included them because earlier ones including the stories sold well. The sketches became their own kind of canon, by means of a profit-driven closed circle of authority; once popular, always collected. Again, though, the "borrowings" went well beyond topics or life stories; close reading of a few collections reveals that publishers actually stole from each other directly, wholesale. *The Eccentric Magazine*, published by G. Smeeton in the summer of 1812, was the direct source for both *Lives and Portraits*, published by W. Lewis, and *Portraits and Lives*, published by J. Arnett. The latter two publications take the entire text and pictures of the former--

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[121] Several misers turn up in collection after collection: Elwes, Daniel Dancer, William Jennings, James Taylor, etc. It is these accounts that Noddy Boffin collects and studies in *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-65), to Bella Wilfer's great distress. In one scene, Boffin asks Silas Wegg to read some of the accounts aloud, and refers to actual freak books: "'And here's Kirby's Wonderful Museum,' said Mr. Boffin, 'and Caulfield's Characters, and Wilson's. Such Characters, Wegg, such Characters! I must have one or two of the best of 'em to-night'" (479). Boffin finally chooses the life of Dancer, as read from "Merryweather's Lives and Anecdotes of Misers" (481). This specialized offshoot of the freak books--a miser book--actually existed, and it continued the by then decades-long tradition of "borrowing" heavily from earlier freak books. The passage Dickens quotes from Merryweather very nearly matches *The Eccentric Mirror*'s. For example, the *Mirror*:

> It took many weeks to explore the contents of his dwelling. One of his richest escrutoirs was the dung-heap in the cow-house, which contained near 2500l. and in an old jacket, carefully tied, and strongly nailed down to the manger, was the sum of 500l. in gold and Bank notes. (1: "Daniel Dancer" 10-11)

Dickens/Merryweather:

> It took many weeks to explore its whole contents . . . One of Mr. Dancer's richest escretoires was found to be a dungheap in the cowhouse; a sum but little short of two thousand five hundred pounds was contained in this rich piece of manure; and in an old jacket, carefully tied, and strongly nailed down to the manger, in bank notes and gold were found five hundred pounds more. (*Our Mutual Friend* 483)

If Dickens's treatment of characters did not already strongly suggest great familiarity with freak books or physiologies, certainly this passage should.

Significantly, too, Dickens notes that Boffin "pursued the acquisition of those dismal records with the ardour of Don Quixote for his books of chivalry" (467). Although Boffin turns out to have been shamming all along in order to warn Bella by example, the reader has no clue of that yet. The idea that one overriding obsession--books of chivalry, disappointed love, etc.--could literally crack one's brain survived the Romantic era, living on into the Victorian.

unchanged except for the preface--add a new title, and print "new" collections. The page breaks even come at the same places, and the latter two collections' prefaces[122] are identical (with each other). *The Eccentric Magazine,* in turn, had without acknowledgement copied *The Eccentric Mirror,* which was produced by G. H. Wilson; the former collection is really just a shorter version of the latter. In cutting four volumes down to two, *The Eccentric Magazine* omits several of the *Mirror*'s shorter accounts, most of them of foreigners' lives, and trims several others; what text then remains is almost word-for-word identical to passages in the *Mirror.* The repeated engravings are *all* identical. Such "borrowing" was so widespread and thorough that one can say, fairly literally, that to read one freak book is to read them all.

The main difference between physiologies and their parent freak books is clear: in one sense, they emphasize opposite qualities in their subjects. The former highlights subjects' unremarkableness, their recognizability, their ostensible essence; the latter, subjects' difference from the norm, their oddity, their incommensurable individuality. The question of how and why the one emphasis changed for the other is taken up in the second section of this chapter. For now, though, it must be established that the two genres are in fact one, familially related. One powerful piece of *prima facie* evidence for this is format: the physiology includes the same kinds of contents as the freak

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[122] *The Eccentric Magazine*'s preface is worth quoting here:

> Mr. Lemoine was editor of the first part of this volume; a man, unfortunately too eccentric: blessed with an education and abilities of the most superior order, he passed the major part of his life in selling books, writing pamphlets, and sacrificing at the shrine of Bacchus--but he is gone!--and while we pity his failings, let us snatch from oblivion, the name of a man, whose latter moments deserved a far better fate! His Portrait and Life shall be given in the second volume. [They are not.] (1:v-vi)

In just a few lines are packed elements now familiar in the literature of eccentricity, attributed here to the *editor* of a book of eccentrics, by association: misdirected education, impracticality, eccentricity as a kind of affliction, and lack of due appreciation by an unfeeling world.

book, in essentially the same arrangement. Both are divided into verbal portraits of a few pages each, which do not claim to be comprehensive--to tell an entire life from beginning to end--but rather focus upon what seems most prominent, interesting, or striking. Accounts of misers in the freak books, for instance, relate the miser-as-child's financial circumstances, sources and extent of the eventual fortune, individual manifestations of miserliness, and disposition of the fortune after the miser's death. Likewise, accounts of physically remarkable people focus on physical details: whether or not their parents were remarkable in the same way, how the subject eats, sleeps, and moves, and precise measurements. The physiologies, too, remain focused upon the subject's supposedly essential qualities: the Stock-Broker's greed and self-importance, the Cockney's vulgarity, the Diner-out's finicky imperiousness at table.

Furthermore, both physiologies' and freak books' brief accounts feature, and usually begin with (especially after the century's first decade), an engraved portrait that, much like the verbal sketch, aspires to convey all of a life in one summary image. For example, a commonly reproduced portrait of Daniel Dancer showed him clutching a sack, presumably of gold, and looking around suspiciously from under his hat's brim. Thomas Laugher is depicted pointing to his birth certificate, dated 1700. (*The Eccentric Mirror*, published in 1807, lists him as still living.) Likewise, the physiologies. "The Hangman" in *Heads of the People* is shown grimly holding a noose. "The Natural Young Lady" of *Sketches of Young Ladies* can be seen grinning and leaping into a wagon in order to exhibit her "natural" high spirits; "The Manly Young Lady," riding a horse (*not* sidesaddle) and wearing foxhunting garb. Because the freak books and physiologies are so plainly similar, in both format and the more telling way discussed immediately below, I will consider

them *all* physiologies, early and late, and use that term for them all.

To return now to the subject of eccentricity specifically: the characteristic all physiologies share, the characteristic that makes them vital to the history of eccentricity, is their innocuousness. Again, "Innocuousness was of the essence" (Benjamin 36). In the British case, this was true for cultural reasons more than for political or legal ones. Whereas French authors (at least after 1836) had to adopt innocuousness to avoid prosecution, British authors of the Romantic period had fewer such restraints. Certainly they had fewer than a century before, when, for instance, Swift had to publish *Gulliver's Travels* anonymously, with revisions, and under care of his printer George Faulkner, even though the book made only veiled satirical allusions: high-heels and low-heels = Tory and Whig parties; Big-Endians and Little-Endians = Catholics and Protestants. Lord Byron, for one, freely and frequently attacked the British government in the most direct, scabrous terms; see, in particular, *The Vision of Judgment* and *Don Juan*. He remained exiled from England for...other, nonpolitical reasons. As Raymond Williams notes, "Wordsworth wrote political pamphlets . . . Coleridge wrote political journalism and social philosophy, . . . Shelley, in addition to this, distributed pamphlets in the streets, . . . [and] Southey was a constant political commentator" (*Culture* 30-31). None of them suffered much at the hands of the government; in fact, Wordsworth and Southey in particular grew fat off it. In short, the political climate in Great Britain was more favorable than many other European countries to frank dissent; therefore, the physiologies had relatively little political reason to be innocuous.

Benjamin explains the reason, with such economy that he deserves to be quoted at length:

The long series of eccentric or simple, attractive or severe figures

> which the physiologies presented to the public in character sketches had one thing in common: they were harmless and of perfect bonhomie. Such a view of one's fellow man was so remote from experience that there were bound to be uncommonly weighty motives for it. The reason was an uneasiness of a special sort. People had to adapt themselves to a new and rather strange situation, one that is peculiar to big cities. Simmel has felicitously formulated what was involved here. . . . "[P]eople had never been in a position of having to look at one another for long minutes or even hours without speaking to one another." This situation was, as Simmel recognized, not a pleasant one. In his *Eugene Aram* [1832], Bulwer-Lytton orchestrated his description of big-city dwellers with a reference to Goethe's remark that every person, the best as well as the most wretched, carries around a secret which would make him hateful to all others if it became known. The physiologies were designed to brush such disquieting notions aside as insignificant. They constituted, so to speak, the blinkers of the "narrow-minded city animal" which Marx wrote about. (37-38)

This situation, which Benjamin ascribes here to Paris, obtained even earlier in the cities of Great Britain, due to the nation's leading role in the Industrial Revolution.

That story, the Industrial Revolution, is familiar enough. It is useful, though, to remind ourselves of the original import of the phrase:

> first used by French writers in the 1820s, and gradually adopted, in the course of the century, by English writers, [it] is modelled explicitly on an analogy with the French Revolution of 1789. As

> that had transformed France, so this has transformed England; the means of change are different, but the change is comparable in kind: it has produced, by a pattern of change, a new society. (Williams, *Culture* xiv)

James Watt invented the modern steam engine in 1776. In Britain it was immediately put to use mechanizing and speeding up production processes, primarily those of mining and cloth. In 1784, for instance, British production of spun cotton was twenty-four times greater than that of twenty years before (Johnson 309). After 1815 the rate of technological change was even faster: new high-velocity cotton mills, first built in Manchester in 1818, speeded up the process ten times; and by the early 1820s, there were railroads carrying coal and other goods all over England (Johnson 309, 189-92). They would soon carry passengers, as well. Thus was produced a huge demand for coal (to run the engines and to sell overseas) and for manufactured goods (especially cotton and linen cloth). There was concomitantly a great demand for people to run the machines and to mine and transport the coal. Therefore, workers, many of them already being crowded off their farms anyway by the economic upheaval, moved to cities to seek wage labor. London's population skyrocketed, as did that of other cities, especially the industrial cities of the north, Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester, and Liverpool. And so, during the Romantic era, hundreds of thousands of Britons found themselves, for the first time in their lives, in the situation Benjamin describes: staring silently at great masses of strangers whom they could not help suspecting of terrible secrets. They were newly immersed in a frightening, unsympathetic crowd--a new society indeed, a terrifying, swarming, hostile one.

Thomas De Quincey's works register this new urban fear. It seems worth noting that De Quincey was born in 1785, and that he was the son of a

merchant in Manchester. He was thus very much a child of the Industrial Revolution, growing up in one of industrialism's epicenters. In such a position he could not help but share in the period's anxieties, which he recorded in great detail. In 1834, for instance, uncharacteristically writing in second person, evidently counting upon his reader's sympathy, he describes one's growing trepidation upon even approaching London, then one's total, unnerving invisibility once there:

> Already at three stages' distance (say, 40 miles from London), upon some of the greatest roads, the dim presentiment of some vast capital reaches you obscurely, and like a misgiving. This blind sympathy with a mighty but unseen object, some vast magnetic range of Alps, in your neighbourhood, continues to increase, you know not how. . . . [Y]ou soon begin to feel yourself entering the stream as it were of a Norwegian *maelstrom;* and the stream at length becomes the rush of a cataract. . . . This *trepidation* increases both audibly and visibly at every half-mile, pretty much as one may suppose the roar of Niagara and the thrilling of the ground to grow upon the senses in the last ten miles of approach, with the wind in its favour, until at length it would absorb and extinguish all other sounds whatsoever. . . . Everywhere else in England, you yourself, horses, carriage, attendants (if you travel with any), are regarded with attention, perhaps even curiosity: at all events you are seen. But, after passing the final post-house on every avenue to London, for the latter ten or twelve miles, you become aware that you are no longer noticed: nobody sees you; nobody hears you; nobody regards you; you do not even regard yourself. In fact, how

> should you at the moment of first ascertaining your own total unimportance in the sum of things--a poor shivering unit in the aggregate of human life? (*Works* 1:180-81; emphases in original)

One can still see, and the sight of the multitude unnerves, but one cannot *be* seen. And one who is not seen is necessarily disconnected from one's fellow citizens. In a passage cited by Benjamin, Friedrich Engels, writing in Manchester in the early 1840s, explains:

> The hundreds of thousands of all classes and ranks crowding past each other, are they not all human beings with the same qualities and powers, and with the same interest in being happy? . . . And still they crowd by one another as though they had nothing in common, nothing to do with one another, and their only agreement is a tacit one, that each keep to his own side of the pavement, so as not to delay the opposing streams of the crowd, while it occurs to no man to honour another with so much as a glance. The brutal indifference, the unfeeling isolation of each in his private interest becomes the more repellent and offensive, the more these individuals are crowded together, within a limited space. . . . The dissolution of mankind into monads, of which each one has a separate principle and a separate purpose, the world of atoms, is here carried out to its most extreme. (37)

One loses all one's identity and community amid the blind, busy throng; one becomes "but one wave in a total Atlantic, one plant (and a parasitical plant besides, needing alien props) in a forest of America" (De Quincey, *Works* 1:181-82).

In such a situation, as Benjamin (via Göethe and Bulwer-Lytton)

observes, everyone in the city seems to possess awful secrets. The secrets might be specifically sinister or criminal, but they need not be; the mere fact of everyone's following "a separate principle and a separate purpose" which is neither known nor assisted by others indicates a perpetual "war of each against all" (Engels 37). In other words, the simple fact that city dwellers carry out their daily business with little or no knowledge or concern for others' daily business means that strangers very well might be the enemy: the stranger one just met (or rather, *saw* on the street) might well be about principles and business that directly conflict with one's own--particularly if, say, the stranger were competing with one for scarce jobs, or attempting to gain additional capital by underselling others, creating monopolies, and breaking workers' unions. What you don't know about others *can* hurt you. Paranoia, particularly in the city,[123] may be perfectly justified by mundane facts such as the keeping to one's own side of the pavement.

In any case, whatever the nature of people's secrets, by the end of the eighteenth century and now on into the nineteenth, there was a general sense of mystery regarding the self: what had seemed transparent a century ago now appeared inaccessible, complex, deep. This was thought true even of one's own self, and so doubly true of another's. De Quincey, for example, reports nightly journeys into his own mysterious mental depths: "I seemed every night to descend, not metaphorically, but literally to descend, into chasms and sunless abysses, depths below depths, from which it seemed hopeless that I could ever reascend" (103). What he found in those depths, awful nightmares, filled him with horror and loathing. People simply "were" mysteries, even to themselves, and sometimes mysteries better left

[123] This is not to conclude that the country is innocent and the city is guilty, as Williams's *The Country and the City* cautions us against doing. It is just to say, as Engels does, that the "war of each against all" "is nowhere so shamelessly barefaced, so self-conscious as just here in the crowding of the great city" (37).

unsolved. (I emphasize: "were," not *were*.)

This could seem so if one accepted De Quincey's new theory of memory, which now, post-Freud, we tend to accept as natural fact. "[T]here is no such thing as *forgetting* possible to the mind," De Quincey claims; "a thousand accidents may, and will interpose a veil between our present consciousness and the secret inscriptions on the mind; accidents of the same sort will also rend away this veil; but alike, whether veiled or unveiled, the inscription remains for ever" (*Confessions* 104). Even the most banal mental impressions accumulate in one's mental "depths," inaccessible perhaps but never erased. For

> [w]hat else than a natural and mighty palimpsest is the human brain? Such a palimpsest is my brain; such a palimpsest, oh reader! is yours. Everlasting layers of ideas, images, feelings, have fallen upon your brain softly as light. Each succession has seemed to bury all that went before. And yet, in reality, not one has been extinguished. (*Works* 10:346)

They merely lie stored, hidden away, "waiting to be revealed, when the obscuring daylight shall have withdrawn" (*Confessions* 104). (Note the repeated association of the hidden with the dark.) Such memories may not at first be recognizable as one's own, yet they undeniably are: "[I]f I had been told of them when waking, I should not have been able to acknowledge them as parts of my past experience. But placed as they were before me, in dreams like intuitions. . . I *recognized* them instantaneously" (104; emphasis in original). If the mind really were like this, then the volume of hidden, inaccessible information and memories would have to be massive in relation to those consciously known and remembered. Hence the sense of mystery. The brain, now generally understood to be a medical or physical rather than a

metaphysical entity, hides most of its contents from its very owner.

Surely this sense of the self's hiddenness and potential awfulness drives many of the widely read British Romantic narratives of self: a fundamental function of such works, at some cultural and individual-psychic level, is to get to the bottom of who these people, and by extrapolation people in general, really are deep down. Such attempts would of course include Wordsworth's *Prelude*, in which he traces the "Growth of a Poet's Mind" from childhood, and Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*[124] and the autobiographical interpolations of *Don Juan*, just to name a few prominent examples. Nearly all of De Quincey's œuvre performs the function of exploring and confessing the mysterious depths of the hidden self.[125] Note, in this connection, the key word "Confessions" in his best-known work,

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[124] In *Nightmare Abbey*, published in 1818, soon after the fourth canto of *Childe Harold*, Thomas Love Peacock satirizes Byron's never-ending exploration of the gloomy mazes of his own soul, sketching him as the funereal Mr. Cypress, forever roaming around the dank Abbey drinking wine from a cup fashioned from a human skull--a *memento mori*--while lamenting the irreparable loss of youth, the impossibility of achieving lasting happiness, etc.: all the familiar Byronic themes. The satire works partly because because it resembles Byron, or a certain side of him as presented in his poetry; but it also works because "Byronism," or a determination to sound one's own sorrowful depths, was already a widespread phenomenon. *Sketches of Young Gentlemen* (1838) makes reference to it: "Time was, and not very long ago either, when a singular epidemic raged among the young gentlemen, vast numbers of whom, under the influence of the malady, tore off their neckerchiefs, turned down their shirt collars, and exhibited themselves in the open streets with bare throats and dejected countenances, before the eyes of an astonished public. These were the poetical young gentlemen" (81). Peacock's epigraph from Samuel Butler is an unavailing attempt to sneer away a culture-wide impulse:

> There's a dark lantern of the spirit,
> Which none see by but those who bear it,
> That makes them in the dark see visions
> And hag themselves with apparitions,
> Find racks for their own minds, and vaunt
> Of their own misery and want. (37)

[125] Alina Clej acknowledges this basic point: "Throughout his adult life Thomas De Quincey pursued the project of 'self-revelation' initiated by his first *Confessions*, a task he never seemed able to complete or abandon" (19). However, she quarrels a bit with this reading--hence the quotation marks around "self-revelation"--pointing out that for every bit of his secret self he reveals, De Quincey teasingly hides another. Clej holds that he always hints at more he *could* be saying but isn't, and argues that his overriding motive was not philosophical or self-therapeutic but financial.

Confessions of an English Opium-Eater (1822).[126] There, he meticulously traces the sources of his opium addiction, horrific dreams, and imaginative habits back to childhood; he does so in even greater detail later in the 1856 revision and in the abortive sequel, *Suspiria de Profundis*. (Note the significance of this latter title, too: "Sighs *from the depths*.") He also records the concomitant sense, that others--in particular, city dwellers--possess strange and potentially sinister secrets. For example, while describing in the *Confessions* his hard times in London, he observes: "The inner economy of . . . a man's daily life would present a most strange picture . . . Even with my limited opportunities for observing what went on, I saw many scenes of London intrigues, and complex chicanery, 'cycle and epicycle, orb in orb'" (48). Certainly one cannot convince oneself that the city crowd is *friendly*: "it cannot be denied that . . . London society is harsh, cruel, and repulsive" (50-51). Only opium allows him communion with the people. Only intoxicated, on Saturday night--most workers' day for spending their pay, as he specifies--can he enjoy and not fear the company of strangers encountered in the street. Opium provides a rare means of breaking down the fears and barriers imposed by urban society, of reaching others' elusive selves and speaking with them:

> Gradually I became familiar with their wishes, their difficulties, and their opinions. . . . Whenever I saw occasion, or could do it without appearing to be intrusive [for others mistrust us as

[126] I cite the 1822 edition rather than the 1856 for two reasons. First, obviously, the 1822 edition falls within the period covered by this chapter, whereas the later edition would not. Second, the 1856 text is thoroughly altered--to begin with, it is three times the length of the 1822--and very much a book of its later time. De Quincey really entered into the Victorian spirit of the age in revising his *Confessions*: he added further details of his relationship with family and guardians (family values), reminiscences of his times with Wordsworth and Coleridge (literary memoirs), additional pseudoscientific discussion of the use and effects of opium (scientific explanations), and--see Freud, a few decades afterwards--greater emphasis on the effects of his early childhood experiences in shaping his imagination and dreams (psychoanalysis).

> much as we do them], I joined their parties . . . I drew from opium some means of consoling myself. For opium (like the bee, that extracts its materials indiscriminately from roses and from the soot of chimneys) can overrule all feelings into a compliance with the master key. (81)

Opium can do what even sincere good will could not: bring the dwellers amid "the soot of chimneys" within sympathetic reach.

The very plan of the city, too, the labyrinthine urban geography so different from the open vistas of the country, inspired confused alienation. De Quincey records that frequently, when walking home, he would come "suddenly upon such knotty problems of alleys, such enigmatical entries, and such sphinx's riddles of streets without thoroughfares, . . . [that] I could almost have believed, at times, that I must be the first discoverer of some of these *terræ incognitæ*, and doubted, whether they had yet been laid down in the modern charts of London" (81). To live in London, or by extension any city, was to be a stranger in a strange and hostile land.

All these related terrors--the hostile crowds, the feelings of utter insignificance, the twisted, mysterious streets--deeply bruised his psyche. He laments, "I paid a heavy price in distant years, when the human face tyrannized over my dreams, and the perplexities of my steps in London came back and haunted my sleep" (81). He means quite literally that "the human face tyrannized over [his] dreams": in them, upon oceans of water, "the human face began to appear: the sea appeared paved with innumerable faces, upturned to the heavens: faces, imploring, wrathful, despairing, surged upwards by thousands, by myriads, by generations, by centuries" (108). He blames his terrors conjecturally on city life: "Perhaps some part of my London life might be answerable for this" (108). In the same passage from the 1856

edition, the blame for the nightmares becomes more pointed: "Perhaps some part of my London life (the searching for Ann amongst fluctuating crowds) might be answerable for this" (*Works* 3:441).

Such were the fears newly faced by British society in the Romantic era. So, such were the fears physiologies functioned to soothe: "The physiologies were designed to brush such disquieting notions aside as insignificant" (Benjamin 38). If looking at the surrounding crowds of mysterious and terrible strangers was the problem, then the physiologies provided the solution. The solution was obvious and twofold: make the strangers seem less mysterious, and make them appear less terrible. Convince readers that the people they saw were easily and thoroughly "readable" in a glance, and that everything read in this fashion was utterly benign. This double amelioration would reconcile British citizens to the new urban order of existence.

The first part of the solution is easily seen in the physiologies' format. As discussed above, individual lives are brief and focused, relating only the "interesting" portion. Compare the few-page physiology with late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century biography and autobiography: Boswell's *Life of Johnson* fills nearly two thousand pages; autobiographies by Coleridge and De Quincey (especially De Quincey) ramble on for several hundred apiece. The tendency was to collect and relate every possible detail, for it all seemed relevant. In the physiological sketch, though, only the oddity seemed to matter, so that is all that is discussed. Along the same line, and especially by the 1840s, physiological sketches frequently include pictures that, like the accompanying words, sum up all of a life, a self, in one quickly consumable image.

These tactics subtly instill the belief that "what you see is what you

get"--that one *can* see all in a glance, and that the objects of one's gaze do not possess disquieting secrets after all. In response to the perceived elusiveness and secrecy of the self, the physiologies reclaim its instant, utter readability. As Benjamin puts it, "They assured people that everyone was, unencumbered by any factual knowledge, able to make out the profession, the character, the background, and the life-style of passers-by" (39). Better yet, the physiologies suggest that this valuable skill need not even be learned or cultivated: "In these writings this ability appears as a gift which a good fairy bestows upon an inhabitant of a big city at birth" (39).

The second part of the comfort physiologies offer is that they render their subjects innocuous. Even sketches of potentially rough or unsympathetic characters--for example, the misers, who often brought families into unnecessary squalor and misery along with themselves, or daring adventurers such as the nobleman bully Lord Camelford--in balance show their subjects in a positive light. However much attention people's awful qualities receive, their more amusing, benevolent, and above all, *harmless* ones are at last insisted upon, sometimes without much apparent justification. The physiologies raise the specter of potentially terrible difference--all these strange people massed together in one book!--only to tame it, to reveal it as a mere harmless, amusing poltergeist summoned for our entertainment.

Camelford's story, as told in *The Eccentric Mirror*, concisely illustrates the position the physiologies encourage and the means by which they do it. Namely, the *Mirror* arranges details and commentary in such a way that the reader really cannot help but overlook traits such as Camelford's violence and cruelty in favor of his more sympathetic or amusing characteristics. Confronted with potentially unnerving oddity, the reader is brought to find

that oddity excusable or even kind of cute.

The opening paragraph provides a striking microsmic example of how this works. It begins: "We cannot survey the circumstances of the life of this eccentric and unfortunate nobleman without regretting that the virtues and good qualities which he occasionally manifested, were obscured by passions often dangerous to the peace and welfare of society" (4: "Lord Camelford" 3). The pronoun "we" was probably intended to mean "we the people who assembled this collection," but it must be read also or primarily to mean "you the reader and I the author," or even simply "everyone." The very first word, then, solicits the reader's complicity with the sketch's position. "We cannot survey . . . without": *we* cannot help but adopt the following position; it is ineluctable, like natural law. Camelford was an "eccentric and unfortunate nobleman." "Eccentric" here (as in the collection's title) bears a neutral signification, much like the astronomical one discussed above--out of the common road; different; variant, and not necessarily in a bad way. The second section of this chapter will further discuss the period's use of the word "eccentric"; but for now, to move on to the word "unfortunate," the suggestion is subtly made that Camelford suffered from simple bad luck, that he has suffered enough without our condemning him, too. Additionally, the fact that he was a "nobleman" ("great grandson of the famous Governor Pitt" [4]) grants him some license. He also had "virtues and good qualities"--definitely a point in his favor--even they were sometimes "obscured" by his "passions." Note the suggestion here, too, that insofar as Camelford *had* a secret self--"obscured" qualities, traits sometimes unavailable to view--those qualities are specified to have been good.

Still, the sentence ends on an ominous note: "dangerous to the peace and welfare of society." (Not all that ominous, though: his offenses were

against the abstract "peace and welfare of society" rather than against particular, living individuals.) So the next sentence dismisses the potential evil: "At the same time these mischiefs were not the result of a bad heart; for when reason and reflection recovered the dominion which the love of every species of extravagance had usurped in his mind, he thought no sacrifice too great, to repair the injuries which the gratification of his humour had occasioned" (3). He didn't *intend* harm; his "heart" was not bad (again, the hidden is specified to have been good). Besides, he tried hard to rectify his mistakes--"no sacrifice was too great"--which were in any case only brought about by the "gratification of his humour." That makes it sound as if his offenses sprung from (again) natural, ineluctable urges, "humours" as in the four humors theory of the body--i.e., an excess of choler made him do it. The later phrase "usurped in his mind" reinforces this hint that he was blameless: hey, the impulse just took him over. The phrase "gratification of his humour" also makes Camelford sound like a whimsical rather than a violent man, like his offenses were harmless caprices on the order of donning armor or playing wargames in his back yard. Too, how many bad things can one say about one whose "reason and reflection" eventually "recovered [their] dominion," which suggests that his "humours" were short-lived and therefore nugatory? Or about one possessing a "love of every form of extravagance"? Isn't "extravagance," particularly of emotion, what the Romantic era was all about?

The paragraph concludes:

> He exhibited a truly singular compound of human virtues and frailties; being distinguished for eccentric boldness and intrepidity of spirit; for many acts of noble, but oddly irregular, beneficence; for a love of frolic; and a passion for national and

> scientific pursuits; at one time, for uncommon dignity, good sense, and enlargement of sentiments; at another, for unreasonable positiveness; for liberality of expence without foolish vanity or mad profusion; so that those who studied his character with the greatest attention, knew not whether they ought to admire his virtues and rectitude of understanding, or to lament his dangerous eccentricities. (3-4)

By my count there are six clearly or subtly positive qualities listed here (counting "eccentric boldness and intrepidity of spirit" as one), with only one negative one. Even the latter, "unreasonable positiveness," makes him sound merely stubborn in an innocuous way, a bit of a crank at worst. Together with the other subtle rhetoric discussed above, this list makes the choice of whether to "admire his virtues and rectitude of understanding or to lament his dangerous eccentricities" a non-choice. The latter becomes impossible. His eccentricities seem as dangerous as Toby Shandy's.

That said, let us examine on a broader level what "dangerous eccentricities" this sketch reveals, and how they are glossed over. Early in his naval career Camelford was found guilty of "refractoriness and disobedience of orders" (5); the resulting discipline "he would not endure" (6). However, the *Mirror* is quick to reassure us, again, that the infractions were "the result rather of a certain peculiarity of temper, than of either badness of heart or want of understanding" (5). Later, serving on a different ship, Camelford "sent a challenge to Captain Vancouver, for the ill treatment he alledged he had received while under his command," ignoring Vancouver's response that "the measures of which he complained . . . were absolutely necessary for the preservation of discipline" (6). Camelford paid for it in the end, though, as the *Mirror* states in undeniably sympathetic terms: "The chagrin of this

unmerited disgrace [a conclusion reached without any presentation of evidence] is said to have preyed with such violence on the spirits of that meritorious officer, as to accelerate his death, which happened not long afterwards" (6-7). This is quite a stretch, given that Camelford actually died from a duel with a different man.

Soon after the challenge, Camelford attempted to commandeer another British ship officially under a superior (but absent) officer's control. The absent captain's lieutenant persisted in resisting Camelford's commands, so "Lord Camelford immediately put the pistol to his breast, and shot him through the body" (8). Extraordinarily, particularly since the incident happened before a large crowd of witnesses, Camelford was acquitted of mutiny. The *Mirror* cites the court-martial's exonerative decision at length--at much greater length than the offense. Summing up Camelford's character as captain, the physiology states, "In his professional duties he was a severe disciplinarian, and to his honor be it mentioned, he was particularly attentive to the comfort and relief of the sick" (10). The second statement, together with the specification that it is "to his honor," takes all possible sting out of the first.

Without such clockwork reassurance of his admirable qualities, it would be hard to maintain a positive view of the man; without praise he comes off like a hot-tempered bully. Even the *Mirror* must acknowledge that "[h]is irritable disposition . . . involved him in numberless quarrels and disputes" (21). For instance, he acted as ringleader at a riot in the Drury Lane Theatre, during which he repeatedly punched one Mr. Humphries without provocation until he "at last left him with one of his eyes almost beaten out, and wounded over the eye near the temple" (15). One night Camelford and a friend "took it into their heads to chastise the guardians of the night, for not

exercising due vigilance" (17); thereupon, they attacked four watchmen, severely wounding two. Camelford was known for picking fights with unoffending coffeehouse patrons; in fact, it was one such fight that led to his death. Having heard a rumor that one Mr. Best had said something against him, Camelford peremptorily challenged Best to a duel, ignoring the latter's strenuous denials and pleas for peace. That duel killed Camelford, quite senselessly.

Yet every time a shadow of criticism begins to lower over the sketch, it is exorcised by a sunny, glowing detail. For instance, to make Camelford's rather idiotic death more sympathetic, *The Eccentric Mirror* dilates upon his protracted death agonies, and chooses them for its summary engraving. (Above the legend "Death of Lord Camelford," he appears semi-reclining, supported by two friends, sadly shaking the hand of his killer in forgiveness.[127]) The incident is even made into a lesson in piety:

> "I wish," says Mr. Cockburne [Camelford's clergyman], "with all my soul, that the unthinking votaries of dissipation and infidelity could have been present at the death bed of this poor man; could have heard his expression of contrition after misconduct, and of reliance on the mercy of his Creator, could have heard his dying exhortation to one of his intimate friends, to live in future a life of peace and virtue: I think it would have made impressions on their minds, as it did on mine, not easily to be effaced." (26)

Even his most memorable and foolhardy exploit--singlehandedly "to repair

[127] The engraving is not strictly accurate: Camelford did not die on the "field of honor" but at home, several days later, from complications of the bullet wound--which Best tried to decline to inflict, after Camelford's shot missed. This factual inaccuracy underscores the picture's ameliorative function; the point is not to show how the incident really happened but to make Camelford look better, less impulsive and threatening.

to Paris, and in the midst of their capital to attack the rulers of the hostile country" (10)--makes Camelford seem a kind of Quixote, in the admirable sense of one pursuing lofty if impractical goals. To storm a foreign capital all alone: to dream the impossible dream! In addition to the task's impossibility--he made the attempt in 1799, during wartime--"the mere act of embarking for France [was] a capital crime" (13). But again, the *Mirror* and the crown laud his patriotism and verve, reasoning that "he had been influenced by no other motive, than the wish to render a service to his country" (12). Ah, well, then.

Such are the more subtle whitewashing techniques employed by the physiologies. Frequently, though, the collections more explicitly declare subjects good at heart, or visibly benevolent, in spite of personal oddities--especially subjects who on the face of things already look fairly innocuous (unlike Camelford, for instance). In this way, the physiologies continue the defense of eccentrics epitomized by late eighteenth-century writers such as Sterne and Smollett: "they're weird but they're harmless. You've got to love them." Take, for example, the case of Henry Lee Warner, Esq., an "*extraordinary but truly amiable* man" (*Mirror* 1: "Warner" 23; emphasis added). The "but" here, like the qualificatory clauses highlighted just below, reveals the (continuing) underlying belief that oddity is not valued in itself; that *despite* being "extraordinary" he managed also to be "amiable." Warner slept all day and walked his grounds all night, dressed--like Sir Roger de Coverley--after the fashion of "the English gentleman of the last age: a gold-laced coat and waistcoat, with deep slash-worked sleeves, and richly embossed buttons, a deep chitterlin of rich yellow lace, curve-toed shoes, and oblong buckles" (23). He often found trespassers depredating his forests, because it was well known that he would not prosecute; "yet when during his midnight

walk any of the offenders were perceived by him, he would mildly exclaim, 'Take care how you get down that tree, or you may hurt yourself" (24). The *Mirror* reiterates, in summary, "Mr. Warner, *with all his peculiarities*, was endowed with a thousand qualities which do honour to the heart of man" (25; emphasis added). The *Mirror*'s similar defense of playwright Charles Macklin even uses the word "eccentricities": "Such was Macklin, to whom, *notwithstanding all his eccentricities*, may be applied the character given by Dr. Johnson of Mr. Thomas Sheridan, that were mankind divided into two classes of good and bad, he would stand considerably within the former" (4: "Macklin" 39; emphasis added).

Even people who were "eccentric" only physically are generally specified to have been good-hearted. Even their bodily difference is domesticated for the reader's comfort. For instance, it is said (in racist fashion) of John Richardson Pimrose Bobey that "for one of the African race, [he] may be considered handsome," and that "there are many *white* characters who would be found more *black* and fuller of *blemishes* than this Spotted Negro (*Mirror* 2: "Bobey" 33; emphases in original). Patrick Cotter, "commonly called Patrick O'Brien; or, The Irish Giant," reached the alarming height of eight feet; he is pictured reaching down toward the three-foot Joseph Boruwlaski, who only comes up to his knees. But this potentially monstrous character is described as "unoffending and amiable in his manners to his friends and acquaintance, of whom he had, in the last years of his life, a pretty extensive circle, as he was neither averse to a cheerful glass nor to pleasant company" (1: "Cotter" 32). Daniel Lambert, the world's fattest man, is said to have been so humane in his work as prison-keeper that "[f]ew left the prison without testifying their gratitude, and tears often bespoke the sincerity of the feelings they expressed" (1: "Lambert" 11). The *Mirror* even

puns that Lambert was "the *greatest* man in the British empire" (34). No matter what the nature of subjects' oddities, the physiologies found a way to make them seem less threatening and strange.

Frequently physiologies' pleas for amused tolerance of eccentricity are made in terms that had become traditional by 1800: sketches often employ the word "hobby-horse," which *Tristram Shandy* had lastingly associated with eccentricity;[128] or else they describe eccentrics in specifically quixotic detail, in the manner of Addison, Steele, Smollett, and Sterne. For example, the Fairlop Fair became Daniel Day's (see below) "principal hobby-horse" (*Mirror* 3: "Day" 31), and as Sterne might have written, "no man was ever injured by [it]" (33). The following characterization of philanthropist Mr. Mathew sounds equally Sternean: "There are very few men who have not some hobby-horse, but yet it would be extremely difficult to find one who would, like Mr. Mathew, sacrifice the enjoyment of a princely fortune to the pleasure of riding his favorite nag" (3: "Mathew" 22). References to Don Quixote similarly abound. The addle-pated Reverend George Harvest, for instance, had an unfortunate accident which destroyed his chances of marrying, while riding "upon the road upon his Rosinante" (1: "Harvest" 18). Harvest was also, like the Knight, thought mad while abroad (in Lyons), and consequently was briefly confined for treatment. The eccentric barber Robert Forster possessed a "famous silver Mambrino's helmet, decorated in its centre with *the barber's arms*" (2: "Forster" 36; emphasis in original). "Dicky" Dart, "the wooden grocer" is a kind of third-generation Quixote: like the quixotic Sir Roger de Coverley, Dart lost his sanity by "his having, in early life, been disappointed in his honourable overtures" toward a woman.

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[128] According to the *OED*, Sterne did not coin the word; it had been in use since the late sixteenth century, and since the late seventeenth in the sense Sterne means. Sterne infused the word with eccentric significance.

The preceding examples show how physiologies plead for amused *tolerance* of eccentricity, in both the specialized ("*the* eccentric") and general ("deviant") senses. In addition, the physiologies present certain benevolent lives quite plainly for readers' *admiration*. For example, readers are encouraged to venerate one Mr. Mathew, who, during Jonathan Swift's time, spent all his "princely fortune" (*Mirror* 3: "Mr. Mathew" 22) on keeping a huge, hospitable house for any visitors who wished to stop by. There, like King Arthur, Mathew insisted upon no order of precedence at table. In like manner, Daniel Day--who also "had many other eccentricities, [which] were unoffending in their nature" (3: "Day" 33)--exemplified benevolence in founding and funding an annual fair, for which he provided beans and bacon for all comers. Day was "a devout christian, a sincere friend, a good master, and an honest man; he was just without austerity, liberal without profusion, free without intemperance, and lively without excess: in fine, he lived merry and wise, and died universally revered and lamented" (35). Hugh Smith, the doctor who published *Essay on the Blood* in 1759, "benevolently set apart two days for the poor in each week; from those that were very poor he never took a fee" (4: "Hugh Smith" 16), and from middle-class patients, no more than half a crown. Lives such as these are remarkable mainly for their exemplary benevolence, and are included in physiologies for readers' edification and admiration.

The link between eccentricity and benevolence seems to have been forged so lastingly in the eighteenth century that it continues to hold in the nineteenth, even where there is little apparent support. That is, "eccentricity" in the specialized sense became associated with benevolence in the ways described in previous chapters. "Eccentricity" in the more general sense featured in physiologies becomes conflated with the other sense, and so,

with somewhat limited success, adopts or continues the other sense's conventions and traditions. Consequently, misers, primarily, are routinely declared to have been benevolent in their own way. The reasoning appears to be: they are "eccentric," i.e. deviant, so they must have been benevolent, as well. For example, a sketch of John Elwes's life describes him as irredeemably tight-fisted and unkind, but then, in a poem, refers to his "virtue and vice in firmest tints combin'd/ . . . And av'rice coupled with benevolence" (*Mirror* 3: "Elwes" 35). Where, again, were the virtue and benevolence? Similarly, Daniel Dancer ate long-rotten meat, wore his unwashed clothes until they fell off him, and refused his dying sister medical care rather than spend any of his several-hundred-thousand-pound hoard. Nevertheless, the *Mirror*'s editors visibly strain to redeem him as benevolent:

> Notwithstanding his great penury, Mr. Dancer possessed some praiseworthy qualities. He observed the most rigid integrity in every transaction, and he was never averse to assist those of whom he entertained a good opinion, and whose embarrassments required a temporary aid; but, at the same time, it must be confessed, he did not lend his money without expecting the usual interest. (1: "Dancer" 11)

In other words, yes, he'd help a person in a jam--for a price. If he liked him. And, well, he was always punctual...about collecting the interest. That is the best that can be said of Dancer, by the *Mirror*'s own account; these are "praiseworthy qualities"?

Much of what I've described in the last ten pages as characteristic of the physiologies is really more characteristic of early than late ones (obviously, since my primary example is the often-pirated *Eccentric Mirror*). The important distinction between early and late physiologies is that late ones did

not even need to work to domesticate their subjects' potentially unnerving characteristics. Later subjects are not whitewashed before our eyes, as in the early physiologies, but rather, they *come* that way. The most threatening character in *Sketches of Young Ladies*, for example, is the "manly young lady." Her most frightening quality: she skillfully rides a horse. The most threatening character in *Sketches of Young Gentlemen* is probably the "political young gentleman," who argues about political issues in public--mostly with other political young gentlemen. He can sometimes be a bit of a bore: the horror, the horror. No truly awful quality ever appears; as Benjamin summarizes, physiological subjects *circa* 1840 are completely "harmless and of perfect bonhomie" (37).

If a somewhat frightening or unsympathetic character from the recent past, made innocuous, could provide comfort, then one from the present who is innocuous through and through could offer that much more. The former might do a little to help reconcile readers to difference in general; the latter could do much to reconcile readers to their particular, current situation. Thus, as social conditions in Great Britain grew to resemble those Engels and De Quincey describe, and as general anxiety consequently mounted, physiological subjects came more and more to resemble the very people one saw *right then*, every day, on the city streets. *Those* people were worrisome, so those people were presented in a thoroughly unworrisome manner. Physiologies, focusing their attentions to fit their times' cultural needs, cut out foreign and rural portraits, along with the merely interesting (e.g., tales of court intrigue and of amazing survivals) and, most importantly, all unsettling characteristics from all subjects. Furthermore, the physiologies deeply generalized, turning portraits of individuals into even shorter sketches of types, abstractions being by nature less threatening than particular

cases. One can be directly and unwelcomely menaced by the latter, whereas one can simply choose not to think about the former.

In these ways, physiologies functioned to make the industrial era's new society more bearable. Because it was, as Benjamin explains, the act of looking at strangers in cities that fed anxiety, physiologies were shaped[129] so as to make that act more comfortable, even enjoyable. They assisted readers in the art of convincing themselves that what they saw would not hurt them.

ii. Science, Codification, and the Eccentric as Species

The physiologies were one major influence upon the eccentric's development during the Romantic era; the progress of science was the other. In order to set up my discussion of the ways in which this force changed conceptions of eccentricity, I will first describe the time's scientific climate. So: in this time, and particularly "[i]n the years after Waterloo, scientific invention was of passionate interest to a rapidly expanding British and international public" (Johnson 543). And not only scientific invention, or technological advances, but science in general. Really, for the moment, science *was* general, in two senses. It was widely accessible: "it was still possible for a moderately well-educated man or even woman . . . to grasp the latest scientific developments" (543). And it was as yet uncompartmentalized: despite some minority dissent,[130] the dominant British culture "saw art and science, industry and nature as a continuum of creation and the quest for knowledge as a common activity, shared by

[129] By...whom? Physiologies *circa* 1840 have (several) authors' names attached; early ones have none. Obviously particular people rather than the culture at large wrote the early physiologies. However, with anonymity being the standard, and the physiologies so plainly speaking to general cultural needs, it is difficult to avoid speaking in passive voice upon occasions such as this. To say definitively, "X and Y shaped the physiologies," as opposed to "physiologies were shaped,"is difficult on multiple levels.

[130] See, for instance, Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*.

chemists and poets, painters and engineers, inventors and philosophers alike" (583). In other words, the Enlightenment ideal still obtained: knowledge of all kinds should (and could) be shared by all. As Raymond Williams shows, the Romantic concept of "science" had not yet come to resemble our own--namely, "as expressing physical and experimental science, to the exclusion of theological and metaphysical"; involving "a particular and highly successful model of neutral methodical observer and external object of study" (which "became generalized, not only as science, but as *fact* and *truth* and *reason* or rationality"); and performed by a "scientist," i.e., a specialist trained to perform such studies. These meanings were fairly solidly in place by the end of the Romantic period, and were "perhaps more complete in English than in most comparable languages" (*Keywords* 278-79; emphases in original). Still, early in the period especially, this was not the case; it was only *beginning* to be so.

Science, then, was both relatively nonexclusive and essentially of one piece. To illustrate: Humphry Davy, who was credited with inventing the safety lamp that saved thousands of miners' lives, gave a series of scientific lectures during the first decade of the century. His first "Introductory Chemistry" course was delivered to over 300 people, "including many society ladies who sent Davy sonnets and love tokens"; he became a kind of sex symbol. Thereafter, he "gave lectures on minerology, on geology, on the applications of chemistry to agriculture," and on other scientific topics, always to large, enthusiastic audiences (Johnson 546). Earlier, in 1800, he had published *Researches, Chemical and Philosophical*,[131] a combination of topics that strikes the twentieth-century reader as incongruous.

Charles Lyell's work similarly illustrates early nineteenth-century

[131] Along these lines, the term "natural philosophy" was still used for "science."

science's accessible and unified qualities. In the *Principles of Geology*, which was published between 1830 and 1833 and read by a large and diverse British audience,[132] Lyell relates the history of the world as gleaned from observing geologic formations and the characteristics of animals and humans, and reading and verifying previous scientific writers' accounts. Respectively, its three volumes detail geologic change over time, developments in the plant and animal kingdoms,[133] and the formation of geologic features such as mountains and of the globe itself. Lyell recognizes no boundaries between these diverse regions of science, which are now fairly rigidly divided into the separate "fields" of geology, botany, anthropology, human medicine, and zoology. As Mary Somerville, writer of the popular science text *On the Connection of the Physical Sciences* observed in 1834, "in all [branches of science] there exists such a bond of union, that proficiency cannot be obtained in any one without a knowledge of the others" (Preface; unpaginated).

Likewise, most of the icons of Romanticism--Coleridge, Wordsworth, Percy and Mary Shelley, and Byron--did not recognize or perpetuate disciplinary boundaries. Coleridge and Wordsworth, for instance, were longtime friends of Davy's, and held frequent philosophico-scientific discussions. Mary and Percy Shelley knew *of* Davy and admired his work.

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[132] Martin J. S. Rudwick calls the book "on any reckoning one of the most important books ever published in the earth sciences . . . [Lyell's] concept of 'the uniformity of nature' that the *Principles* embodied and exemplified gave the book a seminal influence on nineteenth-century culture in general, and helped to define what it means to be 'scientific'" (*Principles* 1:vii). "Uniformity of nature" means viewing natural history as a long, uniform, slowly incremental process, as opposed to "catastrophism," the belief in naturally or supernaturally caused cataclysms (the sudden appearance of mountains, Noah's flood). Forming natural-historical narratives that accord with the uniform view requires "the scientific method" as described by Williams, above--not the reading of scripture, and not the exercise of reason independent of meticulously gathered evidence (e.g., arguing by first causes).

[133] See the discussion of Cuvier, below.

Paul Johnson writes, "When Byron, Shelley and his wife[134] sat down by the shores of the Lake of Geneva, their theme was the beauty and poetry of electricity" (583). Percy Shelley, perhaps the most esoteric of Romantic poets, was bitten particularly hard by the science bug:

> In 1808, while a schoolboy in Dr. Bethel's house in Eton, he had electrified the doctor, who put his hand on a doorknob Shelley had connected to a Voltaic pile. He also blew up a tree stump with gunpowder he had made, and the doctor claimed he found him sitting in an alarming blue circle of spirit-flame trying to conjure up the devil. . . . [A]t Oxford, . . . Shelley connected himself to an electrical battery charged by turning a handle rapidly and made his hair stand on end, and he told his friend Hogg he was building an "enormous" electrical kite, "or rather combination of kites, that would draw down from the sky an immense volume of electricity, the whole ammunition of a mighty thunderstorm, and this being directed to some point would there produce the most stupendous results." It was Shelley's noisy, smelly and dangerous experiments in his rooms at University College, almost as much as his public avowal of atheism, which led to his expulsion. (Johnson 547)

According to Maurice Hindle, Mary Shelley read Davy's 1812 book *Elements of Chemical Philosophy* (that word "philosophy" again) and 1802 *A Discourse, Introductory to a Course of Lectures on Chemistry*, both during the fall of 1816. These books underlie *Frankenstein*, which was composed shortly afterwards. There, Shelley has Victor successfully assemble his "secret of life"

[134] Johnson's earlier comment that *even* a moderately well-educated woman could grasp the latest scientific advances *can* be read to mean that women's educations at the time tended not to be as extensive as men's. But to dismiss Mary Shelley as simply "[Percy's] wife" is undeniably gender-biased.

out of bits of learning from diverse fields: the alchemy of the ancients (Paracelsus, Albertus Magnus, et al.--the same authors Pope, Swift, and company scoffed at in Scriblerus's *Memoirs*), mathematics, anatomy, and chemistry. Victor's best friend Henry Clerval "was deeply read in books of chivalry and romance"[135] (36), and later studies Indian languages and culture in preparation for a career as a colonist, enlisting Victor's help. The two men, respective embodiments of science and of art, are the closest and most compatible of friends. Only many years after *Frankenstein*'s composition would the conditions be appropriate for Wordsworth to lament of Davy, "His scientific pursuits had hurried his mind into a course where I could not follow him, and had diverted it in proportion from objects with which I was best acquainted" (Johnson 626). For only later, gradually, did the rift between art and science appear and widen for the dominant culture.

Early in the nineteenth century, then, science appeared to be fully compatible with all other knowledge and accessible to anyone; and it had, in the preceding few decades, achieved astonishing technological advancements. Many of these new mechanical wonders--particularly the railroad and the

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[135] In the 1831 edition, Mary Shelley adds an intriguing detail: one of Clerval's favorite fictional characters is specified to be Amadis. The other famous literary character who loves Amadis is Don Quixote. Hindle notes that "*Don Quixote* was one of the books Mary Shelley was reading during the composition of *Frankenstein*," and furthermore, that "[b]oth Don Quixote and Frankenstein start with the noble intention of helping their fellow-creatures, but their aspirations are doomed by their pursuit of a 'single vision,' one that takes them further and further away from satisfying the moderate needs of the community, and nearer and nearer to a personally tragic denouement" (xxxiv). See the Author's Introduction from 1831, too: "Every thing must have a beginning, to speak in Sanchean phrase" (8). Cervantes's novel was evidently on Shelley's mind both when she originally composed *Frankenstein* and years later when she revised it. And so here is another instance of the now-attenuated but still persisting Quixotic influence upon the history of eccentricity: Frankenstein as Quixote.

One other detail supports this connection: as a child, Robert Walton, who shares Frankenstein's scientific fervor, "read with ardour the accounts of the various voyages which have been made in the prospect of arriving at the North Pacific Ocean through the seas which surround the pole." He found these accounts in a library as monomaniacally focused as Quixote's: "a history of all the voyages made for purposes of discovery composed the whole of our good uncle Thomas's library." Walton comments, "These volumes were my study day and night" (14). As with Quixote, the constant, monomaniacal study inspired Walton's later quest.

amazingly fast factory machines--were newly and strikingly visible every day to most of the British population. No wonder science's possibilities looked unlimited. It looked like humankind was on the brink of learning everything about everything--about the physical world, about plants and animals, about the human body and human nature. Scientific and literary authors alike registered this sense of excitement and power. For instance, Davy writes:

> Science has . . . bestowed upon [man] powers which may be called almost creative; which have enabled him to change and modify the beings surrounding him, and by his experiments to interrogate nature with power, not simply as a scholar, passive and seeking only to understand her operations, but rather as a master, active with his own instruments . . . [W]ho would not be ambitious of becoming acquainted with the most profound secrets of nature; of ascertaining her hidden operations; and of exhibiting to man that system of knowledge which relates so intimately to their own physical and moral constitution? (*Chemistry* 16)

In Mary Shelley's novel, Victor Frankenstein's imagination is fired by a speech very similar in content and tone, delivered by Professor Waldman:

> [Modern chemists], whose hands seem only made to dabble in dirt, and their eyes to pore over the microscope or crucible, have indeed performed miracles. They penetrate into the recesses of nature, and show how she works in her hiding-places. They ascend into the heavens: they have discovered how the blood circulates, and the nature of the air we breathe. They have acquired new and almost unlimited powers; they can command

> the thunders of heaven, mimic the earthquake, and even mock the invisible world with its own shadows. (46-47)

Inspired, Victor vows to himself, "So much has been done, . . . --more, far more, will I achieve; treading in the steps already marked, I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation" (47).

That was the crux: *exploring unknown* powers and unfolding the deepest *mysteries* of creation. As in the above quotations, Nature tended to be cast as possessing hidden mysteries which the searching scientist[136] would find and reveal. Scientists did not construct knowledge; rather, they discovered it. Scientific discoveries were just that, in the older sense of the word--dis-covering, *un*covering, revealing that which objectively existed *a priori*: namely, "natural law," the unbreakable rules by which the universe governs itself. The mystery was, how, precisely, was the law formulated? How did it work? What did it demand? Once decoded by the help of methodical, "scientific" experiments and observations--not composed, not invented, but deciphered--it could be as stated as confidently as one could read aloud a law from the Magna Carta. Natural law simply *was*--much as it is for us today.

As Williams notes, the conception of Nature as "constitutional lawyer" actually originated in the previous century (*Keywords* 222). Pope, for instance, wrote, "Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night;/ God said, Let Newton be! and all was light!" In other words, Newton found, decoded, and

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[136] As many critics have observed, there is a distinct masculinist slant to the era's scientific tropes: the scientist was assumed to be male, with Nature generally cast as female; scientists masterfully "probe" "her" innermost secrets, which she unavailingly attempts to "veil." See, for example, Georges Cuvier: "Calculation, if we may so express it, thus commands nature, and determines her phenomena more exactly than observation can make them known; experiment compels her to unveil; while observation pries into her secrets when refractory, and endeavours to surprise her" (1:3). For one good study of this trope, see Easlea.

revealed *a priori* facts and laws previously shrouded in mystery. Still, this trope became much more common, even standard, during the Romantic period; what was just emergent in Pope's day was part of the dominant culture by the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Thomas Malthus's hugely influential 1798[137] *Essay on the Principle of Population*, for instance, employs "natural law" to justify unequal division of property. The famous "principle" or natural law he discovered is that a civilization's ability to produce food for its members increases arithmetically (i.e., by addition), by means of steadily improving technology; but the same civilization's population will, if unchecked by natural thinning mechanisms such as famine, overcrowding, and disease, increase geometrically (i.e., by multiplication), doubling itself every twenty-five years. (For Malthus, an Anglican minister, birth control and abortion were not viable options although they were available.) By this "law," a civilization that could now produce exactly enough food to support all its members would also have exactly enough twenty-five years later; twenty-five years after that, only three-fourths could be fed; in another twenty-five years, one-half; in another twenty-five years, five-sixteenths. The gap between population and food supply steadily increases, necessitating the starvation of well over half the population in just a century. Under this ineluctable law, communal sharing means communal starvation: because there will eventually be insufficient resources for the civilization as a whole, if all members share ownership equally then all members will own increasingly small shares or "warrants." By this reasoning, it is only reasonable and natural that some should possess more than others. Since some *must* starve, they might as well do so; better

[137] Here is an interesting and telling coincidence: Malthus's *Essay* was published in the same year as Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*. Even while a new emphasis upon the individual, the emotions, and the mystical or irrational was coming into being, so was a new emphasis upon science, the technological, and the systematic.

that than that all should starve together. To help the needy is only to worsen the problem, because that only keeps more people alive, which in turn drains the general pool of resources even further. Those people will continue to reproduce, too, making the problem exponentially worse over time.

Thus, Malthus justifies an entire social and economic system with all its injustices as merely conforming to a natural law that he has discovered. It is impossible to exaggerate the frequency of his references to the "laws of nature" (159), "the inevitable laws of nature" (206), "the book of nature" (158), the "fixed laws of our nature" (11), etc., plus the concomitant "musts" and "necessaries."[138] He claims merely to read this law, this "book of nature," not to write it; this is "just the way things are."

The search for natural law could be, and was, carried even farther, into a search for a total natural *system*. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno have argued that this is in fact the ultimate goal of all Enlightenment science: "its ideal is the system from which all and everything follows" (7). For an excellent example, examine Georges Cuvier's landmark study, *The Animal Kingdom Arranged in Conformity with Its Organization*. Although this influential work was first published in France in 1817, it was read by many Britons--by several thousands more after it was translated into English in 1827. New English editions and abridgements appeared almost yearly through the thirties. There, Cuvier states directly: "Natural history then should be based on what is called a *system of nature*--or, a great catalogue, in which all created beings have suitable names, may be recognized by

[138] Interestingly, Malthus argues that while natural law rules our lives, and we constantly struggle against it, we can never know more than a tiny fraction of it. Understanding *all* natural law would "repress future exertion, and . . . damp the soaring wings of intellect" (384); therefore, God keeps total understanding forever beyond our grasp. We *should* try to learn all, but we never will. This view aligns Malthus more with eighteenth-century thinkers than with the more scientifically sanguine ones of the nineteenth century; with the believers in mystery, rather than with those who believed they would find the secrets to all mysteries.

distinctive characters, and be arranged in divisions and subdivisions, themselves named and characterised, in which they may be found" (1:3-4; emphasis in original). *The Animal Kingdom* attempts to provide just such a system: elaborating upon Lamarck's classifications and Linnæus's two-word species-naming system, Cuvier divides all creatures into four divisions (Mollusca, Articulata, Vertebrata, and Radiata), then into the "genera, tribes, familes, orders, class[es] . . . and divisions which constitute the community of the animal kingdom" (1:xxi). As is generally the case with natural law, Cuvier claims merely to catalogue and explicate "the conditions of existence" (1:4)--i.e., simple, objective facts, the way things are--not to impose a system of his own invention.

By Cuvier's system, a creature identified and placed according to its "distinctive character" is *determined*: the system and process of identification marks the creature's place within the hierarchy of all creatures. As Cuvier explains, "[W]e[139] employ an assiduous comparison of beings, directed by the principle of the *subordination of characters*" (1:4; emphasis in original). His is indeed a system "from which all and everything follows": an individual creature's form and habits reveals its species, tribe, family, order, class, and division, and these qualities reveal its natural, proper niche in the animal kingdom,[140] and concomitantly, the way it should be viewed and treated. Cuvier sums up his scientific goals thus: "There can be but one perfect method, which is the *natural method*. . . . This method is the *ideal* to which natural history should tend; for it is evident that if we can reach it, we shall have the exact and complete expression of nature" (1:5; emphases in original). Everything in the world will be known and disposed of properly.

[139] The royal "we"; he worked and wrote alone, and here refers only to himself, as far as I can discover.

[140] The metaphor of the kingdom, with its implications of rigid, intricate hierarchy, is quite apt.

Malthus's appeal to natural law as a sanction for bad news has a slight, insincerely apologetic ring to it--something like a bank clerk's saying he's sorry, but bank policy forbids his granting a loan to one in your circumstances; it's not his decision to make. When later Romantic-era writers discuss natural law, however, they tend to do so triumphantly, with a sense of proud excitement in their own or science-in-general's progress. They sound more like Cuvier than like Malthus. For instance, De Quincey found David Ricardo's famous book *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817) so invigorating that it gave him "a pleasure and an activity which I had not known for years"--all because "Mr Ricardo had deduced, *à priori*, from the understanding itself, *laws* which first gave a ray of light into the unwieldy chaos of materials, and had constructed what had been but a collection of tentative discussions into a science of regular proportions, now first standing on an eternal basis" (100-101; emphasis added). Merely reading another's translation of the book of nature stirred De Quincey from the torpor in which he was then mired. Somerville reports with evident satisfaction in the *Connection's* Preface, "The progress of modern science, especially within the last five years, has been remarkable for a tendency to simplify the laws of nature" (unpaginated). She proudly contributes directly to that worthy cause, "endeavour[ing] to make out the laws by which the material world is governed" (Dedication; unpaginated). And Mary Shelley's Victor Frankenstein rhapsodizes:

> The world was to me a secret which I desired to divine. Curiosity, earnest research to learn the *hidden laws of nature*, gladness akin to rapture, as *they were unfolded to me*, are among the earliest sensations I can remember. . . . It was the *secrets of heaven and earth* that I desired to learn; and whether it

> was the outward substance of things, or the inner spirit of nature and the mysterious soul of man that occupied me, still my enquiries were directed to the metaphysical, or in its highest sense, the *physical secrets* of the world. (36-37; emphases added)

He accomplishes his goal: he divines the secret of life itself. Although Shelley warns against the *consequences* of learning and exploiting hidden natural laws, she does show Victor unquestionably *able* to do so. His difficulty is to keep the secret from the questing Robert Walton, not to find the secret in the first place. Mary Shelley's husband Percy, writing as the author of the novel, argues that far from its describing an impossible fantasy, "The event on which this fiction is founded, has been supposed, by Dr Darwin, and some of the physiological writers of Germany [i.e., the scientific experts], as not of impossible occurrence" (11). For the Shelleys as for Great Britain generally, in Somerville's words, "Science [was] regarded as the pursuit of truth" (2)--a thrilling, eminently successful and productive pursuit.

As indicated above, science was already widely accessible before and into the Romantic era; but now, seen as producing amazing new technologies and eternal natural laws, science demanded new high levels of prestige and influence. "Scientific" thinking--e.g., the assumption that neutral, detached, systematic, expert observation yields truth statable in the form of objectively existing natural law; the search for a total system, particularly one of classification; the equation of "the scientific approach" with reason itself--entered all areas of the dominant culture. As Thomas Carlyle puts it in "Signs of the Times" (1829), "It is admitted, on all sides, that the Metaphysical and Moral Sciences are falling into decay, while the Physical are engrossing, every day, more respect and attention" (63). Furthermore, he writes, "Intellect, the power man has of knowing and believing, is now nearly

synonymous with Logic, or the mere power of arranging and communicating" (74). Cuvier, for one, recognizes this process already underway, and welcomes it. He reassures the reader that he has personally verified all changes to old systems by means of careful experiments and observation; then, pleased with himself and with science, he continues:

> This habit, necessarily acquired in the study of natural history, of the mental classification of a great number of ideas, is one of the advantages of that science which is seldom observed, and which, when it shall have been generally introduced into the system of common education, will become, perhaps, the principal one. By it the student is exercised in that part of logic which is termed method . . . Now this art of method, once well acquired, may be applied, with infinite advantage, to studies the most foreign to natural history. Every discussion implying a classification of facts, every inquiry which demands a distribution of materials, is performed according to the same laws; and the young man who had cultivated this science merely for amusement, is surprised, when he makes the experiment, at the facilities it affords him in disentangling all kinds of affairs. (1:xxiii-xxiv)

Nothing could not be approached "scientifically"--so everything was.

Although Cuvier was French, he perfectly describes developments in Great Britain, as well. For example, De Quincey, who was certainly no scientist, refers frequently to his opium experiences as "experiments." In fact, in the brief article "Madness," part of his *Notes from the Pocket-book of a Late Opium-Eater* series (1823-24), he supports his theory that the liver, not the brain, produces madness, with "my own experiments directed to this very question, under the use of opium" (*Works* 10:446). Having systematically

varied dosage sizes and periods between doses, he comes to the conclusion that "the power of the biliary functions to affect and to modify the power of thinking according to the degree in which they were themselves affected, and in a way far different from the action of good or bad spirits, was prodigious, and gave me a full revelation of the way in which insanity begins to collect and form itself" (10:447). (Note the word "revelation," which again communicates the assumption that he is not constructing but merely finding and uncovering an eternal, *a priori* natural law.)

Carlyle saw the growing influence of science and systems, and expressed his repugnance towards it. His opinion, which was shared or even entertained by decreasing numbers of Britons during the period, is that whereas "machinery" broadly conceived--not only mechanical devices but also areligious systems of thought that purport to explain all by means of experiment and logic--was once a useful servant, it has now become a tyrannical master. Machinery horribly and thoroughly--but unnecessarily--rules everyone's lives. "[Now] is the Age of machinery, in every outward and inward sense of that word," Carlyle writes. "Not the external and physical alone is now managed by machinery, but the internal and spiritual also. Here too nothing is left to be accomplished by old natural methods" (59-61). (In appealing to the "old natural methods," he actually bolsters the concept of "natural law" which formed a cornerstone of the scientific thought he hated so much.) "These things, which we state lightly enough here, are yet of deep import, and indicate a mighty change in our whole manner of existence. For the same habit regulates not our modes of action alone, but our modes of thought and feeling" (62).

All this has happened because "a new trade . . . has arisen among us, under the name of 'Codification,' or codemaking in the abstract; whereby any

people, for a reasonable consideration, may be accommodated with a patent code;--more easily than curious individuals with patent breeches, for the people does *not* need to be measured first" (68). Codification *seems* natural, "as if it could never have been otherwise," but, Carlyle insists, "it has been and might again be otherwise" (68). The damage need not be permanent, for "[t]his deep, paralysed subjection to physical objects comes not from Nature, but from our own unwise mode of *viewing* Nature" (80-81). Change our mode of viewing and we change our thought and feeling; stop thinking scientifically, mechanistically, and we can escape our current slavery to machinery, to science, to Codification.

Again, however, this was a minority view expressed by an unusually prescient individual. The dominant culture's tendency was to embrace the machinery enthusiastically. And so--to return at last to the eccentric--science deeply altered the concept of eccentricity during the Romantic period. Perhaps the best way to begin detailing just *how* the concept changed is to return to the word itself. As noted above, "eccentric" was not used as a noun until 1832; before then, it only appeared as an adjective, usually describing an astronomical orbit or geometric shape. To be more precise now, *before 1800* the word was rarely used to describe people, but after then it was used that way with increasing frequency. The physiologies quite frequently do so, for example, in titles like *Portraits and Lives of Remarkable and Eccentric Characters* (1819) and *Biographical Sketches of Eccentric Characters* (1832). (*The Eccentric Mirror* [1807] and *The Eccentric Magazine* [1812], earlier titles published before "eccentric"'s new usage had completely solidified, use the adjective but only point to "*the* eccentric" indirectly, by way of a "mirror" and a "magazine.") The sketches, too, employ the adjective this way. *The Eccentric Mirror* says of Lord Rokeby that he "indulged himself in the

gratification of those eccentric whims, for which he afterwards became so distinguished" (1: "Rokeby" 9). Christopher Pivett was an "eccentric artist" (2: "Pivett" 8) who never slept in a bed; the miser Thomas Day, Esq., an "original and truly eccentric character" (2: "Day" 20). Inventor Martin Van Butchell was "one of the most eccentric characters to be found in the British metropolis" (3: "Van Butchell" 16).[141] As the last two examples show, the adjectival "eccentric" often modified the noun "character." This explains a couple of things: first, the relative ease and rapidity with which "eccentric" moved from its new adjectival usage to the nominative. Shortening "an eccentric character" to "an eccentric" is a logical, convenient verbal shortcut, much like "blind people" to "the blind." And second, this accounts for the use of "character" as synonymous with the nominative "eccentric," as in, "He's a real character." The *OED* lists Oliver Goldsmith as the first to use "character" this way, in his 1773 play *She Stoops to Conquer*: "but he's a character, and I'll humour him." Still, significantly, the next listed usage in this sense is dated *1832*, from George Downes's *Letters from Continental Countries*: "'Abi lassa,' added with a sigh the old man, who was a bit of a character." In any case, the adjective "eccentric," like the concept, was so well established by 1832 that it became a noun.

As I've indicated above, though, "eccentric" as in, say, *The Eccentric Mirror* means something very different from "eccentric" in *St. Ronan's Well.* The word was not really used in the eighteenth century, but a very particular set of characteristics came to be clustered together; a definite *concept* of "the eccentric" existed although a *word* for it did not. In the first couple of decades of the nineteenth century, "eccentric"'s sense was still very close to its original astronomical/geometrical sense. It carried a metaphorical meaning

[141] To reinforce the argument made in the first section: note the connection here between the city, eccentricity, and a physiology.

so simple and direct it was almost literal: ex-centric, outside the center of the dominant culture; different; deviant. Hence it could and did describe a wide variety of people of both genders and from all social strata who were different: dwarves, giants, court intriguers, actors, transvestites, misers, survivors of horrible ordeals, and now-familiar benevolent, quixotic "characters." Before long, though, by 1832, the word became specialized to mean a *particular kind* of different person, a species similar in most ways to "the eccentric" as he appears in eighteenth-century works such as *Tristram Shandy* or *Launcelot Greaves.* In summary, the concept of "the eccentric" existed in the eighteenth century but had no name; then after 1800 the adjective "eccentric" was used, but much more broadly than the narrowly defined, nameless eighteenth-century figure (the figure would have fit the adjective's signification, but would have been only one figure among a multitude); and finally, late in the Romantic period, the word came to signify much the same concept it had before 1800.

The explanation for this curious and rapid progress lies in science's development during the period. Specifically, the culture-wide scientific search for natural law, for total systems, came to bear directly upon the conception of eccentricity. The desire for such systems and laws was "in the air," as it were, from about the turn of the century onwards. For instance, *Bewick's History of British Birds,* which is more accurately described as an attempt to catalogue all birds one might find anywhere in the world, was first published in 1797, then again in 1804.[142] Cuvier published his *Animal Kingdom* in 1817, having published the preliminary studies *Elementary Survey of the Natural History of Animals* in 1797 and *Lessons in*

[142] This book forms part of young Jane Eyre's reading, in the first chapter of Charlotte Brontë's novel. Jane is struck with the *History*'s description of the climate in "Lapland, Siberia, Spitzbergen, Nova Zembla, Iceland, Greenland[, and] the Arctic Zone" (*Jane Eyre* 8). My information on *Bewick's* comes from Margaret Smith's editorial note.

Comparative Anatomy from 1800 to 1805. Malthus published the *Essay on the Principle of Population* in 1797; Davy, systems of chemistry in 1802 and 1812. Mary Shelley's character Victor Frankenstein finds the very system of life in her novel of 1818. And the physiologies both express and satisfy this same cultural desire.[143]

As for expressing the desire for systems and laws: *The Eccentric Mirror*'s statement, for instance, that "[i]n the catalogue of eccentric misers may with justice be ranked Mr. Samuel Stretch" (3: "Stretch" 17), implies that somewhere exists, or should exist, or might as well be written down because it exists in fact, a complete catalogue of eccentric misers. *Heads of the People,* published after the desire for systems had taken even firmer cultural hold, addresses the issue more directly. *Heads*'s editor explains that he will add to his now-partial catalogue later, indicating an assumption that the audience would expect comprehensiveness: "John Bull [i.e., England] has a numerous family; all more or less distinguished by the virtues, the humours, the follies, and the droll and melancholy constitution of their papa. We give here some fifty of his children: we shall present the world with at least half-a-hundred more" (vi).[144] And the author of *Sketches of Young Ladies* ("Quiz," otherwise unidentifiable) frames his physiology in explicitly Cuvierian terms, thoroughly in the language of science:

> We have often regretted, that while so much genius has of late years been employed in classifications of the animal and

[143] This seems like an appropriate place to acknowledge that I am aware of the irony inherent in my situation as critic: I too am looking for a system, for a network of general rules that explains the development of the concept of eccentricity. My analysis of systems is intended to be critical of those systems, to suggest that they could have been otherwise; and in making this analysis, I create a system of my own. All I can say is that I don't know how to get out of this loop. The ascension of scientific and systematic thinking described in this chapter is even more the norm today. I'm describing the first trotting footsteps down a path we're far along now.

[144] See the discussion of the natural law of eccentricity below. Here is a genealogy of eccentricity, indeed: Britons inherit it from "their papa," the nation itself.

> vegetable kingdom, the classification of young ladies has been totally and unaccountably neglected. And yet, who can doubt but that this beautiful portion of the creation exhibits as many, if not more, varieties than any system of botany yet published? Nature, indeed, seems to have exhibited here, more than in any other part of her works, her uncontrollable propensity of ranging at freedom . . . It was in vain that we waited for more than ten years in expectation of this philosophical theme being taken up by Cuvier, Dr. Lardner,[145] or Mrs. Somerville. . . . [T]he Linnæan [naming] system hath been observed in this classification . . . (7-8)

None of the acknowledged experts would write a comprehensive, classificatory catalogue, so he wrote one himself. At the end of the volume, he congratulates himself for having "described, to the best of our[146] zoological powers, two dozen classes of young ladies." There are others, he acknowledges, half-apologizing (like *Heads of the People*'s editor) for not presenting a *complete* catalogue; still, he claims, "we have selected the most striking and important classes at this present time existing in Great Britain" (110). Granted, this imposition of Cuvier's system upon British young ladies is made largely in jest; still, as Carlyle observes, "[c]onsidered as a metaphor, all this is well enough; but here, as in so many other cases, the 'foam hardens itself into a shell,' and the shadow we have wantonly evoked stands terrible before us and will not depart at our bidding" (66). Figures of speech become figures in fact. Even a joking application of "science" is both significant and effective; it both reveals the culture's desire (the joke only works in a context

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[145] Dionysius Lardner, whose doctorate degree was in letters, published several scientific texts, the later ones better known than the earlier. Among his works are *System of Algebraic Geometry* (1823), *Popular Lectures on the Steam Engine* (1828), *Popular Lectures on Astronomy* (1848), and *Animal Physics, or the Body and Its Functions Familiarly Explained* (1857).

[146] The royal "we" again. The brief volume's stylistic consistency does argue for one author.

where systems such as Cuvier's are familiar and welcome) and satisfies it (even a humorously applied system is still a system).

Speaking of satisfying the cultural desire for systems: the physiologies do so by their very existence. They not only speak of catalogues as good things, they *are* catalogues, inspired by the same beliefs and needs as *Bewick's Birds* and *The Animal Kingdom*. As catalogues, they perform a valuable cultural function. Specifically, in addition to ameliorating urban desire, as was discussed above, and closely bound up with that function, they allow readers to believe they are viewing all possible human deviation. Physiologies provide the illusion, comforting on multiple levels,[147] that readers can know all--all they have to do is read on. In fact, the physiologies claim as much. Remember the *Mirror*'s claim to include portraits of *"all such* as have gained celebrity or notoriety, by deviating in a remarkable degree from the ordinary course of human existence" (1:iii; emphasis added). The *Mirror* further claims, "There is scarcely any whim or caprice so absurd and ridiculous that we shall not find instances of it upon record" (1: "Prince of Palagonia" 31). Not only is there nothing *new* under the sun, there is nothing not already *on record* under the sun. Later physiologies make implicit claims to comprehensiveness simply by covering so many familiar types. As Benjamin puts it, again, "[f]rom the itinerant street vendor of the boulevards to the dandy in the foyer of the opera-house, there was not a figure . . . that was not sketched by a *physiologue*" (35). Whether or not this is

[147] Namely: there's no one so mysterious and awful out there to worry about--here are all the weirdos, and see how unmysterious and harmless they are? (see discussion of this point, above); and, thanks to science, humankind knows or will soon know everything about everything--this can only be for the better.

factually accurate[148] is unimportant; the fact that comprehensive catalogues, total systems, were considered desirable and were offered to the public *is*.

One basic requirement of the total system was that it be based on scientific, verifiable fact. Hence the physiologies' insistence upon their own factuality. The *Mirror*, for instance, claims to describe "only such characters as have really existed, and such events as have actually happened" (1:iv). *Portraits and Lives* similarly insists, "those documents only have been preserved which could be depended upon for authenticity" (1:iii). One finds frequent asides like this one from the *Mirror*: "The reader might perhaps be inclined to doubt the authenticity of these particulars, did they not rest on the credit of persons of the highest respectability" (2: "Charles Dornery" 24). As with the claim to comprehensiveness, the twentieth-century critic can easily find ways to dispute this. One easy place to begin would be to point out that many if not most sketches rely primarily upon information gathered from the subject him- or herself--by the standards of scientific objectivity, the least reliable source possible. But again, the point is not whether or not the claim is true; the point is that it is *made*, that absolute factuality was considered important and desirable.

Ostensibly strictly factual and wholly comprehensive, the physiologies veritably spout oracular generalizations in the guise of natural law. Since the subjects of sketches are eccentrics broadly defined, many of these supposed natural laws relate to eccentrics or eccentricity. And since they are posed *as* natural laws, and as such unquestionably true, many of them are still with us today. One law that is *not* still current is propounded in the *Eccentric Mirror*:

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[148] Again, the irony: it is difficult-to-impossible to avoid employing the same terms and standards I'm engaged in critiquing--for instance, "factual accuracy." In any case ("case" being another scientific term), even the *Mirror*'s four thick volumes could not include sketches of *all* who had deviated "in a remarkable degree from the ordinary course of human existence." Not even in 1807.

"The character of the British seaman is compounded of undaunted courage and whimsical eccentricity. He performs the most ordinary actions in a way so peculiar to himself as to make them highly interesting, and by this singularity of manner he frequently renders the gravest subjects irresistibly ludicrous" (3: "Daniel Bryan" 2). In short, British sailors are naturally eccentric. This law, which now sounds just silly, exemplifies a pitfall built into the concept of natural law: supposedly eternal laws often prove themselves dated, and pass in and out of currency. Who, today, believes this law to be generally true? Certainly not as many as would accept this one: "In no class of mankind do we find more frequent instances of eccentricity than among men of extraordinary genius" (3: "Jonathan Swift" 1).[149] The *Mirror* uses Swift himself to exemplify the generalization. The following natural law, too, was first proffered during the nineteenth century but quickly seemed like timeless, obvious, natural fact (and still does):

> [N]o country affords so many instances of eccentric humor as the British islands, where it is to be found equally among the lowest as among the highest classes of society. The reason of this undoubtedly is, that each feeling himself perfectly independent of all others, gratifies the propensities and indulges the caprices peculiar to himself, heedless of the censures or approbation of all the rest of the world. (3: "Richard Dart" 18).

This universal British feeling is "an indirect eulogy on the political constitution and the laws under which the English enjoy the happiness of

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[149] For an excellent direct statement of this law, see Weeks and James's recent "scientific" study of eccentricity:

> [S]tandard IQ tests were a part of our procedure with all the subjects in the eccentrics project, and the results supported our *a priori* assumption that eccentrics tend to be above average in intelligence. The sample had an average IQ in the 115-120 range, more than one standard deviation above the norm; this places them in the top 10-15 percent of the population. (38)

Not only is the law true, they have the numbers to prove it.

living, and by which each individual is suffered to gratify every whim, fancy, and caprice, provided it be not prejudicial to his fellow-creatures" (1: "Henry Lee Warner, Esq." 22). That is, the superior British form of government grants freedom and independence to all British citizens of all classes; feeling this freedom, everyone of course indulges his or her eccentricities. Eccentricity, then, is a natural consequence of Great Britain's constitutional monarchy, an adaptation to the environment, as it were. Under a different, less perfect form of government, citizens would probably be as ordinary as those of other nations.[150]

Foucault has argued that "[d]iscursive practices are characterized by the delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge, and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories" (199). A discourse sets the standards by which knowledge and truth can be defined, produced, and expressed. One can observe the operation of this principle in the above examples. First, the speaker indicates distance between himself and his subject; he speaks of *those* people *out there*, sailors and geniuses. Even when referring to Britons in general, of which apparently he is one, he uses a third-person descriptive mode; he does not, for example, speak of "us." As discussed above, "objective" distance, disinterestedness together with the ability to stand outside and look in upon "proper" objects of study, was (and still is) considered necessary for the production of scientific fact and natural law. These people constitute proper objects of (scientific) study because they are "objective": they can be touched, seen, and heard, quantified and measured, unlike "subjective" and therefore improper objects such as metaphysics and religion, the soul and Christian faith.

[150] See also *Heads of the People*, cited above, which calls the French Great Britain's "natural enemies."

Second, the speaker implies that he has performed systematic observations, also necessary to the discovery of natural laws. "In no class of mankind do we find more frequent instances" of eccentricity he writes, implying that a thorough observation of all possible "classes" has already been completed. Phrases such as "no country affords," "each feeling himself independent of all others," and "caprices peculiar to himself" communicate similar ideas. Comprehensive information having been carefully gathered and systematically collated, natural law can now be confidently stated.

And finally, the speaker points to his belief in *a priori*, scientific fact, a belief which it is assumed the reader shares. Phrases such as "in no class...do we find" and "where it is to be found" express implicit faith in that which is objectively lying there waiting to be observed. Phrases like "do *we* find" also appeal (like modern scientific reports) to verification by the reader--as in, Have you not also noticed this to be so? Have your own systematic observations not found this same phenomenon to exist? At the least, such phrases imply that if readers *did* perform systematic observations they would surely find the same thing to be true, for the speaker is only reporting simple fact.

The ostensible natural law that Great Britain is unusually productive of eccentrics might, on the face of it, look like evidence that eccentrics were highly valued, for it is otherwise difficult to see the sense in the dominant culture's claim, made so often after 1800, that the nation contained so many of them. And yet eccentrics were not valued highly, not *per se*. Careful reading of law shows where their value did lie: "It is universally admitted that *no country in the world* produces so many humorists and eccentric characters as the British islands. This acknowledgement is an indirect eulogy on the political constitution and the laws under which *the English enjoy the*

happiness of living" (*Mirror* 1: "Warner" 22; emphasis added). (Note, again, the subtle deployment of scientific discourse. "It is universally admitted": everyone can and does see the simple facts. "[N]o country in the world produces so many": an extensive survey has apparently been taken of these countable, calculable objects called eccentrics.) The *idea* of eccentrics, then, as distinct from eccentrics themselves, performed a valuable cultural function. Specifically, the idea that Britain's superior government allows people to be eccentric if they so desire provided a sort of nationalistic comfort to the beleaguered individual during a time of great systematization. The unspoken argument works like this: eccentrics naturally thrive here; the conditions that produce them persist, so anyone from any class can at any time choose to be eccentric; these conditions do not exist in other countries; therefore, our nation is best; therefore, we are lucky to live where we do, so never mind the systematization proceeding apace. In a word: because eccentrics are most common in Britain, all our lives are pleasant, notwithstanding contrary evidence. Or to put it another way: eccentrics, common as sparrows, provide scientific proof that we live in the greatest nation on earth. That is the logic by which the supposed natural law provides comfort.

This comfort was sorely needed. As writers such as Carlyle recognized, mechanic systematization both literal and figurative proliferated astonishingly during the Romantic era. Labor grew more specialized, mechanized, unpleasant, and unremunerative.[151] "The scientific method" increasingly dominated all forms of thinking. British life in general became more unnervingly urban and less amenable to individual choice and difference. What Horkheimer writes of late twentieth-century life was quite

[151] E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* provides an excellent, highly detailed description of this process.

as true for early nineteenth-century Great Britain:

> The factors in the contemporary situation--population growth, a technology that is becoming fully automated, the centralization of economic and therefore political power, the increased rationality of the individual as a result of his work in industry--are inflicting upon life a degree of organization and manipulation that leaves the individual only enough spontaneity to launch himself onto the path prescribed for him. . . . The word "man" [sic] no longer expresses the power of the subject who can resist the status quo, however heavily it may weigh upon him. (4)

Even De Quincey, whose family's money sheltered him from most suffering that was not self-inflicted, wrote in 1824, "[I]n modern life the whole derives its superiority from the very circumstances which constitute the inferiority of the parts [namely, specialization within a total system]: for modern life is *cast* dramatically" (*Works* 10:452). Individual difference and individual choice are sacrificed for the advancement of the culture and its systems as a whole, even when individual people dislike the whole and only advance it against their will. De Quincey elaborates, making a point ultimately very similar to Horkheimer's:

> [T]he progress of society brings with it a necessity of sacrificing the ideal of what is excellent for the whole. We need, therefore, not trouble ourselves (except as a speculative question) with the comparison of the two states; because, as a practical question, it is precluded by the overruling tendencies of the age--which no man could counteract except in his own single case, *i.e.* by refusing to adapt himself as a part of the whole, and thus

forgoing the advantages of either one state or the other. (10:452)

One *can* oppose the dominant culture successfully, on a small scale, writes De Quincey, but one will gain little and lose much by the opposition; therefore, one might as well accede and so gain the benefits of "launching himself onto the path prescribed for him."

In this environment, eccentricity offered an apparent way out. As in the early eighteenth century, the idea of eccentricity provided an escape valve for tremendous cultural pressure. That eccentricity was supposedly a particularly British phenomenon makes perfect cultural sense, given that, as Williams argues, industrialization was *actually* a particularly British phenomenon. Eccentricity made modern life more bearable, much as physiologies made newly urban life more bearable.

Still, despite eccentricity's cultural usefulness, it was not highly or unqualifiedly valued *per se*. It couldn't be: the same conditions that made it useful also made it nugatory. That is, in the late eighteenth century, the trope of eccentricity as minor illness made eccentricity at once more and less sympathetic. In similar dialectic fashion, the early nineteenth-century logic of systems produced a need for eccentricity, while at the same time, that logic contained and organized eccentricity's potentially subversive energies.

One can observe this process at work in the physiologies. Even early ones organize eccentrics (broadly defined) into types or groups in a way that erases their difference. For example, *Th e Eccentric Mirror* claims to describe "all such as have gained celebrity or notoriety, by deviating in a remarkable degree from the ordinary course of human existence" (1:iii). If this were to be literally true, the volumes would have to include infinite varieties of difference. What the *Mirror*--which is the most comprehensive and wide-ranging physiology I have been able to locate--actually does include, however,

does not even approach the infinite. There are only about a dozen categories of difference, and every eccentric falls quite neatly into one and only one of them. There are eccentrically shaped subjects (giants, dwarves, a "spotted negro," and the astonishingly obese); subjects with eccentric physical abilities (a strong man, an amazingly fast and durable runner and walker, long-lived men and women, and a man who could and did eat virtually anything); subjects with eccentric intellectual abilities (self-taught mathematical and musical prodigies, artists, writers, and actors); transvestites (several women who passed as men and one man who passed as a woman); survivors of horrible ordeals (a woman who survived several nights buried in snow, and a man survived the Black Hole of Calcutta); nobility from other lands; misers; absent-minded, benevolent, harmless men of the Quixote-Coverley-Shandy line (but, as previously, no women like this); court intriguers (whose difference consisted in the unusual altitude and complexity of their social connections); eccentric sailor-adventurers; and a few already-famous historical personages (Joan of Arc, Lady Godiva, the philosopher Heidegger).

And that's all. Listed together like that, this may seem like a pretty broad variety of subjects, but held up against the vast possibilities of infinite difference, these few well-defined categories look puny. And again, the use of such categories erases difference. For example, Joseph Boruwlaski looks less unusual, less different or eccentric, when other dwarves appear in the same collection, even within his own portrait. His portrait in the *Mirror* spends five pages out of twenty-five covering the rivalry between Boruwlaski and the dwarf "Bébé" at the French court. Thus, Boruwlaski must be understood as *a* dwarf, as *one* individual example of a large, fairly homogeneous category--not as a truly different, truly ex-centric person. He may be ex-centric from dominant society, but it is made clear that somewhere in nature exists a

circle with numerous members, in the middle of which Boruwlaski belongs. Daniel Lambert's portrait devotes a similar proportion of pages to describing other large men, their measurements, and their eating habits. Misers are routinely compared to other misers; and so on. In the very act of describing difference, then, the physiologies employ clearly-bounded categories that describe creatures with very similar characteristics, habits, and appearance.

That is to say, the physiologies effectively divide eccentrics into species. Species of eccentrics, like species of animals, may seem exotic when compared with other species (especially if the other species are significantly more "normal"); but still, to see an individual animal as a representative of a species is to measure it automatically against certain norms, to erase its oddity and individuality. As Adorno and Horkheimer explain, "What was different is equalized" when it is viewed through the microscope of science. Science "excises the incommensurable. . . . Abstracting, the tool of enlightenment, treats its objects as did fate, the notion of which it rejects: it liquidates them" (12-13). A platypus may seem like a strange animal, but any given platypus is not strange among other platypuses; and an unusual platypus is, at worst (or best), a somewhat atypical specimen--a blip on the graph, a minor anomaly in calculation that is ultimately averaged out. Merely to think in terms of species, as the physiologies subtly manipulate the reader to do, is to elide difference. The *Mirror*, for one, expresses pleasure in "advert[ing] sometimes to the delineation of any uncommon object, to the sportive productions of nature, in her occasional deviations from her general laws" (2: "Bampfylde Moore Carew" 1); however, in so adverting, the physiologies instantiate and enforce the general laws much more than they ever revel in the deviations.

Just to reinforce the validity of comparing the specification of animals (i.e., the sorting of individual creatures into species) with the specification of

eccentrics: examine Cuvier's description of method. Note how very closely it resembles the *Mirror*'s statements regarding method, quoted above:

> [I created a table] in which I should . . . indicate the *best authenticated* species belonging to each of the subdivisions, and in which, *to increase the interest*, I should add some details regarding those species that are rendered *remarkable* by their being *so common in this country*, by their utility or mischievous practices, by the *singularity of their habits* and their economy, by their *strange forms*, their beauty, or their *size*. (1:xx; emphases added)

The connection is even clearer when viewed from the other direction: *Sketches of Young Ladies*, *Sketches of Young Gentlemen*, and *Heads of the People*, for example, all employ starkly scientific, Cuvierian language. They do so jokingly, perhaps, yet do so nonetheless. The subtitle for *Young Ladies* shows this: *In Which These Interesting Members of the Animal Kingdom Are Classified According to their Several Instincts, Habits, and General Characteristics*. Furthermore, the author of that book speaks of different varieties of young ladies as if they were different animal species:

> [W]e used in former times to consider this busy young lady as the only one of her class. By degrees, however, as we have enlarged our knowledge of things, we have discovered that she is only a type of a thousand others. There are now, within the range of our acquaintance, no less than five fine specimens. Two of them are sisters, and, in a zoological point of view, may be considered the noblest pair, yet discovered, of those useful animals that practise the happy art of doing every thing and nothing at the same time. (18)

Young Ladies, Young Gentlemen, and *Heads* habitually refer to representative examples of their species as "specimens," and Quiz goes so far as to use the pronoun "it" in referring to them. *Heads* takes the comparison a step farther:

> The Cabinet Minister is the paragon of animals . . . [He] is descended (not in a direct line, for all his ways are crooked) from the smallest, meanest, vilest, and most pitiful of all the creeping things that went up with Noah into the ark. Not only has he sprung from the most wretched of the race of reptiles, but he is a disgrace to his family besides. . . . His nature is an essence compounded from all that is most noisome and noxious in other natures. . . . Instead of being *the* "Head of the People," he is only an insect preying upon it. . . . Still it is not to be denied that the Cabinet Minister has been gifted by nature with talents of an extraordinary and ennobling character. (353-54)[152]

Heads's authors do not merely speak of people *as if they were* animals, but directly (if somewhat facetiously) *call* them animals.

Like animal species, or birds described in *Bewick's,* species of people can be identified by "their several instincts, habits, and general characteristics." For example, *Heads*'s "Apothecary" can be identified by his "exuberantly prudent cheeks, the amplitude of the abdominal curve, and the loose, easy suit of sober black, which, combining comfort with respectability, outvies the propriety of costume exhibited by the most affluent undertaker" (385). The "Manly Young Lady" "is found most in those counties where there is good hunting, and prefers the north to the south" (*Young Ladies* 43); she

[152] Note here the phenomenon discussed in the first section: a wholly negative, critical sketch is not allowed to stand; positive qualities must be scraped together from somewhere, then they are thrown onto the canvas in the usual seemingly inconsistent way.

talks frequently of horses and dogs by gender, rides constantly, emphatically does not sew, wears hard shoes, always wanted to be a boy, speaks uncomfortably directly, reads Isaac Walton and the *Sporting Magazine*, hates novels and love stories, and is beloved by the village neighbors. In this way, ostensibly natural characteristics and habits reveal the species to which a given "specimen" or individual rightly belongs.

What is ironic about this system of identification-by-natural-characteristics is that the characteristics are often plainly, even emphatically *not* natural. That is, the characteristics of many types or species are affected, which is the main thrust and jest of the sketch--yet these affected characteristics are those which provide the basis for identification. In other words, the discourse breaks its own rules requiring truth and scientific fact. For instance, of the "Extremely Natural Young Lady" Quiz writes, "But there is a class who like so much to have it said of them 'how very natural!' that they have become affected on purpose . . . [She is] always doing some out of the way thing, that she may appear simple and girlish" (100). The "Censorious Young Gentleman" has a reputation for being clever, "which he maintains by receiving all intelligence and expressing all opinions with a dubious sneer, accompanied with a half smile" (60). Without this obvious affectation his actual ignorance would appear more clearly. Thus, the discursive seams show from time to time; the use of naturalistic-classificatory discourse in the realm of human beings makes itself visible upon occasion, when it does not neatly fit, when it contradicts its own laws.

The application of scientific discourse--most especially the concepts of natural law and species--not only devalued the individuality and difference which eccentrics (broadly defined) potentially possessed and exhibited; it even destroyed these qualities. If the mere division into species destroys difference,

the destruction is even more complete when the number of species available as pigeonholes decreases. As noted above, *The Eccentric Mirror* describes a dozen types of oddballs; later physiologies, fewer and fewer. For instance, *The Eccentric Magazine*, published only five years later, and *Lives and Portraits*, published only a decade later, discard all foreign nobility, survivors, court intriguers, most physical and intellectual prodigies, and all transvestites. Women virtually disappear altogether. By 1820 only half a dozen categories of male eccentrics remained, "*the* eccentric" as in Sterne *et alia* prominent among them.

Far from being valued in itself, then, eccentricity during the Romantic era was almost completely systematized, organized, and classified out of existence. Paradoxically, perhaps, this was also accomplished by means of *expanding* the concept of eccentricity. Everyone, or more precisely, every *type* or *species* became eccentric--amusing, odd, interesting in its own way. Physiologies moved rapidly from describing particular, actual individuals (albeit representative of categories, even in the earliest physiologies) *to* describing types or species--from John Elwes to "The Miser." And in these descriptions of species, amused tolerance became the norm, the prescribed attitude, no matter what the subject. All "sketches had one thing in common: they were harmless and of perfect bonhomie" (Benjamin 37). When everyone is eccentric--the chimney-sweep, the cabinet minister, the domestic young gentleman, the eccentric--no one is eccentric.

To return to the point made two paragraphs ago: physiologies of the late 1810s and twenties included fewer species of eccentrics than in the 'oughts. This made "*the* eccentric," which by now had a whole century of history and tradition behind it, more prominent by default. And this fact provides the final piece of the puzzle, the puzzle being the question, How did

the word "eccentric" move within thirty years from being an adjective not even applied to humans, to being a widely recognized nominative, "*the* eccentric"? My summative answer: at the turn of the nineteenth century, odd, different people of many kinds--"eccentric characters," people residing outside the dominant culture's center--came to be of interest to a large British audience. This happened primarily due to the progress of scientific thinking and of urban industrialization, with all of progress's attendant ills. These new pressures produced a cultural demand for eccentricity, which was expressed in general pride that Great Britain was the eccentric capital of the world. However, over time, and by the specific means of the concepts of natural law and species classification, these pressures also ground away at eccentrics and eccentricity. The pressures were intense, so the grinding progressed quickly. Soon, virtually all that was left was the quixotic figure familiar from the eighteenth century, in Sterne, Smollett, *et alia*. This familiar figure was the only one of the few remaining species of eccentric characters with a solid, definitive history; he was the one that looked most like a naturally occurring organism, like a creature who was "just that way." So, partly by the rules of scientific discourse and partly by default, this figure looked most representative of eccentric characters in general. Thus, this eighteenth-century figure, the addle-pated, benevolent male quixote trotting harmlessly along upon his hobby-horse, came to be known as *the* eccentric.

In short, the British Romantic era saw a brief, broad expansion of the term and concept "eccentric," followed by a rapid narrowing-down or specification. It is wonderfully apt that Dickens, in *Sketches of Young Gentlemen* in 1837--the earliest days of his career--would write, "[People] are perhaps a little too apt to confound a great many heavier terms with the light word eccentricity, which we beg them henceforth to take in a strictly

Johnsonian sense, without any liberality or latitude of construction" (25). By 1837 the word "eccentric" did indeed possess a "strictly Johnsonian sense." Dickens, the writer perhaps most associated with eccentric characters, would further narrow and solidify that sense during the Victorian era.

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Chapter 5

"A lone lorn creetur": Dickens, Darwin, and the Eccentric's Demise

When we think of eccentrics today, we tend to think of *Victorian* eccentrics.[153] Most of all we think of Charles Dickens's colorful characters--how wonderfully odd, how delightfully different! How hospitable the Victorian era must have been to eccentrics of all stripes. How sad that we no longer practice such tolerance, nor encourage such individuality. That is our usual refrain.

However, as earlier chapters of this genealogy might now lead one to expect, things were not actually this simple. Granted, our usual understanding of Victorian eccentricity does contain considerable discursive truth. Eccentrics were indeed often portrayed in a clearly positive light, by Dickens in particular: John Jarndyce of *Bleak House*, for example; the Garlands of *The Old Curiosity Shop*; the Cheeryble brothers of *Nicholas Nickleby*. And the time saw the publication of two important arguments on behalf of individual difference: Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, which asserted the necessity of individual variety for the survival of all species; and John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*, which specifically pleaded human eccentricity's social usefulness.

But these discursive elements formed only one side of a dialectic. This dialectic had existed as long as the figure of the eccentric, casting him, like his ancestor Don Quixote, as simultaneously "good" and "bad"--admirable but tetched, benevolent but a little mad, harmless but impossible to take seriously. Not only did this dialectic of eccentricity continue into and through the Victorian era, but both sides of the dialectic intensified their respective claims. Scientific and philosophical arguments such as Darwin's

[153] See, for instance, Weeks and James's *Eccentrics*: the striking example with which they begin their book, "Emperor Norton," began his reign in 1856.

and Mill's, as well as character portraits such as Dickens's and later, Gissing's, asserted more plainly and urgently than ever before the value of eccentricity. But at the same time, these same texts also spelled eccentricity's doom. This was true in two senses. First, they spelled it *out*, or (ostensibly) disinterestedly *described* how certain social and natural forces made eccentricity unviable, both in general and particularly at that time. And in the less innocuous sense, these texts *caused* eccentricity's doom by reifying the assimilatory forces that were assailing eccentricity.

In short, both the value and the valuelessness of eccentricity were asserted simultaneously and with increased vigor between 1840 and 1900. The eccentric's cultural demise resulted, as much a product of the "positive" side of the dialectic, finally, as of the "negative." Idealization and practical-minded critique together stripped away the eccentric's scant remaining cultural power, his small store of oppositional potential. And so, to borrow the words of Mrs. Gummidge of *David Copperfield,* the eccentric truly became a "lone lorn creetur," ex-centric in the etymological sense, (cast) outside an increasingly homogeneous, internalized-rule-bound British society.

Right there, with the famously rule-bound Victorian social milieu, is probably the best place to begin detailed discussion. I have divided previous chapters into convenient pieces in order to emphasize particular discursive developments and their relationship to eccentricity--e.g., the medicalization of madness, the innocuousness of physiologies. But now I am trying to show how both sides of the dialectic of eccentricity--the tendency to idealize and admire the eccentric, and the tendency to cluck over him as sick or culpable, respectively--intensify their arguments and ultimately effect the eccentric's cultural downfall. My task here is to trace the back-and-forths of a dialectic

and its cultural effects, a task that does not lend itself well to convenient divisions. Therefore, this chapter is of one piece.

And so, to begin with the time's social atmosphere: its rigidity, its pervasive control (and admiration for *self*-control and self-abnegation), and its devotion to punctilio, to class distinctions, and to being "proper," are proverbial.[154] We have all heard that piano and table legs were called "limbs," and underwear became "unmentionables." We all know--and for a reminder, we can consult virtually any Victorian novel--that the mixing of classes was regarded with deep horror.[155] We know that the rules for behavior, dress, and conversation were both elaborate and absolute.[156] To illustrate just how well known Victorian social control *still* is in late-twentieth-century America, one need look no farther than current American politicians and social critics. Gertrude Himmelfarb, Newt Gingrich, and William Bennett, among others, have recently been proposing, in essence, that America go back to those "good old days." They make their arguments in full confidence that their audience will immediately recognize the truth of the association--"Victorian" with "rules" and "control"--and will desire something similar.

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[154] D. A. Miller's book *The Novel and the Police* provides a valuable discussion of how the Victorian novel both reflects and solidifies such tight social control. Steven Marcus's book *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England*, to name one example, provides a useful nuancing of our one-dimensional picture of Victorian society. Marcus reminds us that *all* people didn't behave "properly" *all the time*, however dominant the hegemony may have been. I emphasize the familiar rigidity here, but do so in order to discuss how eccentricity was understood; I somewhat slight the time's cultural diversity to clarify my argument. Notwithstanding my emphasis on social control, I acknowledge that even in Victorian society (!), dissent, disobedience, and difference did of course exist.

[155] See, for just one example, *Silas Marner*. Godfrey Cass is as ashamed by his secret wife's low class standing as by her dependence upon opium. Furthermore, when Eppie wants to marry Aaron Winthrop, the connection appalls Cass, because by this point Eppie knows she is actually Cass's daughter, yet she plans to marry "beneath" herself.

[156] In particular, the idea of the "fallen woman" allowed for little deviation. Once "fallen," she was forever considered impure. See, for instance, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, and the severity with which she and all around her regard her "offense."

Virginia Woolf, looking backwards a British generation or two, found only gloom and oppression in the Victorian atmosphere; she sums up the whole cultural milieu with the single word "damp." "Damp" for her is both an adjective and a noun: she finds the age waterlogged by sentimental tears, as by much of Dickens's work, for instance; but more broadly and importantly she decries the omnipresent, dismal chill--the damp*ening* of spirit, of spontaneity, of joy and comfort--that Victorian society engendered. She writes:

> A change seemed to have come over the climate of England. . . . [D]amp now began to make its way into every house--damp, which is the most insidious of all enemies, . . . silent, imperceptible, ubiquitous. . . . [T]he constitution[157] of England was altered and nobody knew it. Everywhere the effects were felt. The hardy country gentleman . . . now felt chilly. Rugs appeared, beards were grown and trousers fastened tight under the instep. The chill which he felt in his legs he soon transferred to his house; furniture was muffled; walls and tables were covered too. Then a change of diet became essential. . . . But the change did not stop at outward things. The damp struck within. Men felt the chill in their hearts; the damp in their minds. In a desperate effort to snuggle their feelings into some sort of warmth one subterfuge was tried after another. Love, birth, and death were all swaddled in a variety of fine phrases. The sexes drew further and further apart. No open conversation was tolerated. Evasions and concealments were sedulously practised

[157] "Constitution" here should probably be read in two senses: the most obvious one, related to physical health--"the healthiness of England was altered"; and also the governmental, capital-C sense--"the rules by which England lives were altered." (See the discussion of Mill, below, on the rule of middle-class public opinion over and above law.)

on both sides. (*Orlando* 227-29)

Woolf's critique cannot fairly be dismissed as generational sour grapes, à la Harold Bloom. That is, in *The Anxiety of Influence*, Bloom argues that each artistic generation, acting out an Œdipal compulsion, attacks the ideals and æsthetic principles of the immediately preceding generation. In Woolf's time one thinks instantly of Lytton Strachey, with his scathing attacks in *Eminent Victorians* upon the Victorian ideals of hard work, self-sacrifice, and moral earnestness, and upon Queen Victoria herself in his biography of her. The argument could perhaps be made, then, that Woolf, like many artists, put down her ancestors merely as a necessary stage toward establishing herself as a writer; that it is her struggle against Victorianism itself rather than her particular complaint against it which holds meaning. However, many Victorian thinkers observed the same central phenomenon as Woolf--that contemporary society had become oppressive and controlling in unnervingly pervasive, subtle, internalized ways; that it had become very difficult to differ from dominant society. Even when they are not *directly* addressing the subject, some Victorian writers such as William Makepeace Thackeray and Anthony Trollope betray that they felt the damp in their very bones. Woolf, then, describes an oppressive gloom that was felt by people who were *there*. The sheer volume of contemporary corroboration demands that we take her portrait of Victorian culture seriously--which, as I began by saying, we really already do.

The best and most influential Victorian writer against contemporary damp is John Stuart Mill. His philosophical treatise *On Liberty*, first published in 1859, is "the single most eloquent, most significant, and most influential statement of the irreducible value of human individuality"

(Collini vii). His main thesis is that "doing as we like" (15),[158] as distinct from doing what *society* likes, is both a fundamental right and a desirable practice. He holds that

> the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant. He cannot rightfully be compelled to do or forbear because it will be better for him to do so, because it will make him happier, because, in the opinions of others, to do so would be wise, or even right. These are good reasons for remonstrating with him, or reasoning with him, or persuading him, or entreating him, but not for compelling him, or visiting him with any evil in case he do otherwise. (13)

Furthermore, he asserts that individuals' ability to act and think for themselves is vital to human happiness and progress: "Where, not the person's own character, but the traditions or customs of other people are the rule of conduct, there is wanting one of the principal ingredients of human happiness, and quite the chief ingredient of individual and social progress" (57).

The *reason* Mill makes this argument is that he not only felt the awful damp, he also felt it intensifying. Mill held that Victorian society already controlled the individual much too thoroughly and was striving to increase that control yet further, both by custom and by law. In a letter to his wife

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[158] Matthew Arnold famously attacked this position, characterizing the theoretical right of all to do as we like as, in actual practice, the anarchist's "right to march where he likes, meet where he likes, enter where he likes, hoot as he likes, threaten as he likes, smash as he likes" (*Culture and Anarchy* 119). This attack supports my characterization of dominant Victorian society: the prospect of virtually unlimited personal liberty totally unnerves Arnold and the respectable society he represents. The choice appears to be strictly dichotomous, between civilization, tight social control, and order (Culture) on the one side, and on the other, barbarity, chaos, and disorder (Anarchy)--as Arnold's title would suggest.

Harriet written in January 1855, Mill expresses his sense of the issue's urgency: "Nothing seems to me more needed [than an insistence upon individual liberty]. . . . It is a growing need, too, for opinion tends to encroach more on liberty, and almost all the projects of social reformers in these days are really *liberticide*" (qtd. in Collini xi). His goal in *On Liberty*, then, was to disperse the steadily encroaching damp.

As his letter indicates, for Mill the primary source of damp was "opinion"--specifically, *middle-class* opinion. Mill observes, "Where there is an ascendant class, a large portion of the morality of the country emanates from its class interests and its feelings of class superiority" (10). The "ascendant class" in his time was definitely the middle class. More than half a century of universal education in support of "high capitalism"--of high degrees of specialization and division of labor, unequal distribution of goods, and concentration of population in urban centers of production--had produced a swarm of middle-class professionals. The newly organized high-capitalist society required and supported veritable hives of specialized workers: bankers, lawyers, clerks, teachers, nurses, salespeople, administrators, and managers. As George Orwell notes, the middle class of Mill's time "was growing suddenly rich [and numerous] after a couple of centuries of obscurity" ("Dickens" 67). The middle class crowded itself both upwards and downwards, "on such a scale as to make the old classification of society into capitalists, proletarians, and petit-bourgeois (small property-owners) almost obsolete" (Orwell, "England" 276). In short, the middle class came to wield enormous sociopolitical influence.

And the middle class never likes eccentricity--not now, and not in Victorian Britain. The reason for this is the conservatism which arises from the middle class's precarious social position. That is, middle class people

always know they could sink in class at any time, and believe (or at least hope) they could rise if they imitate their betters closely enough. And so, as Paul Fussell explains,

> [w]orried a lot about their own taste and whether it's working for or against them, members of the middle class try to arrest their natural tendency to sink downward by associating themselves, if ever so tenuously, with the imagined possessors of money, power, and taste. "Correctness" and doing the right thing become obsessions . . . (41)

Most often the "right thing," the thing that would earn upper-class approval, is the conservative thing. In any case, the last thing middle-class people want to do is to offend their betters; to do so would be tantamount to voluntarily climbing down the social ladder. To protect their position and to leave open the possibility of climbing, therefore, middle-class people avoid and disapprove of anything remotely capable of offending upper-class sensibilities, which tend overwhelmingly to be conservative. (This latter point is true because, obviously, people of wealth and power have vested interests in maintaining a system that treats them so well.) *This* is how it is in the middle class's "class interests and its feelings of class superiority" to adopt, even to internalize an oppressive, rigid belief system that seems to work *against* middle-class interests. This is why, now and during Victoria's reign, middle-class people shed or mask their own deviations or eccentricities, ultimately out of fear, and purse lips and shake heads against the eccentricities of others. As Fussell puts it, for the member of the middle class,

> [v]irtually no latitude is permitted to individuality or the milder forms of eccentricity, and [middle-class] employees soon learn to

> avoid all ideological statements . . . Terrified of losing their jobs, these people grow passive, their humanity diminished as they perceive themselves mere parts of an infinitely larger structure. And interchangeable parts, too. (40)

Thus, by associating themselves with their "betters" and as an effect of class and economic insecurity, middle-class citizens very frequently adopt a conservative position. Thorstein Veblen comments upon the logic involved:

> Since conservatism is a characteristic of the wealthier and therefore more reputable portion of the community, it has acquired a certain honorific or decorative value. It has become prescriptive to such an extent that an adherence to conservative views is comprised as a matter of course in our notions of respectability; and it is imperatively incumbent on all who would lead a blameless life in point of social repute. Conservatism, being an upper-class characteristic, is decorous; and conversely, innovation, being a lower-class phenomenon, is vulgar. . . . Innovation is bad form. (138)

"Innovation" here applies in the broadest sense: virtually any deviation from old, established, *upper-class* forms of thought, behavior, or social decorum. Deviation or innovation--eccentricity--is simply not *classy*. Thus, conservatism tends, and tended during the Victorian era, to overrule the historical association between the upper classes and eccentricity. (Members of the highest classes were among the very few whose eccentricity was [grudgingly] tolerated, but this is not to say that the highest classes necessarily *are* more eccentric, nor that they are more *tolerant* of eccentricity. Instead, eccentricity is a function of power: certain upper-class people were openly eccentric because their wealth and power made it possible for them to be so,

not because there is some inherent, natural tendency among upper-class people to be eccentric.) In any case, as the self-consciously "respectable," conservative, upper-class-imitating middle class expanded throughout Victorian Britain, a general distaste for eccentricity expanded along with it.

Mill saw this happening, and tried in *On Liberty* to reverse the process. He saw quite clearly how class insecurity leads to intolerant conservatism, and writes much in the vein that Veblen and Fussell do later:

> Not only in what concerns others, but in what concerns only themselves, the individual or the family do not ask themselves--what do I prefer? or, what would suit my character and disposition? or, what would allow the best and highest in me to have fair play, and enable it to grow and thrive? They ask themselves, what is suitable to my position? what is usually done by persons of my station and pecuniary circumstances? or (worse still) *what is usually done by persons of a station and circumstances superior to mine*? (61; emphasis added)

Eccentricity is not "usually done" among the upper classes; it is only slightly more than generally *tolerated.* Mill makes his point about the aping of betters even more strongly in the introductory chapter: "[One] grand determining principle[159] of the rules of conduct, both in act and forbearance, which have been enforced by law or opinion, has been the *servility of mankind towards the supposed preferences or aversions of their temporal masters, or of their gods*" (10; emphasis added). Note the way Mill's syntax equates "temporal masters" with "gods"; the middle-class person fears and obeys the one as anxiously and servilely as the other.

Mill argues that conservative middle-class values were becoming so

[159] See Chapter 4's discussion of the great search for natural law, which had spread and intensified considerably by the time of Mill's writing.

thoroughly internalized that they now exerted more actual power upon individual subjects than even the law does. This was especially true in England, he claims: "from the peculiar circumstances of our political history, though the yoke of opinion is perhaps heavier, that of law is lighter, than in most other countries of Europe" (12). In taking this line, Mill sounds at times very much like Foucault. To explain: in *Discipline and Punish,* and most especially the chapter on "Panopticism" (195-228), Foucault describes the difference between older, more spectacular (i.e., more in the nature of public spectacles) punitive practices--the rack, the scaffold, drawing and quartering--and the new "disciplinary" forms, best illustrated by the Panopticon. Disciplinary forms work upon the body from within, whereas older punishments had been imposed from without. In the Panopticon, a prison designed by the Englishman Jeremy Bentham, inmates might or might not be seen at all hours--they had no way of knowing precisely when or for how long they were being observed--and would be punished for undesirable behavior, more or less heavily depending upon the exact nature of their offense. Knowing that they were, at least potentially, perpetual objects of the jailer's disciplinary gaze, and believing that transgression surely brought about precisely calibrated punishment, prisoners learned to control *themselves* to avoid such punishment. They developed the sense of "conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (201). Foucault argues that from the eighteenth century onwards, Western societies--not just prisons, but entire cultures--have operated upon the same principle. All people are their own (and each other's) overseers, to the degree finally that many transgressive acts and thoughts are quite literally unthinkable; self-control motivated at bottom by fear of punishment freezes certain desires before they can fully develop, express themselves, and be

enacted.

Mill's *On Liberty* makes essentially this same argument. Mill writes, for instance, that "[society] practises a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression, since, though not usually upheld by such extreme penalties, it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life" (8). Furthermore, "Our merely social intolerance kills no one, roots out no opinions, but induces men to disguise them, or to abstain from any active effort for their diffusion" (34). Similarly, "The effect of custom, in preventing any misgiving respecting the rules of conduct which mankind impose on one another, is all the more complete because the subject is one on which it is not generally considered necessary that reasons should be given, either by one person to others, or by each to himself" (9). And most in the Foucauldian line:

> I do not mean that they choose what is customary, in preference to what suits their own inclination. It does not occur to them to have any inclination, except for what is customary. Thus the mind itself is bowed to the yoke: even in what people do for pleasure, conformity is the first thing they think of; they like in crowds; they exercise choice only among things commonly done: peculiarity of taste, eccentricity of conduct, are shunned equally with crimes . . . (61-62)

Damp reaches the bones and works upon the individual subject from within. Social control becomes internalized, escaping critical scrutiny, and therefore becomes all the more powerful and thorough-going. In fairly literal fashion, it becomes impossible to do what middle-class society will disapprove of--even to be a little eccentric.

One need not search far beyond Mill in Victorian literature to find

examples of this kind of rigid, internalized social control. In fact, examples pop out from the most unexpected places. For example, see Thackeray's *The Book of Snobs*.[160] This collection of pieces originally written for *Punch* between 1846 and 1847 was clearly intended to entertain rather than to make any kind of social protest. Thackeray was not by any stretch a radical (nor was *Punch*); he was born into wealth, the son of a colonial administrator in India, and he studied law before becoming a writer. Thackeray's gentle satire touches himself as frequently as his targets--e.g., "University Snobs," "Dining-out Snobs," "Literary Snobs"--and touches no one with much bite. Thackeray's sketches are light, innocuous caricatures, very much in the spirit of the later physiologies.[161] (This makes literary-historical sense: *The Book of Snobs* was published just a few years after the physiologies had disappeared. Their influence upon Thackeray is immediate and obvious.) However, even in this lighthearted setting, Thackeray cannot help but grumble in mid-sketch, albeit wearing a forced grin, that "Society having ordained certain

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[160] It is with Thackeray, and particularly with this book, that "snob" attains its most common modern sense, "One who vulgarly admires and seeks to imitate, or associate with those of superior rank or wealth; one who wishes to be regarded as a person of social importance"(*OED*). This describes the broad range of his satiric targets quite accurately. Thus, he seems to have noticed precisely the tendency toward middle-class conservatism decried by Mill.

[161] Thackeray's book, and Trollope's *Hunting Sketches*, too, also resemble the physiologies in their organization: they lightheartedly describe certain types or species of snobs and hunters, respectively. Trollope's book describes, among others, "The Man Who Hunts and Doesn't Like It," "The Man Who Hunts and Never Jumps," "The Hunting Farmer," and "The Master of Hounds."

The important difference between these two books and the physiologies appears in their cultural function. As discussed in Chapter 4, physiologies served the vital function of ameliorating urban life, of making the surrounding hordes seem harmless and amusing. *Hunting Sketches* and *The Book of Snobs* are written amusingly and innocuously, and do make all types described appear in a light similar to that of the physiologies; however, their main function (aside from providing amusement) is to *regulate*. That is the cultural urge they satisfy. They provide characteristics by which the different types may be identified, and more importantly, provide *rules* by which the different types should live. For example, Trollope's "Hunting Farmer" has precisely prescribed for him his clothing, down to the acceptable colors, how much he should talk and who should talk first (not much, and he should wait for the other to speak), his most appropriate attitude towards foxes (murderous), how seriously he should take hunting (quite), etc. Physiologies are about making strangers seem innocuous, whereas post-physiologies are about laying down the social law.

customs, men are bound to obey the law of society, and conform to its harmless orders. . . . [Society] has its code and police as well as governments, and he must conform who would profit by the decrees set forth for their common comfort" (19). He repeats the smiling complaint shortly afterwards: "there are many disagreeable things in society which you are bound to take down, and to do so with a smiling face" (21).

Similarly, Trollope's *Hunting Sketches*, another post-physiology, seems an odd place for unhappy references to society's rigidity and the impossibility of defying public opinion--but there they are. At the beginning of the book, Trollope asks rhetorically, "How many men go to balls, to races, to the theatre, how many women to concerts and races, simply because it is the thing to do?" (1-2), noting society's automatic, near-universal conformity. Then in each sketch, he relates the rules of conduct that bear upon that particular type, in such a way that it is impossible to say whether he mostly approves or disapproves of those rules; he seems to do both at once. For example, he begins his sketch of "The Hunting Parson" with the equivocal statement, "The world at large is very prone to condemn the hunting parson, regarding him as a man who is false to his profession; and, for myself, I am not prepared to say that the world is wrong" (71). Trollope then justifies the parson's right to hunt for several pages: the parson does too have the time, he has a right to innocent enjoyments, hunting is healthful and innocuous, "old ladies" are too prudish regarding clergymen's behavior. But then, in effect, Trollope nullifies his own apology, on the grounds that one must follow society's rules regardless of their wrong-headedness:

> [T]he hunting parson seems to have made a mistake. He is kicking against the pricks, and running counter to that section of the world which should be his section. He is making himself to

> stink in the nostrils of his bishop, and is becoming a stumbling-block, and a rock of offence to his brethren. It is bootless for him to argue, as I have here argued, that his amusement is in itself innocent, and that some open-air recreation is necessary to him. Grant him that the bishops and old ladies[162] are wrong and that he is right in principle, and still he will not be justified. Whatever may be our walk in life, no man can walk well who does not walk with the esteem of his fellows. Now those little walks by the covert sides,--those pleasant little walks of which I am writing,--are not, unfortunately, held to be estimable, or good for themselves, by English clergymen in general. (82-83)

Therefore, they are not to be indulged in. It's as simple as that. Public opinion always has the last word; as Mill puts it, "public opinion now rules the world" (66).

Thus, even fairly conservative writers such as Trollope and Thackeray register the arbitrary, pervasive, internalized nature of Victorian social control, even while writing works that are ideologically conservative. Even they cannot help but chafe a bit, as their more liberal or radical counterparts certainly do, under the heavy yoke of public opinion.

In a social atmosphere this inhospitable to individual choice and difference, the eccentric was bound to become an endangered species. The fourth chapter of this study shows how, by the logic of rapidly advancing scientism, the eccentric came to seem a kind of distinct species; now, as Mill

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[162] Speaking of the rule by rigid "old ladies," see George Gissing's *New Grub Street* (1891): "Like her multitudinous kind, Mrs. Yule lived only in the opinions of other people. What others would say was her ceaseless preoccupation. She had never conceived of life as something proper to the individual; independence in the directing of one's course seemed to her only possible in the case of very eccentric persons, or of such as were altogether out of society" (256). Gissing's ambiguous syntax at the end of this passage suggests that perhaps eccentrics *are* those who are "altogether out of society"--that these are not two distinct groups, but one and the same.

argues, that species begins to be excessively squeezed, to suffer, to dwindle, to die out. The requisite social-environmental conditions, "freedom, and variety of situations" (Mill 58), are mostly gone, and what remains of them disappears daily. Mass-productive, high-capitalist society homogenizes the formerly vastly different environments of different groups and individuals; consequently, these different groups--species, if you will--come to resemble one other uncannily. Numerous, distinct environments and species become one:

> The circumstances which surround different classes and individuals, and shape their characters, are daily becoming more assimilated. Formerly, different ranks, different neighbourhoods, different trades and professions, lived in what might be called different worlds; at present, to a great degree, in the same. Comparatively speaking, they now read the same things, listen to the same things, go to the same places, have their hopes and fears directed to the same objects, have the same rights and liberties, and the same means of asserting them. (72-73)

"[T]here ceases to be any social support for nonconformity" (73),[163] and this will only increase over time, because

> [t]he demand that all other people shall resemble ourselves, grows by what it feeds on. If resistance waits till life is reduced nearly to one uniform type, all deviations from that type will come to be considered impious, immoral, even monstrous and contrary to nature. Mankind speedily become unable to conceive diversity, when they have been for some time

[163] See Marcuse, who finds an "organized effort to reject the Other in his own right, to prevent autonomy even in a small, reserved sphere of existence" (245).

unaccustomed to see it. (74)[164]

In the damp Victorian atmosphere, "by dint of not following their own nature,[165] [individuals] have no nature to follow: their human capacities are withered and starved: they become incapable of any strong wishes or native pleasures, and are generally without either opinions or feelings of home growth, or properly their own" (62).

Thus, internalized rule by public opinion and the razing of differences between social environments endanger individual difference, encroach upon eccentricity. As Mill notes, the most common response to this state of things is, Very well, no great loss:

> [T]he evil is, that individual spontaneity is hardly recognised by the common modes of thinking, as having any intrinsic worth, or deserving any regard on its own account. The majority, being satisfied with the ways of mankind as they now are (for it is they who make them what they are), cannot comprehend why those ways should not be good enough for everybody . . . (57)

The logical solution, then, is to change public opinion regarding the value of eccentricity, beginning with the portion of the populace most likely to be swayed by philosophical arguments such as Mill's. He muses, "the intelligent part of the public [must] be made to feel its [eccentricity's] value--to see that it is good there should be differences, even though not for the better, even though, as it may appear to them, some should be for the worse" (73-74).

And so Mill directly argues that eccentricity is intrinsically valuable. This is so, he claims, at the levels of both the unit and the whole. When individual difference is encouraged, there is "greater fulness of life about [an

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[164] Note again the language of natural law, the timeless generalizations--"X happens."

[165] The idea that eccentrics are ordinarily "following their own nature" shores up the concept of the eccentric as species: this is *their* nature, as distinct from *our* more normal nature.

individual's] own existence, and when there is more life in the units there is more in the mass which is composed of them" (63). More "life" does not merely mean more *joie de vivre;* Mill argues that the flourishing of eccentricity insures both freedom and progress for the nation:

> In this age, the mere example of nonconformity, the mere refusal to bend the knee to custom, is itself a service. Precisely because the tyranny of opinion is such as to make eccentricity a reproach, it is desirable, in order to break through that tyranny, that people should be eccentric. Eccentricity has always abounded when and where strength of character has abounded; and the amount of eccentricity in a society has generally been proportional to the amount of genius, mental vigour, and moral courage, which it contained. That so few now dare to be eccentric, marks the chief danger of the time. (67)

When a nation squashes all the eccentricity out of its citizens, that nation tends toward the sorry state of China. In this unabashedly Orientalist view, China, "a nation of much talent, and, in some respects, even wisdom," provides an instructive "warning example" (71). There, writes Mill, custom and public opinion "have succeeded beyond all hope in what English philanthropists are so industriously working at--in making a people all alike, all governing their thoughts and conduct by the same maxims and rules" (72). Consequently, all of China's early promise has been lost; stagnation, excessive conformity, and general backwardness now reign. All this because the nation did not recognize what Mill now asserts as (yet another) natural law: "A people, it appears, may be progressive for a certain length of time, and then stop: when does it stop? When it ceases to possess individuality" (71).

By this line of reasoning, to be eccentric becomes a kind of patriotic

duty, a service to one's country. Laurence Sterne put that sentiment into Toby Shandy's mouth nearly a century before, but now, under repressive Victorian social conditions, the idea really packs cultural power. And the idea of eccentricity as valuable public service puts a new spin on the now-established idea of eccentricity as a uniquely British quality. The idea that Great Britain was the eccentric capital of the world served the useful cultural function of convincing individual subjects that despite the rapid encroachments of scientific industrialism, with all its evils, Britons still had happy lives full of choice, freedom, and variety. The idea still served this function during the Victorian era, but now it took on the converse importance, as well. That is, previously, eccentricity was seen as an *indicator* of British freedom; Britons were free, therefore they had the latitude to be eccentric. Mill's line of reasoning casts eccentricity also as *cause*; Britons must make an effort to be eccentric *in order to remain* free. Otherwise, mediocrity, stagnation, and tyranny will carry the day.

Taken together, the elements of Mill's argument on behalf of eccentricity form a sort of grand, overarching natural law visible in and influential for many areas of Victorian culture. First, the more eccentricity a nation encourages in the individual, the more it will have collectively. Britain has so little now because the "tyranny of opinion" discourages it; eccentricity and public opinion are at present natural enemies. Another way of saying this is that if the cultural environment nurtures eccentricity, it will flourish; if not, then eccentricity will become extinct. Second, the more eccentricity the nation has, the more "strength of character," "mental vigour," "moral courage," and "genius" its citizens will have. Mill associates these qualities in nearly synonymous fashion. (In fact, Mill argues that "[p]ersons of genius are . . . more individual than any other people" [65]. This

takes an old idea in a new direction. Ever since Quixote, the British eccentric has been said to possess some special wisdom of the heart that compensates for his cracked brain; Sir Roger de Coverley, the Shandys, and Launcelot Greaves all possessed it. Mill, however, asserts a link between wisdom of the *head* and eccentricity; hence the familiar stereotype of the eccentric, absent-minded, but brilliant professor.) And third, the more eccentricity and its associated qualities appear in a nation's citizens, the more that nation will succeed and progress. Eccentricity, then, is not just an escape from damp into a sunnier, less oppressive social climate. It is not merely a freedom *from*. By Mill's logic, it is a positive, general good. To be eccentric is a courageous, unquestionably laudable act. That is one side of the Victorian dialectic of eccentricity.

As observed above, Mill's language and thought in *On Liberty* frequently resemble those of a scientist--in particular, of a "naturalist."[166] He speaks in terms of "nature" (people [especially eccentrics] must follow their own or become less varied and less human; eccentrics have especially "strong natures"), "environment" (synonymous with "cultural milieu"; one's "environment" shapes one's whole personality and life), and "diversity" (crucial to the development of the individual, the nation, and the human race). Also, he often directly compares human life to plant or animal life. For instance, he writes, "Human nature is not a machine . . . but a tree, which requires to grow and develope [sic] itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing" (60). Also, "Human beings are not like sheep; and even sheep are not undistinguishably alike" (67); and again, "He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose

166 "One who is interested in, or makes a special study of, animals or plants. (A less precise term than *zoologist, botanist,* etc.)" (*OED*). The term remained relatively general until the twentieth century; close specialization was not often the case, and was certainly not the norm, during the Victorian era.

his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation" (59). He seeks and pronounces "grand determining principles" or natural laws, as a naturalist would. And his description of nonconforming human beings living in an anti-individualistic culture casts them as animals or plants struggling to live in an inhospitable environment.[167]

Mill, then, sounds a lot like a naturalist. In fact, he sounds like one particular hugely influential British naturalist: Charles Darwin. And it is here, at the conjunction of Mill's and Darwin's positions, that the dialectic of eccentricity forks. This makes the following fact all the more telling: *The Origin of Species*, Darwin's first major work and his most influential,[168] was published in the same year as Mill's *On Liberty*. In 1859 these writers expressed and did much to reify directly conflicting sentiments of dominant Victorian culture. Mill emphasizes and reifies the positive side of the dialectic: that eccentricity is a necessary antidote to the "tyranny of the prevailing opinion" (8), as well as vital to human development. This understanding of eccentricity fundamentally resembles that of the early eighteenth century, when eccentricity as practiced by a select few provided a limited alternative to the rigid dichotomy of madness and rationality; in both views, eccentricity is a needed form of social protest. Darwin (indirectly) argues and reifies the negative side of the dialectic: that eccentricity is

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[167] Hence the extended use of the "environment" or "atmosphere" metaphor in this chapter. I emphasize that element (*element*!) of Mill's position to point up the relationship between Mill's logic and Darwin's, which relationship, plus their relationship to eccentricity, I now describe.

[168] That *The Origin of Species* was very influential does not need to be insisted upon. Still, it is worth noting in this regard that *Origins* went through three editions as fast as the books could be printed; that 1250 copies were sold in London the first day it was available; that Marx and Engels offered to dedicate the first English edition of *Das Kapital* to Darwin (he declined); that Darwin's careful detailing in *Origins* of certain species' habits and relationships seriously stoked the already-widespread natural-history craze; that the book was specifically addressed to the general educated public, and enthusiastically received by it; and that Darwin's social position made his argument all the more influential--"It was of great importance that Darwin [was a] gentlem[a]n and family m[a]n of complete financial, political and sexual respectability" (Burrow 41).

impractical, maladaptive, and therefore suicidal in a universally competitive world that necessitates adaptation to conditions "as they are." After Darwin, the eccentric, already made a kind of species earlier in the century, becomes a *maladaptive* species whose days are numbered.

Still, as noted above, there is an important conjunction between the respective sides of the dialectic: both Darwin and Mill highly value individual difference as a creative force. Even Darwin bolsters the positive side, then. The heading for *On Liberty*'s Chapter 3 neatly sums up Mill's position on this subject: "individuality" is "one of the [very important] elements of well-being," for both the individual and the human race. In that chapter, too, he writes in a decidedly Darwinian vein, "Individuality is the same thing with development, and . . . it is only the cultivation of individuality which produces, or can produce, well-developed human beings" (64). Mill's argument strikingly resembles Darwin's assertion that individual variation is necessary to species' development and survival:

> [A]ny variation, however slight and from whatever cause proceeding, if it be in any degree profitable to any individual of any species, . . . will tend to the preservation of the individual, and will generally be inherited by its offspring. The offspring, also, will thus have a better chance of surviving . . . I have called this principle, by which each slight variation, if useful, is preserved, by the term of Natural Selection . . . (*Origin* 115)

As George Levine observes, for Darwin as for Dickens (as for Mill), "variety is not aberration but the condition for life" (150).

But this is so in a fundamentally different way for Darwin. The passage just quoted shows the overlap between Darwin's position and Mill's, but close reading also reveals the point where they diverge: the concept of

"profitability."[169] Mill (and the side of the dialectic he represents) finds eccentricity or individual difference *inherently* valuable under *all* circumstances:[170] again, "it is good there should be differences, even though not for the better, even though, as it may appear to [people], some should be for the worse" (73-74). Eccentricity, individuality, or individual difference--interchangeable terms for Mill--need not have a function, need not serve as a means to another end; it is a valuable end in itself. (This in addition to serving a practical purpose, keeping social tyranny at bay.) As such, difference is and ought to be *chosen*. Self-selected variations from popular opinion should be put into practice:

> As it is useful that while mankind are imperfect there should be different opinions, so is it that there should be different experiments of living; that free scope should be given to varieties of character . . . ; and that the worth of different modes of life should be proved practically, when any one thinks fit do try them. (57)

Just as the freedom to express any opinion causes the best ones to prevail and keeps them strong (*Liberty* 20-55),[171] the freedom to live any way one chooses ultimately produces the best, most satisfying and useful ways of life.

Darwin does not understand individual difference that way at all. For him, difference is not chosen but random; it occurs unexpectedly and on a

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[169] Obviously Darwin does not intend the monetary connotation of this word; he's talking about animals. However, that sense of "profit," which was nearly as dominant in Victorian times as in our own, is not at all irrelevant, either, as is discussed below.

[170] All but the one exception to which Mill always returns: in being different and doing what one likes, one must do no harm to others. But the eccentric is almost by definition harmless.

[171] This is another significant point of discursive conjunction; see below, the discussion of the "struggle for existence" and of the "survival of the fittest." Mill's understanding of ideas' and lifestyles' functioning in society closely resembles Darwin's understanding of species' and individuals' functioning in a given environment: all are in competition with each other and with the elements, as it were, and only the best adapted or strongest will survive.

minor scale, as a result of genetic permutation--a slightly different coloration, a minutely elongated tailfeather, an ability to go just a bit longer without water. Difference accumulates by tiny increments: "the steady accumulation, through natural selection, of . . . differences, when beneficial to the individual, . . . gives rise to all the more important modifications of structure, by which the innumerable beings on the face of the earth are enabled to struggle with each other, and the best adapted to survive" (204). Whereas Mill's view is largely anti-teleological, Darwin's is *teleological*: although difference first comes about randomly, it ultimately serves the concrete purpose of improving the individual's chances of survival; and any given difference, "however slight and from whatever [unpredictable, unchosen] cause proceeding," tends to strengthen itself in future generations. Differences progress in specific directions--for instance, a species's coloration progressively approximates that of the local flora--which always tend to become more and more useful.[172] Hence the liberal sprinkling throughout Darwin's argument of qualifying phrases such as "if it be in any degree profitable," "if useful," and "when beneficial to the individual." "Profitability" is the key.

And it *is* key, for in Darwin's universe, differences which are not profitable rapidly die out, and so do the individuals who possess them. Darwin proposes the "general principle" "that natural selection is continually trying to economise[173] in every part of the [individual's] organization" (186).

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[172] George Levine points out that the key Darwinian term, "Natural Selection," which appears even in the subtitle (the full title is *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*), is actually an oxymoron (99). That is, natural as opposed to human selection indicates randomness, lack of control--"letting nature take its course." But selection indicates purposeful choice. The final result is a system in which change *originates* randomly but *progresses* according to the specific criterion of usefulness or profitability.

[173] See the note on "profitable" above. It is striking, and telling, how neatly economic discourse overlaps with scientific.

That is, "natural selection will always succeed in the long run in reducing and saving every part of the organisation, as soon as it is rendered superfluous" (187). Thus, "[i]f under changed conditions of life a structure before useful becomes less useful, any diminution, however slight, in its development, will be seized on by natural selection, for it will profit the individual not to have its nutriment wasted in building up an useless structure" (186). Organisms nourishing superfluous structures are not living efficiently; natural selection abhors inefficiency; ergo, inefficient creatures do not live and reproduce. In this way, individual differences which serve no practical purpose drop away relatively quickly from the species; Natural Selection decrees it so. By this logic, if follows that "every detail of structure in every living creature . . . may be viewed, either as having been of special use to some ancestral form, or as being now of special use to the descendants of this form--either directly, or indirectly through the complex laws of growth" (228). The only individual differences that persist are useful ones--and they disseminate throughout the species. In other words, they don't remain *individual* differences for long.

"Useful," "profitable"--for what, exactly? Strictly for survival. That is the sole criterion for judging whether a given characteristic is "useful." For in Darwin's universe, survival is so difficult, such a constant worry and struggle, that it becomes the central focus of life. It is inescapable and perpetual for all creatures. This "Struggle for Existence" is to be understood "in a large and metaphorical sense" (116): it signifies not only direct competition between animals, as with two coyotes fighting over a scarce bit of meat, or herds of several species competing for space at the local watering hole; but also, more generally, the unending difficulty of simply surviving the environment long enough to reproduce. Thus,

> a plant on the edge of a desert is said to struggle for life against the drought . . . [S]everal seedling missletoes [sic], growing close together on the same branch, may more truly be said to struggle with each other. As the missletoe is disseminated by birds, its existence depends on birds; and it may metaphorically be said to struggle with other fruit-bearing plants, in order to tempt birds to devour and thus disseminate its seeds rather than those of other plants. (116)

The former, direct kind of struggle is most intense, and is especially brutal among like creatures: "the struggle almost invariably will be most severe between the individuals of the same species, for they frequent the same districts, require the same food, and are exposed to the same dangers" (126). But the other, more generalized and metaphorical struggle never ends. Sooner or later, no matter how favorable conditions may be at present, the fact of constant universal struggle for existence will bring hardship: "each [organism] at some period of its life, during some season of the year, during each generation or at intervals, has to struggle for life, and to suffer great destruction" (129).

The physical forms of species--tangible scientific evidence, verifiable by any amateur naturalist--prove that species constantly compete with each other for existence. The telling proof: no adaptation solely helps another species but many adaptations harm them. As Darwin phrases it, "Natural selection cannot possibly produce any modification in any one species exclusively for the good of another species . . . But natural selection can and does often produce structures for the direct injury of other species" 228).[174] Cooperation and peaceful coexistence, then, can occur, but only to a very

[174] Note the emphasis here: "*cannot possibly*" produce any cooperative modification. Not only does it not happen, it is impossible that it ever could.

limited extent, and only incidentally within the overarching framework of universal dog-eat-dog competition.

Darwin directly credits his discovery of the relationship between the struggle for life and the development of species to his reading of Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798). As Loren Eiseley notes, "Malthus was very popular at this time and therefore a powerful ally. . . . Darwin spoke of him admiringly as a 'great philosopher'" (182). Darwin read Malthus in 1838, very early in the research that culminated in *The Origin of Species.* In a section on Malthus in his autobiography, Darwin writes,

> being well prepared to appreciate the struggle for existence, which everywhere goes on, from long continued observation of the habits of animals and plants,[175] it at once struck me that under these circumstances favorable variations would tend to be preserved, and unfavorable ones to be destroyed. The result of this would be the formation of a new species. (1:83)

And in the *Origin* itself, he acknowledges that the doctrine of the struggle for existence "is the doctrine of Malthus applied with manifold force to the whole animal and vegetable kingdoms" (117).

What Darwin applies, specifically, is Malthus's fundamental argument that just surviving is very difficult--that, in fact, survival proves unavoidably impossible for large portions of the human race in all times and regions. Malthus argues that four ineluctable natural laws control human existence:

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[175] Here is a crystalline example of how scientific discourse begets more of the same. Darwin goes out to collect evidence by the familiar practices of science: ostensibly neutral observation, accumulation of specimens, painstaking description, and the formulation of natural law as suggested by the evidence. In other words, the information going into his brain is already shaped by the means, the discourse, according to which it is received. Then, with the information thus shaped, he reads Malthus's natural laws, the very discursive validity of which (natural laws) was in part solidified by Malthus. And lo! the natural laws make beautiful sense! They accord so well with his own scientific observations that they inspire...another natural law. And so it goes.

> [T]he power of population is indefinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man.
>
> Population, when unchecked, increases in a geometrical ratio. Subsistence increases only in arithmetical ratio. A slight acquaintance with numbers will shew the immensity of the first power in comparison of the second.
>
> By that law of our nature which makes food necessary to the life of man, the effects of these two unequal powers must be kept equal.
>
> This implies a strong and constantly operating check on population from the difficulty of subsistence. (13-14)

Clearly the Malthusian universe--and so by extension the Darwinian one--is an extremely competitive one. More people will always be begotten than can be supported by the available resources; therefore they will, nay *must* remain perpetually at each other's throats, often quite literally, or die themselves. As Levine argues, though probably not forcefully enough, "'The Struggle for Life' seems to imply that life is an individualistic war" (101)--very much like the frank "war of each against all" that appalled Engels in the impersonal, business-centered big city (37).

Although Darwin never actually uses the phrase "survival of the fittest," he certainly makes the concept appear to be *the* law of nature. In fact, he offers it as such: "[There is] one general law, leading to the advancement of all organic beings, namely, multiply, vary, let the strongest live and the weakest die" (263). This law tends toward ever greater totality; it tends to become more and more the case, because over time the strong become even stronger and overwhelm the weak, by numbers and by more successful adaptation to conditions: "[T]hroughout nature the forms of life which are

now dominant tend to become still more dominant by leaving many modified and dominant descendants" (113). This is true *within* species, too. Individuals usually resemble each other closely anyway, because change occurs and progresses only in very small gradations. In addition, though, species become more homogeneous over time as individuals possessing certain adaptations which strengthen them for the struggle survive and reproduce, and weaker individuals *not* possessing these useful adaptations die out. Darwin characterizes "Unity of Type" as one of "two great laws" by which "all organic beings have been formed" (233).[176] On all levels, then, the strong become even stronger; dominance leads to greater dominance.

The converse is also true: rare and/or weak creatures, which according to natural law are never as numerous nor as well adapted to environmental conditions, and which therefore cannot successfully compete for existence--that is why they are rare and/or weak--become even rarer and die away. Darwin argues that "rare species will be less quickly modified or improved within any given period, and they will consequently be beaten in the race for life by the modified descendants of the commoner species" (154). Iron nature weeds them out. For in all cases, "any variation in the least injurious"--"injurious" meaning "causing the organism to be less well equipped to struggle for life"--"any variation in the least injurious [is] rigidly destroyed" (131).

Thus, a Malthusian understanding of life was widely held in Victorian times; then Darwin's more generalized and scientifically documented use of the principle established it even more firmly. Before Darwin, and especially during the Romantic era, the dominant conception of Nature was a

[176] The other, "Conditions of Existence," was earlier established by Georges Cuvier, as Darwin acknowledges. It held that natural selection progress by means of adaptation by creatures to their environment. See the discussion of adaptation below.

harmonious one. Nature operated by laws that sometimes remained difficult to discover and understand, but which were nevertheless operant, maintaining all of heaven and earth in perfect, peaceful balance. The *Bridgewater Treatises*, which were published in eight volumes between 1833 and 1836, are the culminating expression of that pre-Darwinian understanding. They argue by design for a divine Designer, in several thousand pious pages. But Darwin's influential and essentially Malthusian conception of the universe pretty much exploded the "harmony" theory. As Tennyson famously phrased it, Nature now appeared "red in tooth and claw." Friedrich Engels astutely comments:

> Until Darwin, what was stressed by his present adherents was precisely the harmonious co-operative working of organic nature, how the plant kingdom supplies animals with nourishment and oxygen, and animals supply plants with manure, ammonia, and carbonic acid. Hardly was Darwin recognized before these same people saw everywhere nothing but *struggle*. (Qtd. in Eiseley 195; emphasis in original)

This is a vital discursive point. When people talk of scientific "discoveries"--i.e., recognitions of *a priori* facts and natural laws; seeing what's simply there to see, as opposed to formulating figurative ways of understanding--Darwin's name probably comes up more often than anyone's. (As in: "Darwin discovered evolution.") Darwin ostensibly saw the simple, factual truth that had eluded previous generations. But as Engels's comment implies, this is not necessarily so. It is more accurate to say that "these same people" (i.e., most everyone) who used to see only harmony in nature now became persuaded by an emerging discourse that that account was inaccurate. They allowed themselves to be taught to understand nature and the world

differently. In other words, Darwin's *Origin* made an emergent discourse the dominant one, and this new discourse produced new knowledge of the world--new facts, new certainties, and, through the process of reification, new material realities. Which is what discourse always does, according to Foucault: discourse always produces varieties of power/knowledge, and so as the discourse changes, forms of power/knowledge thereby produced will, too.[177]

Speaking of discourse and the struggle for survival, it should be noted that the model for understanding discourse which underlies this study is, at bottom, Darwinian. I refer to certain elements of discourse as "dominant," or coming to dominance, which implies direct competition or struggle between discursive elements. (In this my model for discourse is also Millian, as noted above.) Dominant elements, like dominant species, do not necessarily cause weaker elements to grow completely extinct, but the former do make the latter's existence tenuous and difficult. This makes them unable to compete with dominant elements, which renders them weaker still, leaving the dominant discourse that much more dominant. Discourse, then, like a thriving, spreading species, consolidates and increases its own strength. Additionally, I characterize certain changes in discourse--for instance, the limited acceptance of eccentricity as a means to provide an alternative to the mad/rational dichotomy in the early eighteenth century--much like Darwin characterizes useful variation. That is, such changes take strong root, as it were, because they are well adapted to their cultural environments, because they serve the needs those environments produce. In these ways, the model of discourse informing this study perpetuates the discourse Darwin helped establish as dominant.

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[177] His entire *œuvre* can be characterized as focused upon this central principle; but see most especially *The Order of Things*, *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality* I.

This is the main reason this study ends with the Victorian era. The very fact that a Darwinian understanding of the world is so firmly established that it permeates even this study's methodology shows how dominant it *still* is; it is even more so now than it was a hundred years ago. To delineate the discursive rules that came to dominance in Darwin's time is to delineate the discursive rules we now live by even more faithfully. On the matter of eccentricity and the related cultural concepts clustered around it--most especially madness and science--our direction was already chosen by the end of the nineteenth century. We have gone farther in that direction since then, but it is essentially the *same* direction.

Perhaps the Darwinian concept most conducive to relating this discussion explicitly back *to* eccentricity is that of adaptation. Up to now the relevance of this section on Darwin to the concept of eccentricity has been largely left implicit. The focus has remained on the Darwinian understanding of the world itself, in order to establish clearly what that is before showing its influence upon understandings of eccentricity. But again, adaptation is a useful *segué,* because the more general significance of this concept--to humans as well as to plants and other animals--seems so clear.

Chambers actually asserted the importance of (human beings') adaptation to the environment fifteen years before Darwin, in his controversial *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*:[178]

> To secure the immediate means of happiness it would seem to be necessary for men first to study with all care the constitution

[178] Briefly, so as not to stray even farther afield from Darwin and eccentricity: *Vestiges*, first published anonymously in 1844, was controversial because, as Chambers himself writes, it was "the first attempt to connect the natural sciences into a history of creation" (388). He boldly counters Biblical and catastrophic accounts of the earth's development with a uniformitarianism very much like Darwin's. The book's very anonymity also accounts for some of its controversial quality, in that many thought that Prince Albert, the Royal Consort, widely known to be a great amateur naturalist, had written it himself.

> of nature, and, secondly, to accommodate themselves to that constitution, so as to obtain all the realizable advantages from acting conformably to it, and to avoid all likely evils from disregarding it. (380)

This is essentially the point Mill makes, although Chambers frames as useful advice the position Mill decries. Darwin argues more generally in the *Origin* that the key factor to remaining competitive in the struggle for existence, and therefore the key factor to survival, is the successful adaptation of the individual (and through the individual, the species) to the environment. As he puts it, "natural selection acts by either now adapting the varying parts of each being to its organic and inorganic conditions of life; or by having adapted them during long-past periods of time" (233). Quite simply, those individuals which adapt themselves, survive; those which do not, die. This, too, is posed as ineluctable natural law.

To help yourself you must inevitably hurt others. We're simply not built for cooperation. We're all pretty much the same. Individual difference is only good when it can be assimilated by the collective--that is, when it is not really difference at all--and when it is *practical*. Dog, eat dog. These are lessons of Darwinian science. And perhaps the most important one is: adapt yourself to your environment, which necessitates intense struggle against your own kind, or die. You certainly can't make the *environment* change; you must alter *yourself* to survive in it. Nature itself proves the truth of this--just look around. Come on, be practical. Be realistic.

This is the mode of thinking which Darwinian science, even more dominant today, establishes as common sense, as self-evident truth, as "the way things are." The Frankfurt School characterizes it as "operationalism"--as an exclusive focus upon practicality, the bottom line, and seeing other

people, organisms, nature, and really the whole world, in terms of how they can be used to benefit the individual in the war of each against all.

Herbert Marcuse describes operationalism as the "Happy Consciousness--the belief that the real is the rational and the system delivers the goods" (84). "The real is the rational": this terse summary of *the* overarching post-Darwinian assumption communicates two fundamental assumptions of the dominant discourse. First, emphasize the word "rational": "what is real is rational" (123), i.e., existing material conditions are chosen, well thought out, and good. Science, driven by capitalism, has undeniably improved certain material realities of life. Because human *ratio,* reason, has been applied via science and business, life is better. Humankind is able to build cheaper, more reliable houses more quickly; to produce and distribute more food and clothing to more people; to provide more people with more nonessential goods; and, through the use of machinery, to relieve more people from drudge labor, than ever before.[179] (Theoretically, anyway; disregarding the actual inequities of distribution and the necessity for huge "reserve armies of the unemployed," with all the attendant miseries, which are built into capitalism.) This success of technological-capitalist society makes rebellion nearly impossible, for to rebel is to reject the good life. The system delivers the goods, so why would anyone want to overthrow the

[179] I emphasize that this was and is the *dominant* mode of discourse. There were, of course, many energetic and well-known dissenting voices during the Victorian period, as there are now. For instance, William Morris imagined in the utopian novel *News from Nowhere* what *truly* labor-saving machinery and cooperative society might be like, wrote several essays for socialism against capitalism, and spoke to socialist groups on many occasions. In *Past and Present* and elsewhere, Thomas Carlyle decried the exploitation of workers by the "captains of industry," the institution of the "cash-nexus" as the sole human bond which is universally recognized, and capitalist competition to undersell with all its cruel consequences. And John Ruskin deplored the unfairness capitalism encourages in *Unto This Last.* These dissenters from the dominant view--Carlyle, in particular--tend to be seen as sympathetic but finally unrealistic eccentrics: yes, they have a good point, but they don't recognize how things really *are.* Which, of course, the dominant discourse *would* have us say, in accordance with its logic--rebellion is not practical, so dissenters must be impractical.

system? As Marcuse puts it, "The more rational, productive, technical, and total the repressive administration of society becomes, the more unimaginable the means and ways by which the administered individuals might break their servitude and seize their own liberation" (6-7).

This is literally true; dissent becomes actually unimaginable, unthinkable. As Foucault and Mill would surely agree, "The coordination of the individual with his society reaches into those layers of the mind where the very concepts are elaborated which are designed to comprehend the established reality" (Marcuse 104). As I have argued throughout this study, discourse orders thought and one's world view. The discourse Darwin helped establish as dominant sees rebellion against the system as simply not *practical,* and practicality is the discourse's central demand; therefore, rebellion makes no sense. And one cannot seriously consider nonsense for long.

It is significant that Mill observes, "There is now scarcely any outlet for energy in this country except business" (70), in that only practical pursuits such as business seem viable. Even very minor rebellions/impracticalities such as acting a bit eccentric simply do not pay. As Mill paraphrases the common attitude, why is what is good enough for "everyone" not good enough for one? Furthermore, how does one argue with public opinion? With a success like the Victorian British Empire, upon which the sun never sets? With a system delivering the goods--especially after the Reform Act of 1860 ameliorated the system's worst cruelties? To differ from society's consensus is to tilt at windmills, which one cannot seriously consider; it is too self-evidently silly. You just hurt yourself, so obviously it's best to submit, to *adapt*. In Marcuse's words, "The impact of progress turns Reason into submission to the facts of life" (11). Darwinian discourse teaches that

self-adaptation to the environment--to public opinion, to "reality," to the practical consensus--is necessary for survival. To approach things from, say, Mill's direction--to try changing *society* so that it accepts individual difference more readily--seems foolishly idealistic and obviously hopeless.

And so, as the hegemony "finds its ideology in the rigid orientation of thought and behavior to the given universe of facts," "[o]perationalism . . . becomes the theory and practice of *containment*" (17). As Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno put it, "The individual is reduced to the nodal point of the conventional responses and modes of operation expected of him" (28). Individuals come to be viewed therapeutically, in terms of how they should be altered to fit in. "Thought and expression, theory and practice are to be brought into line with the facts of [the individual's] existence without leaving room for the conceptual critique of those facts" (Marcuse 107). And under such discursive conditions, "[t]he intellectual and emotional refusal 'to go along' appears neutoric and impotent" (Marcuse 9).

Which now shades into the other sense of the assumption that "the real is the rational." Emphasize the word "real": if the real is rational, then the ideal must be irrational. As Marcuse explains, in an operationalist system, "Values [such as individuality, ethics, and benevolence] may have a higher dignity (morally and spiritually), but they are not *real* and thus count less in the real business of life--the less so the higher they are elevated *above* reality" (147; emphases in original). Such values "remain matters of preference"; "the ideas become mere *ideals*, and their concrete, critical content evaporates into the ethical or metaphysical atmosphere" (148). They cease to be standards, and as such implicit critiques, of existing society; instead they become individual embarrassments, indicators of a shameful lack of realistic thought.

One of the justifications of eccentricity has always been the ideals associated with it, benevolence above all. Sir Roger de Coverley, Launcelot Greaves, and the Shandys[180] are sympathetic characters because they are benevolent despite their oddity, because the humanitarian ideals that are part and parcel of their quixotic nature are finally more valuable than their deviation from social norms is obnoxious. (That this plus-and-minus, debit-and-credit kind of thinking appears inherent in conceptions of eccentricity even early in the eighteenth century reveals the first growth of the operationalism which comes to maturity in the nineteenth.)

But in the operationalist Victorian era, such ideals get transferred to the debit side; they become personal weaknesses, liabilities, flaws. Because they are *merely* ideals--the more elevated the merer--and because ideals are essentially impractical, the idealism that used to be eccentrics' saving grace now becomes their worst stigma. Eccentrics appear "neurotic and impotent," as

> the human qualities of a pacified existence seem asocial and unpatriotic--qualities such as the refusal of all toughness, togetherness, and brutality; disobedience to the tyranny of the majority; profession of fear and weakness (the most rational reaction to this society!); a sensitive intelligence sickened by that which is being perpetrated; the commitment to the feeble and ridiculed actions of protest and refusal. . . . In the totalitarian society, the humanist attitudes tend to become escapist attitudes . . . (Marcuse 242-43)

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[180] William Makepeace Thackeray attacked *Tristram Shandy* vociferously, calling Sterne a "mountebank," a "worn-out old scamp," and a "foul satyr" who was "vain, wicked, witty, and false" (qtd. in Watt 31). Although the attack is *ad hominem*, one cannot help but speculate that the new, operationalist Victorian attitude toward benevolence and eccentricity motivated this respectable, middle-class attack, on some level.

In short, whereas the eccentric used to be admirable if flawed, in Victorian times *every* quality seems a flaw. The touch of madness and minor deviance associated with eccentricity still look bad--worse than ever, in fact, amid the general damp. And now eccentrics' quixotic idealism and benevolence appear as deluded and ridiculous as Don Quixote "flying" upon a wooden horse. The eccentric becomes a mere escapist.

One last general point should be made before the discussion of particular examples proceeds. The word "eccentric" was first used as a noun in 1832, culminating the process of coming to view the eccentric as a distinct species. By the rules of Darwinian discourse, and specifically Darwin's theory of species, the eccentric had to be viewed as a distinct and *maladaptive* species. The eccentric's distinctive characteristics--impractical individual difference, idealism, slight madness--appeared in this new light as plainly misguided adaptations, or failures to adapt, to the operationalist environment. This was a species that could not compete in the struggle for life. This species was at best misguided, and at worst doomed.

Furthermore, now that "the eccentric" had a name, that name exerted great normative, containing power. As Marcuse argues, an operationalist culture tends

> to consider the names of things as being indicative at the same time of their manner of functioning . . . [W]ords and concepts tend to coincide, or rather the concept tends to be absorbed by the word. The former has no other content than that designated by the word in the publicized and standardized usage, and the word is expected to have no other response than the publicized and standardized behavior (reaction). (86-87)

Put briefly, an eccentric is as an eccentric does. The fact that the name

"eccentric" was applied raised certain expectations and reflected certain discursive assumptions: an eccentric was predictably and simply a person who behaved eccentrically, who exhibited the now-traditional, distinctive characteristics of the eccentric.

The eccentric became a mere "character,"[181] as August Strindberg defines the word, in the Author's Foreword to *Miss Julie*:

> [I]t became the middle-class term for the automaton, one whose nature had become fixed or who had *adapted himself* to a particular role in life. In fact a person who had ceased to grow was called a character, while one continuing to develop . . . was called characterless, in a derogatory sense, of course, because he was *so hard to catch, classify, and keep track of*. . . . A character came to signify a man fixed and finished: one who invariably appeared either drunk or jocular or melancholy, and characterization required nothing more than a physical defect such as a club-foot, a wooden leg, a red nose; or the fellow might be made to repeat some such phrase as: "That's capital!" or: "Barkis is willin'!" (95; emphases added)

Note Strindberg's acknowledgement and critique of the dominant Darwinian/operationalist discourse, his sneer for those who value self-adaptation and self-limitation, and who dislike people who are "hard to catch, classify, and keep track of." In any case, the eccentric or "character" came to be defined *by* eccentricity in a fairly rigid, thorough-going way.

This point may seem a bit obvious when put this directly; what else would the eccentric be *but* eccentric? However, to illustrate the development,

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[181] Dickens employs the word "character" in this way as early as 1836, in *Sketches by Boz*: "a greater number of characters [lives] within [my neighborhood's] circumscribed limits, than all the rest of the parish put together" (13). The book also contains a whole sixty-page section headed "Characters."

contrast, say, Coverley of *The Spectator* with Strindberg's own example, Barkis of *David Copperfield* (1850). Coverley has several personal characteristics which have no bearing on eccentricity: he champions the Tory party; he belongs to the Spectator Club; he likes coffee. On the other hand, Barkis is nothing *but* eccentric: we never see Barkis do anything or be anything but that odd man who repeatedly, cryptically mutters to young David, "Barkis is willin'."[182] (Perhaps we could also identify him as a stagecoach driver--another noun, another uncomplex function indicated by a noun.) In this fashion, the concept and the word "eccentric" merged, and concomitantly the range of possible meanings of "eccentric" and actual eccentric practices closed off.

These available meanings and practices represented the sides of the dialectic delineated above. In Darwinian terms, the species "eccentric" exhibited two distinct varieties, one "good" and one "bad." One side of the dialectic, less dominant but still committed, found eccentricity a valuable alternative to oppressive, internalized-rule-bound, respectable Victorian society. As such, eccentricity was more valuable than ever before, which is what Mill argues. This side idealized eccentricity; this variety of eccentric, embodying the alternative[183] discursive element which prized eccentricity, took a thoroughly admirable, respectable form. The other side of the dialectic

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[182] Actually, later in the book, after Barkis has married Peggotty and so no longer has any reason to repeat "Barkis is willin,'" he becomes a miser, hoards his money in a chest, and takes up an alternate refrain, "Old clothes!" (He is trying to convince visitors, and apparently even his wife, that there is nothing in the chest worth stealing.) The point is that he continually repeats *a* given refrain and does nothing else. He is an eccentric, therefore/because he behaves eccentrically *all the time*. In any case, he reverts in the end to his first, most characteristic phrase; his last words are "Barkis is willin'!" (Dickens, *David Copperfield* 445).

[183] It cannot be called truly oppositional because, as argued below, it ultimately supports the dominant operationalist discourse. Alternative elements only offer choices (and in this case, extremely limited ones) supposedly different from those offered by the dominant discourse but in the end not challenging the dominant discourse. (See Williams, *Marxism and Literature* 121-27, for a discussion of dominant, residual, emergent, oppositional, and alternative cultural strains.)

found eccentricity more hideous than ever before--impractical, silly, idealistic in the worst sense, and maladaptive. The anti-eccentric strain, more dominant, cast eccentrics in a negative light; this variety of eccentric appeared quite mad, unable to function in the practical world, exiled, and doomed. In the end, both sides of the dialectic spelled the eccentric's extinction. Both idealization and vilification rendered the eccentric, in both varieties, an impotent, endangered species.

It is no accident that Strindberg uses Barkis to illustrate his point, for Barkis's creator, Charles Dickens, is deservedly the British writer most associated with eccentrics. When the subject of eccentrics comes up, Dickens tends to spring to mind, his works being full to bursting with memorable "characters" who exemplify both sides of the dialectic of eccentricity. (That is, some exemplify one side, some the other.) His influence upon Victorian culture, and specifically upon conceptions of the eccentric, was incalculable. As Levine writes, "No literate person living between 1836 and 1870 could have escaped knowing about Dickens" (120)[184]--and during those years, the British population was becoming much more widely literate. Most illiterate persons probably knew about Dickens, too, for quite often "a group of twenty men and women [would sit] together in a . . . shop listening to one of their number reading aloud from a copy rented from a circulating library at twopence a day" (Mersand vii). Those who couldn't read could listen.

Dickens's works reached this vast audience with special force, because of his publication method: all his novels plus *Sketches by Boz* (1836-7) were

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[184] He adds, "After 1859, the same would have been true of Darwin" (120).

See George Gissing's book-length study of Dickens's work: "for at least five-and-twenty years of [Dickens's] life, there was not an English-speaking household in the world, above the class which knows nothing of books, where his name was not as familiar as that of any personal acquaintance, and where an allusion to characters of his creating could fail to be understood" (*Dickens* 280). Dickens's name was such a household word that he very nearly named the magazine *Household Words*, which he edited, "*Charles Dickens: Conducted by Himself*" instead (Gissing, *Dickens* 280).

published in monthly (or in a couple of cases, weekly) parts. As Peter Ackroyd observes, "such serialisation encourages suspense and maintains the continuity of interest which more conventional publication *in toto* would have precluded, and there is no doubt also that serial publication encouraged precisely the kind of breathless, and almost topical, excitement which the newspapers also satisfied" (199). Dickens often performed his works publicly, as well; in fact, the biographical consensus is that he worked himself to death doing so.[185] These personal presentations added yet more to his works' immediacy and influence.

Additionally, prints representing characters from his novels sold briskly (and all his novels were published with accompanying illustrations), as did products designed to cash in on the novels' popularity.[186] For example, after *The Pickwick Papers* (1837) proved immensely popular, people could and did buy "Pickwick chintzes, Pickwick cigars, Pickwick hats, Pickwick canes with tassels, Pickwick coats, Weller corduroys and Boz cabs" (Mersand vii-viii). Dickens's multimedia influence was in fact impossible to escape, as George Orwell claims was still the case in mid-twentieth century:

> Many children begin to know his characters by sight before they can even read . . . A thing that is absorbed as early as that does not come up against any critical judgment. . . . [Dickens] is an institution that there is no getting away from . . . I should doubt whether anyone who has actually read Dickens can go a week without remembering him in one context or another. Whether you approve of him or not, he is *there*, like the Nelson Column. . . . Even people who affect to despise him quote him

[185] See, e.g., Ackroyd and John Forster.

[186] Apparently Dickens did not plan or market such merchandise himself. In fact, one of his lifelong crusades was to stop other people's making a killing from his success, which crusade largely took the form of trying to improve copyright law.

unconsciously. (90-91)

So literate or not, one way or another, most Britons imbibed Dickens's contributions to the discourse of eccentricity.

Dickens's work, like operationalist discourse in general, distills eccentrics down to their essence. His eccentric characters such as Mr. Barkis are really *nothing but* eccentric. As Orwell writes, they are seen and memorable forever "in one particular attitude, doing one particular thing" (98), an odd one. Whether they are the "positive" or "negative" variety of eccentric, "[t]hey say perfectly the thing that they have to say, but they cannot be conceived as talking about anything else" (99). Such characters are in fact the most common type in Dickens. Infrequently a somewhat rounded,[187] complex character (generally the hero) appears, but nearly everyone in Dickens's world exists in only one dimension:

> Dickens sees human beings with the most intense vividness, but he sees them always in private life, as "characters," not as functional members of society;[188] that is to say, he sees them statically. Consequently his greatest success is *The Pickwick*

[187] E. M. Forster, who popularized the terms "flat" and "round" characters to describe, respectively, simple, one-dimensional characters whose personalities can be summed up in a single sentence, and more complex characters who learn and change, writes, "Dickens's people are nearly all flat (Pip and David Copperfield attempt roundness, but so diffidently that they seem more like bubbles than solids)" (108). He also writes, much in the vein of Marcuse, that the single idea around which the flat character is constructed "is not his idée fixe, because there is nothing in him into which the idea can be fixed. He is the idea, and such life as he possesses radiates from its edges and from the scintillations it strikes when other elements in the novel impinge" (104).

[188] Note Orwell's telling distinction between "functional members of society" and "characters."

> *Papers*, which is not a story at all, merely a series of sketches;[189] there is little attempt at development--the characters simply go on and on, behaving like idiots, in a kind of eternity. (82-83)

Furthermore, as Gissing writes, "With the normal in character, with what (all things considered) we may call wholesome normality, Dickens does not often concern himself" (*Dickens* 114-15). In Dickens's world an eccentric is an eccentric is an eccentric, and this applies to most everyone. This, too, weakens the cultural power of eccentricity: when everyone is eccentric, especially *this* eccentric, then no one is. It appears that this is "just how people are." The word/concept grows diffuse and loses meaning.

Dickens's works reflect and reify both sides of the dialectic of eccentricity delineated above. On the positive side, Dickens gives us the "Good Rich Man" (Orwell 52).[190] This character

> is usually a "merchant" (we are not necessarily told what

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[189] As J. H. Stonehouse's catalogue shows, Dickens's library contained many volumes of sketches, both highminded (e.g., *Sketches of the Lives and Characters of the Leading Reformers of the Sixteenth Century: Luter, Calvin, Zwingle, Socinus, Cranmer, Knox*, 1843) and less so (e.g., *Wilson's Wonderful Characters*, 1821 edition). Interestingly, and significantly, Dickens also owned an 1820 English edition of *Don Quixote* and an 1867 condensation of that work, *Wit and Wisdom of Don Quixote*. No wonder, then, that Dickens continues the direct Quixote genealogy in his "Good Old Men" (see below) and betrays the influence of early nineteenth-century physiologies.

On a different point: Cuvier's *Animal Kingdom* and Darwin's *Origin of Species* were also in Dickens's library, among many other contemporary scientific texts. Dickens knew a lot about his time's science, and it shows in his writings. See Fulweiler, who demonstrates how Darwinian patterns appear in *Our Mutual Friend*. See also Levine on Dickens's and Darwin's mutual knowledge and influence, especially 120-50.

[190] Gissing refers to this type as "benevolent old boys" (*Dickens* 115).

> merchandise he deals in),[191] and he is always a superhumanly kind-hearted old gentleman who "trots" to and fro, raising his employees' wages, patting children on the head, getting debtors out of jail and, in general, acting the fairy godmother. . . . [I]t is the same figure over and over again, the good rich man, handing out guineas. (Orwell 52)

Examples include the Cheeryble Brothers of *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839), Samuel Pickwick of *The Pickwick Papers*, John Jarndyce of *Bleak House* (1853), the Garland brothers of *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841), and most famously, Ebenezer Scrooge of *A Christmas Carol* (1843), *after* Christmas Eve, of course.

Eighteenth-century eccentrics such as Sir Roger de Coverley and later, Sir Launcelot Greaves, resemble Don Quixote but are less mad and misguided, and more concretely benevolent, than the Spanish knight. They are shown actually improving social conditions in tangible ways, and not merely inspiring others by their idealism. This quixotic type or species of eccentric persists, maintaining its characteristic behavior, in the early nineteenth-century physiologies. There, the emphasis shifts even more firmly to the type's benevolence; the benevolent eccentric emerges as *the* eccentric, fairly exclusively, by the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign. And

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[191] This point is more significant than Orwell seems to recognize; he does not speculate on what Dickens's vagueness here means. Gissing provides an answer: he argues that Dickens practices a degree of "idealization" unusual even for a novelist. Truly horrifying elements are distilled and slightly altered until, almost alchemically, they become much less threatening. For example, Mrs. Gamp's vileness, which would horrify anyone in real life, is subtly altered into highly quotable and humorous vulgarity. Dickens idealizes her vileness into comedy (*Dickens* 100-108). Vagueness about the Good Old Man's precise source of income idealizes that income: since obviously the character is kind and generous down to his very bones, the money must be presumed to have come honestly and fairly. No one could possibly have been oppressed in the process of its acquisition. We could not so easily think this if we were given a specific source to contemplate; we would inevitably worry about the poor coal miners, or the starving, striking factory workers. Or other heartless Scrooges (as he was *before* Christmas Eve), of which there are several: for instance, Ralph Nickleby of *Nicholas Nickleby*, Daniel Quilp of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and Mr. Jaggers of *Great Expectations* (1861). Dickens's idealization of the Good Old Man's income assists the Good Old Man's support of the capitalist status quo (see below).

now, in Dickens's novels, the species alters again, so that it comes to embody Benevolence in almost allegorical fashion. The Good Rich Man is just that, in the way Marcuse explains: the noun and function completely coincide; the Good Rich Man is *only* good and rich. One can trace a direct line of descent, then, from the early seventeenth century (Cervantes) to the late nineteenth (Dickens), and thence forward into our own time: Quixote begat Coverley; Coverley begat Greaves and the Shandys; Greaves and the Shandys begat the real-life benefactors described in the physiologies; and the real-life benefactors begat the Victorian Good Rich Man. There is a clear line of development: madness, originally as prominent a feature as benevolence, steadily drops away, finally leaving only the latter. The type gradually becomes idealized as the embodiment of good-hearted generosity. Ironically, the eccentric, symbol of individuality, grows less individual and more typical, to the point during Dickens's time that a type-name such as the "Good Rich Man" actually fits.

The Good Rich Man's personal oddities disappear except for his unusual goodness--and even the remaining traces of oddity point to that goodness. *Bleak House*'s John Jarndyce provides a good example. His "eccentricity does not pass bounds; the better we know him the less observable it grows" (Gissing, *Dickens* 115); and really, it is barely noticeable in the first place. It consists solely in two minor oddities. First, he always refuses any acknowledgement of his generosity. Upon first meeting him, the perceptive Esther Summerson observes, "I felt that if we had been at all demonstrative [of our gratitude], he would have run away in a moment" (63). And second, whenever he feels worried, disappointed, or otherwise in low spirits, he soliloquizes that the wind is "either in the east, or going to be" (64). Esther smokes this gentle ruse quickly, too: "[T]his caprice about the wind was a fiction; . . . he used the pretence to account for any disappointment he could

not conceal, rather than he would blame the real cause of it, or disparage or depreciate any one. We thought this very characteristic of his eccentric gentleness" (80). Refusing to have his kindness recognized, and blaming the weather rather than any person for his discomfort, only make his benevolence seem still more thorough and genuine. As oddities go, they're just not very odd--they're good.

There are no Good Rich Women. There are certainly none in Dickens, and none in other Victorian works, to my knowledge, that flawlessly fits the type. There are sympathetic, generous female characters, to be sure; take, for instance, Dorothea Brooke of *Middlemarch* (1871-2). She veritably aches to do good. But she does not fit the eccentric stereotype, in that she is a complex, thoughtful character. That is, the Good Rich Man is *only* that; Dorothea is not especially rich (and has nothing whatever to do with business), and *is* ambitious, a characteristic not at all part of the Good Rich Man's makeup. Also, she falls in love and marries, twice--something the Good Rich Man distinctly does not do (see below). Finally, she appears in a context, the world of George Eliot, which demands that we take all characters seriously, especially Dorothea--something we are significantly never nudged to do, and are even encouraged *not* to do, with Victorian eccentrics.

The discourse of eccentricity excluded women from the category of eccentrics during the eighteenth century; the Victorian species Good Rich Man, a descendant of the eighteenth-century type, persists in this exclusion. The defining characteristic of the Good Rich Man is total generosity with wealth, usually earned through unspecified trade. A generous *female* merchant, though, would be hard for Victorian society to imagine, and would seem unbelievable to a mass audience of a realistic novel. (She would need to be single by misfortune, and married off quickly, to remain wholly

sympathetic.) As Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue, the ideal (and, I would add, particularly middle-class) role for nineteenth-century British women was "Angel of the House." This type, self-sacrificing, utterly domestic, and pure through and through, appears again and again in Dickens: Esther Summerson, Lizzie Hexam (*Our Mutual Friend*, 1865), Little Nell (*The Old Curiosity Shop*), Agnes Wickfield (*David Copperfield*). Gilbert and Gubar argue that women who do not fit this type were viewed in the dark twin role of "Madwoman in the Attic"; they were "warned that if they do not behave like angels they must be monsters" (53), and as such should be locked away, like the first Mrs. Rochester in *Jane Eyre*.

Roles perceived to be available to women, then, did not include Good Rich Person. The Angel of the House's kindness does somewhat resemble the Good Rich Man's; however, it differs in its sphere. The former operates entirely within the home; the latter, largely outside it. Esther Summerson and her type make members of the household happy through self-sacrifice and generosity of time. The Cheerybles and their type make people outside the home, very frequently complete strangers, happy through no-strings-attached cash donations. In these ways, even though the attitudes of Angel and Man are very similar, the social roles differ fundamentally.

Two female characters in Dickens's works approach being Good Rich Women: Miss Havisham and Betsy Trotwood. The former appears to be Pip's generous benefactress, an illusion she maintains as long as possible. However, Pip eventually discovers that his real benefactor is a man, the convict Abel Magwitch, who could almost be a harmless Good Rich Man himself if not for the frightening fact that he is a convict. (It is in the character of escaped convict that he meets and threatens young Pip at the beginning of the story). And Miss Havisham is not only not a Good Rich

Woman; it turns out she is actually plotting her revenge upon the male sex (as much of it as possible) by training Estella to wreak havoc upon it.

Betsy Trotwood comes closer to the type. She never quite reaches it, however, because she is a bit too complex and full of guile for it. She behaves quite generously toward David Copperfield and Mr. Dick, to be sure. But she also feels irrationally annoyance with David for his not having been born a girl;[192] it takes considerable time on her part and extraordinary innocent suffering on David's to convince her to drop her resentment. She is capable of considerable impatience and irritability toward others--i.e., characteristics outside the defining one of benevolence. And she hides the fact of her not having lost all her money; she allows Mr. Dick and David to struggle and, as they think, scrape by with great peril and difficulty, only to reveal later that she had 5,000 pounds all along. "I wanted to see how you would come out of the trial, Trot [David]," she says (776). The Good Rich Man represents pure, uncomplicated benevolence (from the Latin *bene*, well, and *volens*, wishing)--benevolence so pure it will not allow itself to be recognized, nor give another person any pain. The type could not conceive of throwing a loved one, a blood relative, into the dog-eat-dog world just "to see how he would come out of it." In these ways, the women most closely resembling the Good Rich Man never quite fit the type; the category, possessing a long male lineage, continues to exclude women.[193]

"Impossible not to like and to respect Mr. Jarndyce," writes Gissing (*Dickens* 115)--that is, Mr. Jarndyce and the type he represents. The Good Rich Man's bone-deep good-heartedness demands this response. The side of the dialectic represented by Mill, and less one-sidedly by Dickens, finds great

[192] On the same nonsensical principle, she despises Peggotty for having been born with such a ridiculous "pagan" name.

[193] Intriguing: a genealogy without women! Reproduction of the species without females! It's a phenomenon for the freak books.

value in eccentricity. Character portraits such as Dickens's Good Rich Man reflect and reify this widespread cultural desire. That Dickens would support eccentricity in this way jibes well with the strong stand against oppressive operationalism he takes in *Hard Times*. There he offers Thomas Gradgrind as a warning example, an embodiment of everything anti-humanist, bottom-line-obsessed, and disgusting:

> Thomas Gradgrind, sir. A man of realities. A man of facts and calculations. A man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four, and nothing over, and who is not to be talked into allowing for anything over. . . . With a rule and a pair of scales, and the multiplication table always in his pocket, sir, ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to. It is a mere question of figures,[194] a case of simple arithmetic. (3)

Gradgrind forbids his children to read or hear any fiction, to indulge any sentiment or wonder, and to behave any way but practically. Consequently, they grow up miserable. Louisa Gradgrind returns to him and renounces her entire upbringing as a blight upon her naturally sensitive soul:

> "Father, you have trained me from my cradle. . . . I curse the hour in which I was born to such a destiny. . . . How could you give me life, and take from me all the inappreciable things that raise it from the state of conscious death? Where are the graces of my soul? Where are the sentiments of my heart? What have you done, O father, what have you done, with the garden that should have bloomed once, in this great wilderness here!" (215-

[194] "A Mere Question of Figures" was apparently one of fourteen titles for *Hard Times* short-listed by Dickens (Craig 11). Clearly, in Dickens's mind the "mere question of figures" approach to life, Gradgrind's, goes hand-in-glove with "hard times."

16)

What was attractive about the Good Rich Man is that he worked for Louisa's side against her father's. The good eccentric represented sentimental, idealistic considerations higher and more important than mere practicality.

Which was also one of his two glaring flaws. In a culture which tended to find, with Gradgrind, that "the Good Samaritan was a Bad Economist" (215), such ideals seemed impractical and soft-headed, almost suicidal. The good eccentric appeared all the more valorous for being benevolent against the cultural grain--and all the more ridiculous. Immediately, though, the dominant culture would find him fundamentally hard to believe; bottom-line-oriented society would inescapably consider the mathematics of getting and spending. As Orwell observes, "Even Dickens must have reflected occasionally that anyone who was so anxious to give his money away would never have acquired it in the first place" (52). And it would seem clear that only someone like Scrooge who had hoarded it over an extended miserly life could long afford the type's exaggerated generosity; anyone else would run out of money in a month. In this manner Dickens idealizes eccentricity by removing all alloy from the single quality of benevolence; and in doing so, he idealizes eccentricity in a different way--he makes it seem *merely* ideal, impossible, nonexistent.

Even if benevolence this total and one-dimensional were considered an ideal one could actually aspire to, the problem of the eccentric's supposedly essential impracticality would still remain. Harold Skimpole of *Bleak House* best exemplifies how eccentricity becomes associated fundamentally with blameful impracticality. As with many of his characters, Dickens identifies

Skimpole's single dimension and repeats it and repeats it and repeats it.[195] Again and again we are told that Skimpole is a "baby," a "mere child in the world" (70), that he has "no Will at all--and no Won't--simply Can't" (435), that even Esther Summerson and John Jarndyce "are designing people compared with [him]" (71), that he can't even count change, the language of money being as incomprehensible as "Moorish" (596), and so on. Anything vaguely practical draws the same silly response: Skimpole smilingly throws up his hands and asserts that such things are beyond him, beyond his deepest nature--"I haven't the ruled account-book, I have none of the tax-gathering elements in my composition, I am not at all respectable, and I don't want to be. Odd perhaps, but so it is!" (532).

Skimpole himself offers several eloquent, Millian defenses of eccentricity. One particularly forceful statement of this position likens humans to bees, perhaps alluding to Bernard de Mandeville's *The Fable of the Bees* (1724). (Mandeville argues that individual vices such as vanity produce public good by stimulating trade. The admittedly tenuous link between this position and Mill's is that in each, individual actions bring about culture-wide benefits; the individual's right to act even in ways which are not approved by the community at large must therefore be protected.) As Esther describes Skimpole's oration,

> he protested against the overweening assumptions of Bees. He didn't at all see why the busy Bee should be proposed as a model to him; he supposed the Bee liked to make honey, or he wouldn't do it--nobody asked him. It was not necessary for the

[195] See Gissing: "[Dickens's] art, especially as satirist, lies in the judicious use of emphasis and iteration. Emphasis alone would not have answered his purpose; the striking thing must be said over and over again till even the most stupid hearer has it by heart" (*Dickens* 146). Note Gissing's implicit recognition that much of Dickens's Victorian audience was listening, not reading, and so Dickens's influence extended beyond the literate.

> Bee to make such a merit of his tastes. . . . He must say he thought a Drone the embodiment of a pleasanter and wiser idea. The Drone said, unaffactedly, "You will excuse me; I really cannot attend to the shop! I find myself in a world in which there is so much to see, and so short a time to see it in, that I must take the liberty of looking about me, and begging to be provided for by somebody who doesn't want to look about him." This appeared to Mr. Skimpole to be the Drone philosophy, and he thought it a very good philosophy--always supposing the Drone to be willing to be on good terms with the Bee: which, so far as he knew, the easy fellow always was, if the consequential creature would only let him, and not be so conceited about his honey! (93)

"All he asked of society was, to let him live" (69), to "suffer him to ride his rocking-horse" (71),[196] which is just what Mill asks on eccentrics' behalf. Through Skimpole, Dickens asks for respectable society's tolerance for individual difference, observing that jostling practicality is no more viable a model for life than self-indulgent dronishness. The argument regarding practicality is much the same lesson Dickens teaches through the bad example of characters such as Scrooge, Ralph Nickleby, Jaggers, Gradgrind, and

[196] Clearly, this is an allusion to *Tristram Shandy* and the eccentric's "hobby-horse." Dickens owned Sterne's complete works (Stonehouse 105), and apparently they made a deep, lasting impression.

Bounderby (*Hard Times*).[197] As Skimpole puts it, "Very odd and curious, the mental process is, in you men of business!" (77). The eccentric "infant" Skimpole accepts himself and others, and wants others to do the same; he speaks "as if he knew that [he] had his singularities, but still had his claims, too, which were the general business of the community and must not be slighted" (70). Dickens, like Mill, argues that Skimpole's eccentricity must be valued, protected, and even encouraged.

But then again: Drones? As models for human life? As science-savvy Victorians would know, drones do not contribute to the hive's prosperity, they merely live off worker bees. Bees presumably do not experience resentment with such an arrangement; human beings, most of them alienated workers who would enjoy living like Drones instead, resent it very much. When Skimpole says such things as, "Live upon your practical wisdom, and let us [Drones] live upon you!" (598), he appears much less sympathetic. Esther, representing respectable, practical society, receives such statements with serious doubt which readers are apparently intended to feel, as well. Although she finds Skimpole "at once so whimsical and so loveable" (64) that she cannot help liking him, she also has trouble "in endeavouring to reconcile anything he said with anything I had thought about the duties and accountabilities of life . . . I was confused by not exactly understanding why he was free of them. That he *was* free of them, I scarcely doubted; he was so very clear about it himself" (70). She even suspects his sincerity, since in effect

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[197] Dickens describes the eminently practical and successfully competitive Bounderby in quite unsympathetic terms:

> He was a rich man: banker, merchant, manufacturer, and what not. A big, loud man, with a stare and a metallic laugh. A man made out of coarse material, which seemed to have been stretched to make so much of him. . . . A man with a pervading appearance on him of being inflated like a balloon, and ready to start. A man who could never sufficiently vaunt himself a self-made man. A man who was always proclaiming, through that brassy speaking-trumpet of a voice of his, his old ignorance and old poverty. A man who was the Bully of humility. (14)

being impractical works out so *practically* for him: "I could not satisfy myself that it was as artless as it seemed; or that it did not serve Mr. Skimpole's idle turn quite as well as any other part, and with less trouble" (522). Impracticality might be an ultra-practical adaptation on Skimpole's part. Whether it is or not, his ingratitude is clearly intended as unsympathetic; it is obviously not warranted. After decades of living off Jarndyce's selfless, boundless generosity, he finally leaves Jarndyce, dying soon afterwards. He "left a diary behind him, with letters and other materials towards his Life; which was published, and which showed him to have been the victim of a combination on the part of mankind against an amiable child." Maybe--but he wrote what every reader of the novel knows to be false: "Jarndyce, in common with most other men I have known, is the Incarnation of Selfishness" (831). Skimpole's saying so shows him to be an extremely ungrateful drone.

Dickens only *seems* to defend eccentricity, then, or does so with only one hand. He writes forceful, Millian defenses of eccentricity, but pairs eccentricity with infantile impracticality. He rejects iron practicality, and makes eccentricity appear "whimsical and loveable"; however, at the same time he makes defenses of eccentricity fairly implausible,[198] and delivers them through characters whose interests are served by being eccentric, who

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[198] This Skimpolean defense of impractical eccentricity, too, indicates that his arguments should be understood as implausible:

> I almost feel as if *you* ought to be grateful to *me*, for giving you the opportunity of enjoying the luxury of my generosity. I know you like it. For anything I can tell, I may have come into the world expressly for the purpose of increasing your stock of happiness. I may have been born to be a benefactor to you, by sometimes giving you an opportunity of assisting me in my little perplexities. Why should I regret my incapacity for details and worldly affairs, when it leads to such pleasant consequences? (71)

Skimpole, a total sponge, as benefactor? No way. That is plainly ridiculous. But even to hint at such a connection is to cast another shadow on the Good Rich Man type of eccentric; if Skimpole-as-admirable-benefactor somewhat resembles Jarndyce in the same role, so much the worse for the latter.

receive benefaction without gratitude. In the end, being an extremely hard-working, respectable middle-class Victorian himself, Dickens cannot unqualifiedly vaunt the supposedly impractical, dronish eccentric. What Dickens builds up he simultaneously tears down. The ostensible champion of the eccentric at the same time "shows traces of the 'I've always kept myself respectable' habit of mind" (Orwell 73). Those people should see things the way they are, get practical, and stop sponging off the rest of us: this is the message underlying even Dickens's most ardent arguments on the eccentric's behalf.

Gissing, who was born only a generation after Dickens, and who studied him, was alive to this signification. He calls Skimpole "a character, in the proper sense of the word"--i.e., Strindberg's--and continues, "Skimpole is one of the few people in Dickens whom we dislike" (123). Gissing doubts Skimpole's sincerity, much like Esther Summerson: "If we incline to think his eccentricity overdone, be it remembered that the man was in part an actor, and a very clever actor too" (123).

Gissing articulates what Dickens only intimates: that respectable Victorian society despises the eccentric and his supposedly essential impracticality. In 1891 Gissing published *New Grub Street*, a semi-autobiographical novel recounting his sufferings at the hands of practical-minded late-Victorian society. There, he depicts Edwin Reardon and Harold Biffen, two good-hearted, impractical, eccentric[199] authors, as sympathetic yet hated. Reardon refuses to attend parties and finagle positive reviews in order to market his new novel, insisting upon his work's succeeding only on its own merit. He refuses to write "commercial" fiction, too. Biffen persists in

[199] As the respectable Mrs. Yule's friends say, "Mr. Reardon is growing so very eccentric--has an odd distaste for society--occupies himself with all sorts of out-of-the-way interests. . . . And really, such curious eccentricities!" (253). See below for what these "eccentric" tastes are.

writing "absolute realism in the sphere of the ignobly decent" (150),[200] despite knowing full well that such work will never sell. Like Quixote, they take their greatest delight in old, outdated books: in their case, Greek and Roman classics. Like Skimpole, they find the language of Money as incomprehensible as Moorish. As Biffen puts it, they remain "rabid idealists, both of [them]" (150)--as the mad-dog descriptor "rabid" signals, plainly a bad thing to be. (One would have to be "rabid" to remain an idealist willfully in such a practical-minded culture.) Gissing sums up his society's attitude toward such people in these words:

> The chances are that you have neither understanding nor sympathy for men such as Edwin Reardon and Harold Biffen. They merely provoke you. They seem to you inert, flabby, weakly envious, foolishly obstinate, impiously mutinous, and many other things. You are made angrily contemptuous by their failure to get on; why don't they bestir themselves, push and bustle, welcome kicks so long as halfpence follow, make a place in the world's eye . . . ? (455)

In short, why don't they get practical, go out into the "real world," and compete? Not to compete is not to survive. In these circumstances, even Reardon himself must find his eccentric impracticality blameful: "My

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[200] In characterizing his own work, Biffen differentiates it from Dickens's in much the same way Gissing does his own, in his study of that author: "I want to deal with the essentially unheroic, with the day-to-day life of that vast majority of people who are at the mercy of paltry circumstance. Dickens understood the possibility of such work, but his tendency to melodrama on the one hand, and his humour on the other, prevented him from thinking of it" (151).

behaviour is contemptible; I know that" (50).[201]

Gissing deplores this dominant attitude, but he credits it with so much cultural power, and the nonscientific, pro-eccentric position with so little, that he, too, finally strengthens the hegemony. He plainly shows how much he dislikes the direction his society is moving; however, in describing this movement as inexorable, as a kind of irresistible natural law, he uses operationalism's own terms to strengthen what he hates.

More unambiguously than Dickens, Gissing makes the Millian argument that eccentrics such as Reardon and Biffen are actually valuable, humane exemplars in a cruel, Darwinian world, and that it is not them but society which should change:

> [T]ry to imagine a personality wholly unfitted for the rough and tumble of the world's labour-market. From the familiar point of view these men were worthless; view them in possible relation to a humane order of society, and they are admirable citizens. Nothing is easier than to condemn a type of character which is unequal to the coarse demands of life as it suits the average man. These two were richly endowed with the kindly and the imaginative virtues; if fate threw them amid incongruous circumstances, is their endowment of less value? You scorn their passivity; but it was their nature and their merit to be

[201] See, too, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, first published in 1901, shortly after Gissing's death. There, Ryecroft, an eccentric character cut from the same cloth as Reardon and Biffen, muses, "'Unpractical' [sic] I was called by those who spoke mildly; 'idiot'--I am sure--by many a ruder tongue. And idiot I see myself whenever I glance back over the long devious road. Something, obviously, I lacked from the beginning, some balancing principle granted to most men in one or another degree. I had brains, but they were no help to me in the common circumstances of life" (150). Here again eccentricity is posited as an absence, a deficiency, a lack of practical reasoning.

Incidentally, on this point of the eccentric's impracticality, it is telling that Ryecroft, at the end of a reverie on reading, writes, "Come, once more before I die I will read *Don Quixote*" (240).

> passive. . . . The sum of their faults was their inability to earn money; but, indeed, that inability does not call for unmingled disdain. (455)

True, they do not and cannot compete effectively by society's standards; but the standards are wrong. The fault is not eccentrics'.

Furthermore, Gissing points out that society's standards, part and parcel of a broadly "scientific" (i.e., operationalist) perception of the world, have only recently become dominant. The vulgar, bottom-line practicality personified in *New Grub Street*'s Jasper Milvain (who resembles Dickens's Gradgrind) has only really become the norm during Queen Victoria's reign. This would imply that this understanding of the world, these standards for human thought and behavior, are not necessarily eternally, unquestionably viable: they have taken other shapes which were considered good and natural in their own times; they could in the future take different shapes which will then be accepted.

Society may well be wrong, then, in adopting operationalist discourse so completely. Still, Gissing credits that discourse with nearly irresistible strength. As Ryecroft, apparently speaking for Gissing,[202] observes:

> I wonder whether there are many men who have the same feeling with regard to "science" as I have? It is something more than a prejudice; often it takes the form of a dread, almost a terror. Even those branches of science which are concerned with things that interest me--which deal with plants and animals and the heaven of stars--even these I cannot contemplate without uneasiness, a spiritual disaffection . . . When it comes to other

[202] The Preface to this very autobiographical "memoir" speaks of Ryecroft very sympathetically. In contrast to the case of Skimpole, no clue whatsoever suggests that Ryecroft's words are to be received with anything but respect and thoughtful consideration.

> kinds of science--the sciences blatant and ubiquitous--the science by which men become millionaires--I am possessed with an angry hostility, a resentful apprehension. . . . I hate and fear "science" because of my conviction that, for long to come if not for ever, it will be the remorseless enemy of mankind. I see it destroying all simplicity and gentleness of life, all the beauty of the world; I see it restoring barbarism under a mask of civilization; I see it darkening men's minds and hardening their hearts; I see it bringing a time of vast conflicts, which will pale into insignificance "the thousand wars of old," and, as likely as not, will whelm all the laborious advances of mankind in blood-drenched chaos. (240-41)

And yet, as biblically horrible as the effects of enthroning "science" may be--well, perhaps there's something to it, he suggests. Gissing does after all explicitly endorse a Darwinian view of human nature:

> Man is not made for peaceful intercourse with his fellows; he is by nature self-assertive, commonly aggressive, always critical in a more or less hostile spirit of any characteristic which seems strange to him. That he is capable of profound affections merely modifies here and there his natural contentiousness, and subdues its expression. (*Ryecroft* 82)[203]

Furthermore, Gissing argues that "[h]uman creatures have a marvellous power of adapting themselves to necessity" (212), which makes eccentrics, who fail to do so, all the more blameful and maladaptive. And finally, he takes the stance that inexorable "science" is almost a natural force itself, destructive yet unstoppable: "[O]nly a few could prophesy its tyranny, could

[203] Gissing's own logic would then suggest that the harmless, uncontentious eccentric is not "natural," or that his peculiar nature differs significantly from most people's.

foresee that it would revive old evils and trample on the promises of its beginning. This is the course of things; we must accept it" (242). The best one can say, as with Ryecroft, is that "I--poor little mortal--have had no part in bring the tyrant to his throne" (242). Tyrannical operationalism remains on its throne regardless of our individual wishes or actions; we must adjust ourselves to endure its reign.

The idealization of eccentricity, then, actually works *against* eccentricity, specifically on the point of practicality. In order to make the eccentric look especially good, writers such as Dickens and Gissing emphasize the figure's impracticality. On one level this shows him to be above dirty, mundane considerations such as pounds and pence; on another, this makes him look soft-headed or dronish to newly operationalist, bottom-line-oriented Victorian culture. The eccentric comes to be regarded as a *mere* idealist, an object of disgust--which further solidifies the discourse that finds him disgusting. ("If *this* is the alternative, then I'll stick with good old practicality, thank you.") Late in the century, Gissing makes so convincing a case that his society is cruel to eccentrics, that operationalism rules with an iron fist, that it makes the minor protest which the eccentric embodies seem all the more pathetic and doomed. Who would persist in eccentricity, knowing what horrible things lay in store? Gissing's Henry Ryecroft wouldn't, "[n]ot with the assurances of fifty years' contentment such as I now enjoy to follow upon it!" (29). To change society so that it accepts individual difference more readily--which was apparently Gissing's, and more ambiguously, Dickens's wish--rather than to change oneself into the shape prescribed by the hegemony, really does become an impossible dream. And so the attempt to protest against the hegemony by idealizing eccentricity finally supports the powers that be instead.

This was also true where the quality of asexuality was concerned; this was the second feature which, while idealizing the eccentric as an attractive alternative to the norm, simultaneously made him appear less admirable. Asexuality, like benevolence, was assigned to every generation of eccentrics since Don Quixote. It generally signified special purity, a disinclination for worldly pleasures, and a devotion to higher ideals. It continued to do so during Dickens's and Gissing's time. Now, however, in addition to carrying the stigma attached to idealism in general, the eccentric's asexuality began to carry a specifically biological stigma. As Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno argue, "Where the mastery of nature is the true goal," which it certainly was in operationalist Victorian Great Britain, "biological inferiority remains a glaring stigma, the weakness imprinted by nature as a key stimulus to aggression" (248). To a society taught by Darwin--survival-focused, descent-minded, biologically savvy--asexuality signaled biological inferiority, the inability to reproduce, and, generally, physical weakness. And this weakness invited scorn and ridicule. Darwin taught the huge importance of reproduction to the survival of a species; here was a character who specifically does not engage in sex and cannot reproduce. What a maladaptive, doomed species! What a biological failure! Darwin argues that nature ruthlessly eradicates maladaptations and useless features; the asexual eccentric seemed an extinction waiting to happen.

Dickens's idealized eccentrics all seem to have this maladaptive quality: for example, most notably, John Jarndyce,[204] Samuel Pickwick, the Cheerybles, post-ghost Scrooge, and one of the Garland brothers. One Garland--the less intense do-gooder--is married and has a child; the other,

[204] There is no indication that he ever consummates his brief marriage to Esther Summerson. He provides perhaps the best example of the way the eccentric's goodness goes hand-in-glove with his asexuality: he demonstrates the former by the latter, voluntarily stepping out of the marriage to offer his place to the less eccentric, more biologically viable Allan Woodcourt.

who assists Little Nell and her grandfather, is actually never named but instead, significantly, is referred to throughout *The Old Curiosity Shop* as "the Bachelor." Also in that novel, Master Humphrey, narrator of the story and another, even more generous benefactor to Nell, is referred to until the very end as "the single gentleman."[205] Gissing tends to connect eccentricity with the failure to reproduce, as well: neither Henry Ryecroft nor Harold Biffen ever marries, fathers children, nor even approaches any kind of sexual relationship. Edwin Reardon is an exception; he is married and has in the indefinite past fathered a couple of children. But even he fails sexually: by the beginning of the novel, he and his wife Amy have developed serious differences of opinion regarding his impracticality. These differences rapidly intensify until she leaves him. Reardon dies shortly afterwards, after which she marries the successfully competitive, practical Jasper Milvain. Much as in the case of John Jarndyce, the sexually unsuccessful eccentric makes way for the "better" (i.e., less eccentric, more virile) man. And so, again, the means used to idealize eccentricity, to emphasize its desirable, admirable qualities, end up strengthening the case *against* eccentricity.

It is hard to see instantly how advocating and idealizing eccentricity would effectively squelch it; only closer examination reveals the process. It is much easier to see (and to demonstrate) how emphasizing negative aspects of eccentricity would have the same effect. We tend to remember Victorian eccentrics of the positive variety, probably fulfilling our own need for alternatives to an oppressive hegemony. But we often forget that the literature of the time exhibited plenty of the negative variety, as well.

Many oddballs, particularly in Dickens, are exhibited as freaks and, in

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[205] The Victorian convention generally held that bachelorhood precluded fatherhood. We of course know better; I merely wish to point that to specify a man as a bachelor in that time was to indicate something about him which we would not necessarily assume today.

fact, inhabit categories similar to those of the freak books. Mr. Krook of *Bleak House*, for instance, is several familiar kinds of freak at once. For one, he resembles the rude, self-taught prodigy. Like the farmer-mathematician who could chalk out elaborate equations on his trousers as he plowed a furrow, despite never having been to university, Krook is capable of chalking out the letters spelling "Jarndyce" and "Bleak House" from memory despite not understanding what they mean. He teaches himself how to read and write simply by imitating letters' shapes, an uncanny ability which ultimately provides the vital clue solving Lady Dedlock's mystery. Krook also closely resembles "Dirty Dick," a London tradesman who, disappointed in love, refused ever to clean his shop again. Krook says, much as his freak-book model reportedly had, "I have a liking for rust and must and cobwebs. . . . I can't abear to . . . alter anything, or to have any sweeping, nor scouring, nor cleaning, nor repairing going on about me" (52).[206] And so the junk and filth accumulate in vast heaps around him. Krook is a new type of oddball, too: the victim of spontaneous combustion. Strange but, as Dickens insists in the novel's Preface, scientifically, verifiably true (xiv).

None of these types or aspects of his personality is presented as especially sympathetic; as in the freak books, they appear in the light of bizarre oddities, monstrous qualities--certainly nothing to be emulated or envied. And these are precisely the kinds of useless *lusus naturæ* Darwin claimed natural selection quickly and ruthlessly removes from a species by killing the individual.[207] Which Krook's case goes to demonstrate: he vanishes suddently and mysteriously in a puff of smoke. His self-taught-prodigy quality is most attractive, but even there he comes off as stupidly

[206] The other, more famous Dickens character who resembles Dirty Dick in this way is Mrs. Havisham. Her wedding-banquet room resembles Dick's shop, and the trauma which started her dissolution is the same as his.

[207] Tellingly, Krook has fathered no children and is a lifelong bachelor.

idealistic or just plain paranoid:

> "[I'm] trying to learn myself to read and write," said Krook.
>
> "And how do you get on?" [asked Jarndyce].
>
> "Slow. Bad," returned the old man, impatiently. "It's hard at my time of life."
>
> "It would be easier to be taught by some one," said my guardian.
>
> "Aye, but they might teach me wrong!" returned the old man, with a wonderfully suspicious flash of his eye. "I don't know what I may have lost, by not being learnd [sic] afore. I wouldn't like to lose anything by being learnd wrong now. . . . I'd rather trust my own self than another!" (201).

And lest the connection of freakish qualities with eccentricity specifically be thought unwarranted, or a stretch: the word "eccentric" is used a lot in such cases. For instance, Miss Flite, Krook's lodger, describes him as "a very eccentric person. He is very odd. Oh, I assure you he is very odd. . . . [H]e is a little--you know!--M--!" (51). And just to drive the point home, Dickens even has Krook himself agree: "The old man overheard, and laughed. 'It's true enough'" (51).

Krook's case brings up two points regarding the Victorian eccentric which require further development. First, many characters (in both senses of the word) possess physical freakishness of types recognizable from the freak books; the difference, though, is that now individual oddity of this kind is often connected with personal cruelty or insensitivity. Daniel Quilp, the demonic, malevolent dwarf harrassing Little Nell and her grandfather, is probably the clearest and most dramatic example of this new principle. The freak books devote as many pages to dwarves' lives as to lives of any other type, and these portraits are almost universally positive, if patronizing. But

Quilp is positively satanic:

> The creature appeared quite horrible, with his monstrous head and little body, as he rubbed his hands slowly round, and round, and round again--with something fantastic even in his manner of performing this slight action--and, dropping his shaggy brows and cocking his chin in the air, glanced upward with a stealthy look of exultation that an imp might have copied and appropriated to himself. (25)

Like an imp, he takes his greatest pleasure in inflicting torment upon the innocent: his wife, Little Nell, her grandfather, Kit Nubbles, and Quilp's acrobatic employee Tom Scott. Quilp even symbolically carries the fires of hell about with him; he constantly smokes rancid-smelling cigars. Dickens directly links this character's physical oddity with his demonic rancor, frequently suggesting, as in the passage just quoted, that they are of a piece. He also makes Quilp's oddity, and Kit's innocent but too-candid reference to it--he calls Quilp "an uglier dwarf than could be seen anywhere for a penny" (76)--the main motivation for Quilp's relentless campaign to destroy Kit. Unlike the merely awestruck freak books, Dickens's novels strongly suggest that people with physical oddities must be deformed in spirit, as well.[208]

This is often true, too, in matters of perceived gender appropriateness. For instance, the shockingly "masculine" Sally Brass virtually enslaves the "Marchioness" and schemes with her brother Sampson against innocent Little Nell and her grandfather. After her comeuppance, she apparently becomes a transvestite soldier or sailor, just as described in the freak books:

> Some said with confidence that she had gone down to the docks

[208] See, too, Silas Wegg of *Our Mutual Friend*. That "literary man *with* a wooden leg," surely the wooden-leg-bearer to whom Strindberg alludes, schemes to steal the Harmon fortune from the trusting Noddy Boffin.

> in male attire, and had become a female sailor; others darkly whispered that she had enlisted as a private in the second regiment of Foot Guards, and had been seen in uniform, and on duty, to wit, leaning on her musket and looking out of a sentry-box in St. James's Park, one evening. (548)

Her "unnatural" masculinity and her "unnatural" cruelty--excessive even in a dog-eat-dog world--appear to be of a piece. She is cruel because she is masculine; a more "natural" woman would naturally be kinder. The same masculinity that draws her to the armed services causes her viciousness. Her difference is also her flaw.

Much the same can be said of Frank Fairlie's "unnatural" femininity. Mr. Fairlie, Laura Fairlie's eccentric uncle in Wilkie Collins's novel *The Woman in White* (1860), is disturbingly womanish. The character Walter Hartright describes him like this:

> His beardless face was thin, worn, and transparently pale, but not wrinkled[209] . . . His feet were effeminately small, and were clad in buff-coloured silk stockings, and little womanish bronze-leather slippers. Two rings adorned his white delicate hands . . . Upon the whole, he had a frail, languidly-fretful, over-refined look--something singularly and unpleasantly delicate in its association with a man, and, at the same time, something which could by no possibility have looked natural and appropriate if it had been transferred to the personal appearance of a woman. . . . [M]y sympathies shut themselves up resolutely at the first sight of Mr. Fairlie. (32)

This bizarre femininity, Collins suggests, is also at the root of his blameful

[209] These qualities were ideal in the Victorian woman--with a bit less emphasis on being "worn," of course.

passivity. "Like a woman" (by Victorian lights), Fairlie is so hypochondriacal, fretful, and helpless that he fails to perceive the danger to Laura and fails to do anything to stop it. Again, his difference, his inappropriateness to his gender, is presented as his flaw.

As in these examples, then, individual difference frequently took specifically physical forms, some of which were recognizable from patterns established in the freak books. Such differences were newly tantamount to taints; they signaled maladaptations, weaknesses, and other personality flaws. Eccentricity in the broad sense--uniqueness, difference, ex-centricity--spelled trouble.

Complementing this phenomenon in completing the eccentric's demise was a strengthened connection between eccentricity and madness. Odd characters were, more often now, quite plainly mad, no question about it. This is a fundamental change in conceptions of eccentricity; madness and eccentricity had remained distinct concepts ever since Sir Roger de Coverley, yet now they blurred together. Now to call someone "eccentric" became much the same as tapping one's forehead and whistling. Which is to say, the figure of the eccentric began to disappear; he was quite often subsumed under the category of madman, or, when he was a good eccentric, under the category of philanthropist. The figure's separate, unique cultural territory shifted, now dumping him in other realms. Vestiges of the clear distinction between madness and eccentricity remain in the period, as discursive shifts tend not to happen all at once. For instance, in *David Copperfield* Dickens has Betsy Trotwood argue that Mr. Dick is not insane but merely "a little eccentric--though he is not half so eccentric as a good many people" (204). She, and Dickens, understand the difference. It was, however, a rapidly receding difference, certainly on the way out when *David Copperfield* appeared in

1850.

Mr. Dick provides an excellent illustration of the changes in conceptions of eccentricity. In many ways, he is an avatar of the good eccentric. As Trotwood says, "He is the most friendly and amenable creature in existence; and as for advice!" (204). Dickens also strongly emphasizes Dick's harmlessness. David owes much to Dick's goodheartedness: it is by Dick's advice that Trotwood initially determines to take the fleeing boy in. David comes to take a positively Shandean delight in watching Dick walk up and down in Dr. Strong's garden and listen to Strong's incomprehensible ramblings on Greek etymology: "I think of it as one of the pleasantest things, in a quiet way, that I have ever seen. I feel as if they might go walking to and fro for ever, and the world might somehow be the better for it" (252). The main elements of the good eccentric, then, do appear in the personality of Mr. Dick: pursuing harmless hobbies, he remains kind, mild, and benevolent; the world is a better place for his being in it.

And yet, Dick is not quite "all there," which reflects the new tendency to conflate eccentricity with madness. Probably the best that can be said of him, brain-wise, is that he is not so much mad as "simple," or what we today would call "developmentally challenged" or "retarded." He describes himself as "simple," anyway:

> "[W]hat do you consider me in this respect?" touching his forehead. . . . "Weak?" said Mr. Dick.
>
> "Well," I [David] replied, dubiously. "Rather so."
>
> "Exactly!" cried Mr. Dick, who seemed quite enchanted by my reply. . . . "In short, boy, . . . I am simple. . . . Yes, I am! [Betsy Trotwood] pretends I am not. She won't hear of it; but I am. I know I am." (652)

Certainly he takes deep, rapt pleasure in simple, boyish pastimes: flying kites, above all, and also marbles, pegtop, hare and hounds, sliding on the ice, and cricket. His faith and love for David are as simple and unalloyed as a child's. Accordingly, he is treated like a child: "[H]e was only allowed to rattle his money, and not to spend it. . . . [T]here was an agreement between him and my aunt that he should account to her for all his disbursements" (249). So, for instance, he is allowed one shilling's worth of gingerbread, which he loves (again like a child), per day, and Trotwood arranges for payment.

But in Dickens's world, being childlike is always good; and as Gissing observes, in any case, Dickens "very often associates kindness of disposition with lack of brains" (*Dickens* 117).[210] Simplicity alone does not equal madness. However, Dickens gives ample evidence of Dick's madness elsewhere. The main symptom: Dick is persistently, unquestionably delusional--much like Quixote, the original eccentric. Dick insists, with the clockwork repetitiveness noted by Gissing, that when King Charles I was beheaded in 1649, somehow, by some unknown process, the "trouble in his head" was put into Dick's instead (202 *et al.*). From the time the reader is introduced to Dick until the novel's end, Dick labors fruitlessly on his "Memorial," an autobiography. The problem is, every time he begins to write, he ends up writing about King Charles I instead of himself. He simply cannot *not* write about the king, nor can he help believing he bears the long-dead king's "trouble." He experiences the most relief from this delusion is when he flies kites--kites made of manuscript pages describing the royal trouble in his head. The twentieth-century reader, perhaps, cannot help thinking of a standard psychiatric-ward stereotype: the man who believes he is Napoleon.

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[210] Which provides yet another example of the Victorian era's practice of a Darwinian credo.

Trotwood tries to explain the delusion away as Dick's "allegorical way of expressing" real, traumatic quarrels he had years ago with his brother and sister (205). However, her own patronizing, parental care of Dick, in addition to her revelation that if she were not caring for him he would be in an asylum for life (204), expose that argument as a pleasant fiction. When, late in the novel, David muses, "I really feel almost ashamed of having known that he was not quite in his wits, taking account of the utmost I have done with mine" (624), it seems an obvious fact, a given, that Dick really is "*not* quite in his wits." Dick, then, exemplifies the increasing tendency to blur the formerly clear distinction between madness and mere eccentricity.

This tendency is perhaps even more pronounced when it concerns women. Again, Gilbert and Gubar demonstrate that Victorian women who did not fit the ideal domestic model tended to be dismissed as insane. Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady* and Jane M. Ussher's *Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?* among other historical studies, lend detailed, well-documented verification of that generalization. Women who somewhat resemble eccentrics, who almost fit the definition, (still) end up excluded from it; they are better defined as simply mad. For example, Miss Flite of *Bleak House*, like Mr. Dick, possesses a kind heart like the good eccentric's. However, this receives considerably less emphasis than Dick's benevolence; she never helps the "wards in Jarndyce" in any concrete, practical way, but is merely well disposed towards them. Her virtue seems to lie in being harmless--which all by itself seems not much of a virtue. The more central fact of her existence is that she is utterly delusional; she is, in essence, Mr. Dick without his utility. She attends Chancery every day, hoping against all reason that *this* week Jarndyce vs. Jarndyce will be decided, in her favor. She carries her "documents" there, assorted trash from her purse

which is assuredly neither paper nor relevant to the case. She shows Esther and company her collection of caged birds, and relates the strange ideas she has regarding them: "I can't allow them to sing much, . . . for (you'll think this curious) I find my mind confused by the idea that they are singing, while I am following the arguments in Court. And my mind requires to be so very clear, you know!" (55-56). "'Mad!' whispers Richard"; and "'Right! Mad, young gentleman," she herself confirms (32). As a hatter, clearly. Which finally keeps her, like other women, out of the category of eccentrics; and which participates in the increasing tendency to conflate individual oddity with madness.

Thus, everything worked to eradicate eccentricity in the Victorian era. Respectable, increasingly middle-class-dominated society hated and feared individual difference, and so tried to squelch it. This attitude toward individual difference is reflected in, and further reifies, negative views of the eccentric in Victorian literature, especially the novels of Dickens and Gissing. Those who disliked and fought the repressive tendency idealized and advocated eccentricity as a cure for the tyranny of public opinion; however, in the end, even this process further contributed to eccentricity's demise. The eccentric came to appear a *mere* idealist--a fatal trait in a Darwinian world. And as eccentricity was simultaneously idealized and demonized into, respectively, philanthropy and deformity or madness, the very category shrunk. In Darwinian terms, the species "eccentric" approached extinction. As Gissing writes of Reardon, the eccentric came to be merely "one sickly and all but destitute man against a relentless world" (219). To many, "every blow directed against him appeared dastardly" (219); but the blows landed with none the less force. In essence, this is the understanding of eccentricity that we inherit, that we still possess a hundred years later.

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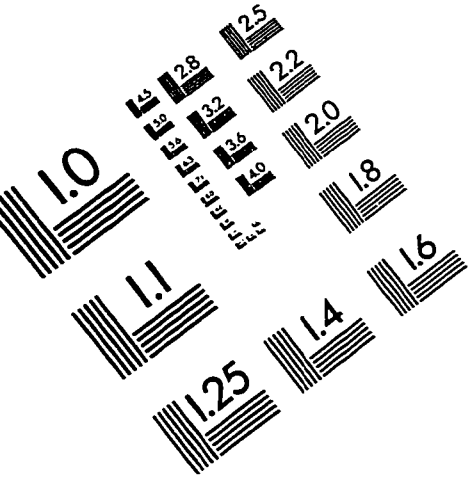

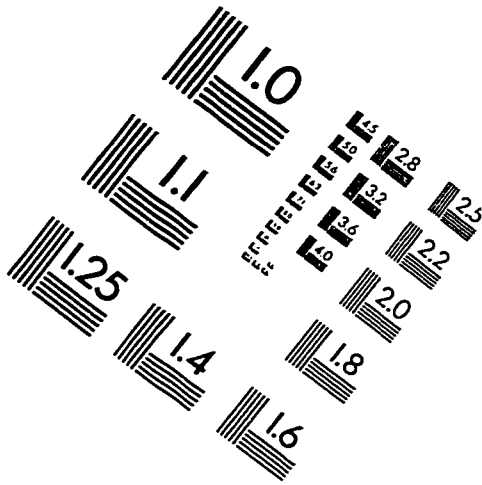

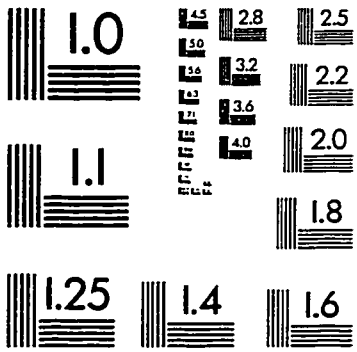

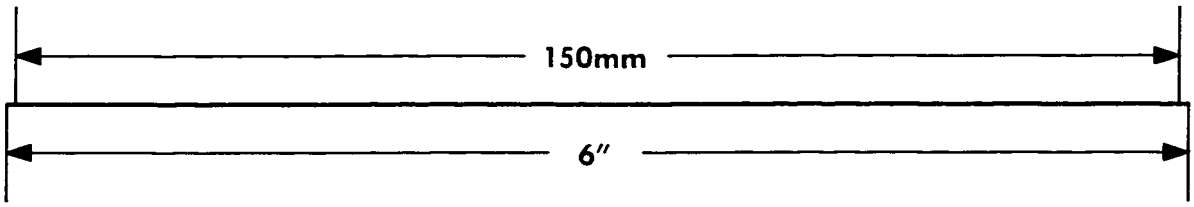

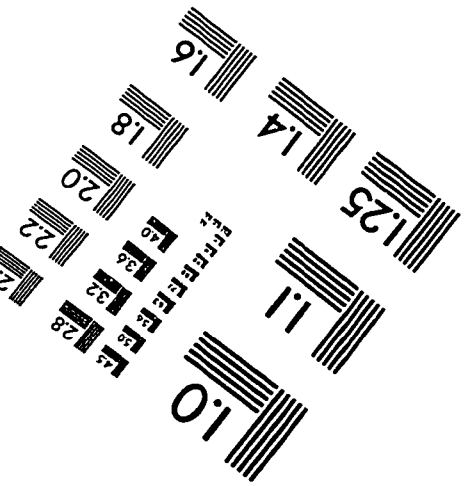

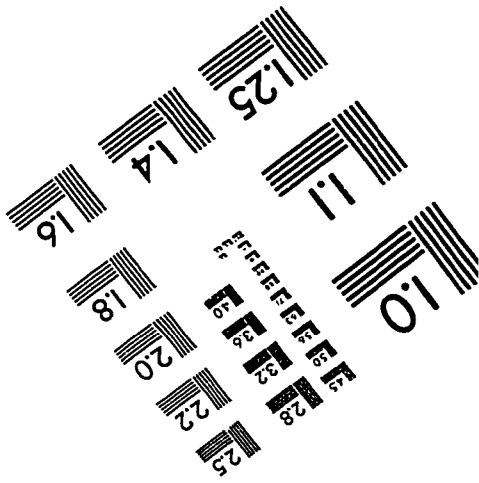

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