

AUTHORITY AND AUTHENTICITY: SCRIBBLING AUTHORS AND THE GENIUS OF PRINT IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

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I. INTRODUCTION

What qualifies a writer—one who writes out words—to be considered an author, one whose words demand attention? The answer to this question may seem self-evident, in that someone who writes but does not gain attention for what is written can hardly be called an author. The scriblings of a writer will remain locked up in a manuscript, somewhere in an attic, awaiting a dialogue with a public that does not exist. This conception of authorship that differentiates between the scribbling writer, who is locked in the experience within the self, and the author, who traverses the gulf between self and other, assumes and claims that we can transmit, and thus transmute, our experience of knowledge, by transporting that knowledge to a public space where experience itself is knowable, shareable, and answerable.

At first glance, this difference between scribbling writer and authentic author appears to be an intellectual, or more specifically a cognitive, distinction. As we think more clearly about it, however, it turns out to be a sociohistorical distinction, based on the technology of invention and the politics of intervention.¹ Early eighteenth-century writers, or should we say “authors,” used the word “scribbler” to indicate the intrinsically wayward nature of producing script. To scribble is to make marks in a carefree or careless manner; usually illegible marks that are also

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¹ See Martha Woodmansee, *The Genius and the Copyright: Economic and Legal Conditions of the Emergence of the “Author,”* 17 EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY STUD. 425 (1984). In this influential essay, Martha Woodmansee traces the historical origins of modern authorship to a group of eighteenth-century English and German writers. In an attempt to make writing into a profitable profession, these writers justified a writer’s “work” as property whose value is based on originality and whose profits belong to the author, rather than to printers and booksellers. By analyzing the legal battle that ensued in eighteenth-century England over copyright, Mark Rose builds on Woodmansee’s study and explains “the way in its sometimes very abstruse course the modern system of the author and the ‘work’ . . . was institutionalized in the discourse of the law.” Mark Rose, *The Author as Proprietor: Donaldson v Becket and the Genealogy of Modern Authorship*, REPRESENTATIONS, Summer 1988, at 51, 58-59.

unintelligible except to the mark maker in the moment of marking. The script will mean little to someone else or even to the scribbler at some future moment. With writing—that is, handwriting or manuscript—there is always a question of intelligibility foremost at the level of mere readability. The scribbling must be readable before it can be meaningful and meaningful before it can be significant. Handwriting or manuscript seems closer to the eccentricity of the individual whose steady or unsteady hand traces the marks. Manuscript would seem to bear the marks of the soul within itself, for the hand that scripts the text marks the frailty of all flesh in the very materiality of the text.

II. THE DERIVATION OF AUTHORITY FROM SCRIBAL HANDWRITING

When the medieval monks make handwriting into an art, they attempt to tame and to train this waywardness at the soul of scribbling. The legibility, the readable uniformity of their scribbling acknowledges that handwriting is a technology invented to stabilize meaning. This uniformity also asserts the intervention of divinity in transubstantiating mere material marks on a page into fully significant meanings that bear the weight of God's authority.

The texts that medieval scribes copy are often, though not always, sacred texts. But the mere act of copying these texts into manuscript confirms their status as authentic, universal, eternal authorities. The word "scribe" itself is used to translate the Hebrew concept of one who is an authority on the Jewish law, and the etymology of the word "scripture," holy text, takes us back to the same root in the Latin word meaning "to write." The correlation between scripting, or making a mark, and "scripturing," or making a holy mark, is hardly coincidental. As an etymological offshoot or byway of "to script," "to scribble"—that is, to make little marks carelessly—always threatens to divert us from the straight and narrow path that leads from script to scripture, from writing to authority. A monk should refuse to copy any scribbling that is not worthy of reproduction, preservation, and distribution. The art of making writing legible, then, is also a political act; the act of claiming or declaiming a culture's authorities. Any eccentricity in the script that distracts from the ability to read the writing also detracts from the centrality of the text, from the sanctity of its authoritative position, and threatens to degenerate into sinfully selfish scribbling. The script must be seen to author

itself, for the scribe is merely a vehicular authority, a translator or medium of authority.

Elizabeth Eisenstein points out how difficult it is to assess authoritatively the habits of preprint and manuscript culture,² for that culture relies heavily on habits that were radically changed by the invention of print, while print itself enabled modes of knowing that were not available to scholars in preprint culture:

Thus constant access to printed materials is a prerequisite for the practice of the historian's own craft. It is difficult to observe processes that enter so intimately into our own observations. In order to assess changes ushered in by printing, for example, we need to survey the conditions that prevailed before its advent. Yet the conditions of scribal culture can only be observed through a veil of print.³

I would hazard a hypothesis that given the ephemerality of unwritten words, even in a culture where memory might give a more intense life to what is spoken to be remembered, the handwritten word gains even more solidity as a source of authority.

Though it helps to make the word appear permanent, scribal solidity guarantees neither readability nor reliability. Eisenstein writes, "For the very texture of scribal culture was so fluctuating, uneven and multiform that few long-range trends can be traced Yet all library collections were subject to contraction, and all texts in manuscript were liable to get corrupted after being copied over the course of time."⁴ Moving from word to script, or at best from script to word to script, the medieval scribe was certainly prone to error, and yet such error does not unsettle the system of textual authoritativeness that guides him faithfully, if not accurately, to copy holy script. When mid-eighteenth-century antiquarians look backward to this preprint culture, their task of historical reconstruction is aided, rather than hindered, by the "fluctuating, uneven and multiform" nature of the unprinted past.⁵ The scholarly caution that Eisenstein practices, which lends authoritativeness to her monumental history, would only be a hindrance to eighteenth-century antiquarians who are themselves ushering in the age of historical anthropology. In other words, like the medieval scribe, the Enlightenment antiquarian must reconstruct full, authoritative meaning from methodically

² See 1 ELIZABETH EISENSTEIN, *THE PRINTING PRESS AS AN AGENT OF CHANGE* 8 (1979).

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.* at 10.

⁵ *Id.*

errant material artifacts. His capacity to do so is enhanced, perhaps even enabled, by a blindness to the inherent unreliability of the method of reconstruction available to him. As we shall see below in the cases of Thomas Chatterton and Horace Walpole, the antiquarian relies on an absence of genuine knowledge about the past he studies in order to construct a field of real knowledge about that past.

As early eighteenth-century writers realized with profound regret, it is impossible to purge the waywardness at the soul of script; a waywardness that always diverts the bold power of script into the diminished emasculation of scribbling. Even the authority of God cannot prevent the frailty of flesh that tempts a scribe to miscopy his text. This waywardness lives in the manuscript of the medieval scribe not only as the inherent errancy of miscopying, but also in the form of artful embellishment. From the viewpoint of the medieval scholar, the soul of the text is its legibly copied script; the body is its eccentric dress—the lavish decoration of the scribe—just as the soul of the written word is its sacred unutterable meaning and the word itself merely the embodiment of that meaning. Of course, that it is a monk who does the copying contributes to the aura of authority that emanates from the script. It is the technology of handwriting itself, however, that serves as the vehicle for this aura. Without the uniform script, and without the embellishment which constantly reminds the reader of the difference between soul and body, between substance and instance, between public authority and private apprehension of that authority, the manuscript would lose its claim to our attention, respect, awe, and obedience.

Scribal embellishment is intrinsically artful, in that its aesthetic achievement is both illusory and artificial. While intending to suggest that the monk's labor is produced solely for the glory of God, embellishment duplicitously also enacts a tendency toward scribbling. This tendency brings attention to the prideful self with its intrinsically fallible apprehension of divine authority and its constant yearning to claim God's authority as its own. Truth needs art only when it attempts to manifest itself in material form. Thus, authoritative knowledge is always artfully displayed because true knowledge is always tainted when touched by human desire and perceived through human vision. Therefore, the scribe's unpaid labor for the profit of salvation contains within itself the tendency to degenerate into paid labor for mere profit, whether it be worldly fame or monetary gain.

III. THE INVENTION OF PRINT AND THE DEGRADATION OF NON-POSSESSIBLE KNOWLEDGE

As the extension of manuscript, the invention of print solidifies and intensifies the difference between the eccentric scribbling of individual experience and the shareable knowledge of identifiable authorities, and ironically creates even greater ambivalence about copying truth into text. But this does not happen overnight. As Walter Ong has noted, "Well after printing was developed, auditory processing continued for some time to dominate the visible, printed text, though it was eventually eroded away by print."⁶ According to Ong,

Print was a major factor in the development of the sense of personal privacy that marks modern society By removing words from the world of sound where they first had their origin in active human interchange and relegating them definitively to visual space, and by otherwise exploiting visual space for the management of knowledge, print encouraged human beings to think of their own interior conscious and unconscious resources as more and more thing-like, impersonal and religiously neutral. Print encouraged the mind to sense that its possessions were held in some sort of inert mental space.⁷

In fact, we could say that print gradually seduced the mind into thinking of mental experience in terms of individual possession. The medieval monk or scholar tended to conceptualize knowledge as that which was common to a culture; that which could be known and therefore certified by common culture. Knowledge could possess properties: it could be subtle or unsubtle, divine or secular, classical or Christian, refined or vulgar. And the origins of knowledge were attributable to identifiable sources such as Aristotle, Augustine, the pagans, and divine revelation. But knowledge itself was not property. Authority, in this sense, is always proper, always an order of truth gleaned by some individuals perhaps better than by some others, but not possessed solely by any individual. For an individual alone to possess such knowledge would make it purely private knowledge, purely private truth, a blatant self-contradiction. Possessible authority, on the other hand, is conceptualized as a personal acquisition, which the individual mind has earned as a result of knowledge or experience created by the individual as a private being.

⁶ WALTER ONG, *ORALITY AND LITERACY: THE TECHNOLOGIZING OF THE WORD* 120 (1982).

⁷ *Id.* at 130-32.

We could trace the emergence of possessive authority as far back as the twelfth century, keeping in mind the inherent duplicity always alive within scribal labor. As Eisenstein writes,

With the so-called "book revolution" of the twelfth century and university supervision of copying, there came a "putting-out" system. Copyists were no longer assembled in a single room, but worked on different portions of a given text, receiving payment from the stationer for each piece The contrast between the free labor of monks working for remission of sins and the wage labor of lay copyists is an important one.⁸

Through a sort of guilt by association, we can see how wage labor might metonymically become associated with the capacity to possess the knowledge which is the source and aim of the labor. We can also envision how the "employer" of copyists might become a metonym for the owner of the knowledge and thus of the authority supposedly contained within the text. But this very indirect metonymy could not fully diminish the ideological constraints under which the early university scholar employs and the copyist labors. If knowledge is that which is worth knowing, and therefore worth teaching in a medieval university, and if all worthy knowledge is an extension of God's truth, then the university scholar is an ideological extension of the monk, and the texts he has copied are likewise such an extension. For the scholar to claim that the knowledge he gleans is solely his own, he would have to deny implicitly the ultimate source of all worthy knowledge outside the fallen flesh. He would have to deny that authority derives only from within the mind of God as mediated by the communal authority of the church. As the church begins to lose its authority during the Reformation, we realize what kind of consequences such a challenge to communitarian knowledge could bring to the secularizing scholar. Knowledge is by definition communal, just as authority is by definition external and resistant to privatization; all experiences that derive merely from the self are diversions and deceptions.

At first, uniform script is the effect of authority, not the cause of it. But as print gains ascendancy, this relation is reversed. Originally, to be an authority is to be scripted. But with time, to be printed is to be an authority. Early eighteenth-century writers are caught in the swivel moment of this process of reversal, not only when print begins to give the stamp of authority, but also

⁸ EISENSTEIN, *supra* note 2, at 12-13.

when authority begins to become fragmented by the possibility of private knowledge. For these writers, scribbling is both positive and negative, both necessary and impossible. It is positive in the sense that writing in general is considered a positive activity. To scribble is to make a mark on the world that ties the private mind to public realities in a literally tangible way. Scribbling, in this positive sense, indicates how writing is a marginally central activity. It is what we must do in order to make sense of ourselves and of our world, but it should be done only in those moments of leisure, while reflecting on the central business of managing life, and should be done only by those who are leisured, those in the leisured class who have no other pressing obligations.⁹

On the other hand, scribbling is temporary madness. It represents yielding to the temptation of individual whims at the expense of commonsense understanding. In this negative sense, the scribbler is always self-deluded. Likewise, he is always deluding his audience by encouraging them to think that they can find truth in the nervously profuse markings that derive from the anxieties of their individual experience, rather than from the sane consensus of externally vested cultural authorities. The scribbler is the careless writer who claims cultural authority over his readers merely by virtue of the fact that he has written; that his scribbles have been scripted, that his script is made overly and overtly legible through the technology of print. Wouldn't it be better if this scribbler's quirks had remained in his own head, or at least in his own handwriting? At least then we would not forget that these words come from the eccentric pride of a self-deluded pretender to authority. At least then we would be less prone to confuse the false authority of that which commands our attention because it is accessibly legible, with the authentic authority of that which is printed because it commands our attention.

⁹ See MARLON B. ROSS, *CONTOURS OF MASCULINE DESIRE: ROMANTICISM AND THE RISE OF WOMEN'S POETRY* 57-68 (1989). Though leisured reading and writing were no doubt markers of status in the premodern period, they were not conceived as Arnoldian cultural obligations. Renaissance writers and readers approached texts as unfixed, variable artifacts that were to be engaged with, compiled and rewritten according to the instruction of the reader's pleasure, rather than according to some notion of authorial authority emanating from an individually authorized text. See Coburn Freer, "Changing Concepts of Literary Ownership in the English Renaissance" (Apr. 1991) (unpublished manuscript, presented at the "Intellectual Property and the Construction of Authorship" conference); Max W. Thomas, *Reading and Writing the Renaissance Commonplace Book: Question of Authorship?*, 10 *CARDOZO ARTS & ENT. L.J.* 665 (1992).

IV. POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE SCRIBBLING: THE PROBLEMS OF
DISTINCTION ILLUSTRATED IN *THE DUNCIAD*

The members of the early eighteenth-century Scriblerus Club joined together in order to protect themselves from the negative consequences of scribbling by scribbling in the positive sense. The Scriblerians, fearful of losing the cultural distinction between positive and negative scribbling, between the writer and the author, between false authority and authentic authority, set out to keep this distinction in tact. Whatever eccentricities may nervously twitch in their individual voices can be smoothed over by the give-and-take of group dynamics, from the consensus that naturally arises from communal efforts.¹⁰ Through their communal scribbling, the Scriblerians can more easily claim that they together represent a continuous tradition of authority, recognizable, intelligible, and sustainable. Pope's *The Dunciad*¹¹ enunciates, on the one hand, the authorialness and authoritativeness of consensus that results from being able to make a distinction between forms of scribbling. On the other hand, it slips endlessly down that hill of ever-intensifying differentiation, a process whereby differences multiply upon differences until false scribbling and authentic scribbling are identically different, and all authority is falsely scripted.

We are confronted with this lucid contradiction on the very first page of *The Dunciad*. "The Dunciad IN FOUR BOOKS / PRINTED ACCORDING TO THE COMPLETE COPY FOUND IN THE YEAR 1742 WITH THE PROLEGOMENA OF SCRIBLERUS, AND NOTES VARIORUM / To which are added / SEVERAL NOTES NOW FIRST PUBLISH'D, THE HYPERCRITICS OF ARISTARCHUS, AND HIS DISSERTATION ON

¹⁰ The dialectic at work between communitarian authority and authority as individual possession in the eighteenth century has a variety of cultural sources and consequences too numerous and complex to trace here. I do not want to suggest, however, that the ideological implications of communitarian authority are necessarily conservative. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, communal authority/authorship is exploited by marginal groups seeking greater sociopolitical power, as well as greater power of individual conscience, initiative, and inventiveness. This was especially true among middle-class religious dissenters in Britain, who formed such groups as the Lunar Society, the Society for Constitutional Information, and the many corresponding societies. Although these groups tend to conceptualize authority as radically individuated and possessible, they also envision a culture in which access to knowledge is mediated by a community of interested seekers after unmediated truth. An interesting analogue to such groups is the nineteenth-century women's clubs described in Anne Ruggles Gere, *Common Properties of Pleasure: Texts in Nineteenth Century Women's Clubs*, 10 *CARDOZO ARTS & ENT. L.J.* 647 (1992).

¹¹ ALEXANDER POPE, *The Dunciad*, in *POEMS OF ALEXANDER POPE* 709 (John Butt ed., 1963).

THE HERO OF THE POEM."¹² Of course, the 1729 edition of *The Dunciad* had also claimed or promised to be "a much more correct and compleat copy . . . than has hitherto appeared."¹³ This promise of completeness is immediately countered by the hordes of prefaces, commentaries, notes, addenda, and appendices which weigh down the text, and which suggest that the obsessive process of revision is unceasing. With each new individual, claiming, from the quirkiness of his own little perspective, to have the final word, claiming to have the definitive view, claiming a direct line of descent from ultimate authority, the text becomes both larger, "more complete," and smaller, trivialized by the weight of undistinguished and nondistinguishable authorities. The text becomes a compendium of error, reminiscent of the famous lines about humanity itself in *Epistle II of Essay on Man*:

Born but to die, and reas'ning but to err;
 Alike in ignorance, his reason such,
 Whether he thinks too little, or too much:
 Chaos of Thought and Passion, all confus'd;
 Still by himself abus'd, or disabus'd;
 Created half to rise, and half to fall;
 Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
 Sole judge of Truth, in endless Error hurl'd:
 The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!¹⁴

By the end of *Essay on Man*, this mass of confusion and error has been proven a harmony of means and ends, knowable only by God, but intuitable by the good, sane, and skilled poet. Otherwise, Pope himself would not be able to give us a glimpse of this harmony. Theoretically, the poet's authority does not come from taking God's perspective—though in actuality Pope himself cannot help but do so in the poem—but instead from scanning humanity itself: "Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;/The proper study of Mankind is Man."¹⁵ The obvious paradox is that Man cannot know Mankind's position, unless his eyes take him above and below that position. To look above or below our status is to vacate the only position of authority that we are collectively competent to hold. But in order to know our position, we have no choice but to vacate that position. The authentic authority of the eighteenth-century author hinges precariously—one

¹² *Id.*

¹³ ALEXANDER POPE, *The Dunciad*, in *THE POEMS OF ALEXANDER POPE*, 317 (1729).

¹⁴ ALEXANDER POPE, *An Essay On Man: Epistle II*, in *THE POEMS OF ALEXANDER POPE*, *supra* note 11, at 516.

¹⁵ *Id.*

might even say vacuously—on this intrinsically self-vacating stance.

The Dunciad is harassed by this fear that authority is but the presumption of human error, that real authority is merely a vacuous metaphysical status in a chain of being that serves to enslave rather than to order humanity. *The Dunciad*, however, is assaulted by this obsessive fear without the final hope articulated by the self-contradictory paradoxes of the *Essay on Man*. Added to this fear of a self-vacating authority is an even more pronounced anxiety over self-vacating authority in relation to social status. From all sides, this authority is threatened with an energy as manic as that which claims that authority itself can be based on the social status of a scribbler. A genuine author needs time and resources to scribble. He needs to have history at his finger tips to avoid falling into the pit of eccentric auto-scribbling, writing out the anxieties of the private self as an automatic autobiographical reflex to the desire for attention. In addition, to access cultural knowledge (classical learning, the cabals that run the political establishment, court etiquette, the gossip of high society, the protocols of literary composition), an authentic author needs to have a stake in the operation and preservation of that knowledge. In *The Dunciad*, we discover, however, that to be on the inside of culture, shaping its contours, is to be shaped by the meanest displays of cultural presumptuousness. To be in the know is to come to know all of the peevish jealousies, ambitions, pretensions, and dissensions that drive the highest ranks of a society to sustain their power over culture.

By the end of *The Dunciad*, we are intensely aware that this found text is as incomplete as ever, not only in that there are literally pieces missing from it, but also in that the poem's closure leaves us thinking and feeling that the center cannot hold; Anarchy, and its attendant Error, rules. The anarchy of the text itself contributes to this sense. It is a heteroglossic poem, with many different voices speaking at once, or more accurately, many different scribblers vying for our attention and diverting us from any univocal authority which might be able to speak from a public, communal stance. The voice of authority, if it is found in the voices of those who represent that authority by virtue of their social status, appears here not lucid, univocal, and universal, but instead opaque, insular, and distressingly disputatious. The poem is preceded, however, with the stamp of authority, suggesting that it speaks from an univocal, unequivocal, hegemonic

position. Following the seal of the Lord Chamberlain, this statement greets the reader:

By virtue of the Authority in Us vested by the Act for subjecting Poets to the power of a Licenser, we have revised this Piece; where finding the style and appellation of KING to have been given to a certain Pretender, Pseudo-Poet, or Phantom, of the name of TIBBALD; and apprehending the same may be deemed in some sort a Reflection on Majesty, or at least an insult on that Legal Authority which has bestowed on another person the Crown of Poesy: We have ordered the said Pretender, Pseudo-Poet, or Phantom, utterly to vanish, and evaporate out of this work: And do declare the said Throne of Poesy from henceforth to be abdicated and vacant, unless duly and lawfully supplied by the LAUREATE himself. And it is hereby enacted, that no other person do presume to fill the same.¹⁶

Pope is satirizing the equivocal legal jargon whereby royal patents were granted to printers for a monopoly on the publication of certain texts and the pseudo-legal procedure whereby publishers had managed to take economic control over the administration of copyright through the Stationers' Company. The license granted here, however, is ironically the right of authors to revise their own production. Pope points to the ludicrousness of authorizing authors to produce, print, and distribute what they scribble, and the even more ludicrous idea of authorizing middle-class merchants, mere middling go-betweens, to fulfill this function for authors. Implicit in the rhetoric of *The Dunciad* is this constant upheaval, threatened by self-declared authors who impose their self-styled authority on the public. Even worse, the licensing laws and printing industry turn social status topsy-turvy, as genuine upper-class authors are expected to grovel before middle-class merchants and artisans in order to receive the stamp of state authority.¹⁷

¹⁶ POPE, *supra* note 11, at 710.

¹⁷ Like some other canonical writers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Pope displays intense ambivalence concerning the author's source of authority, whether that source derives from above or below. Yet to see the author as self-authorizing is in itself distressingly problematic for him. In Mark Rose, *The Author in Court: Pope v. Curll*, 10 CARDOZO ARTS & ENT. L.J. 475 (1992), the author stresses Pope's transitional status:

On the one hand, the last of the great poets in the Renaissance tradition and, as such, the courtly transmitter of received wisdom and the jealous guardian of his own and others' honor; on the other hand, the first of the moderns and, as such, a professional who was immersed in the production and exploitation of literary commodities and the jealous guardian of his financial interests.

V. STATE AUTHORITY: LICENSING LAWS AND THE PRINTING PRESS

How is it that the author himself must be authorized? Is not the author by definition the authority who must authorize himself? The history of copyright was a history of control before it became a history of the individual's right to own what she or he created in words. As Annabel Patterson and Benjamin Moore have pointed out, the development of the modern conception of authorship is intimately linked to changing patterns of social control, rather than some sort of progress from monarchic state control to authorial individual freedom.¹⁸ Just as medieval scribes developed the art of manuscript in order to perpetuate the authority vested in the church while diminishing the waywardness of fleshly threats to that authority, so the monarchic state developed the licensing system to control the authority that is transmitted through the medium of print. Writers may scribble in the privacy of their estates, but cannot become authorities unless authorized as such by the prerogative of the monarchy, representing the power of the state itself. As long as scribbling in private is an upper-class privilege which does not necessarily eventuate in print, the state's authority seems safe.

The problem is that print makes scribbling in private less desirable, while making print itself irresistible. Print enjoins others, in other classes, to be tempted by its irresistibility. And why not, since printing itself is a middle-class occupation? The problem for the state is that, unlike the manuscript, the printed text does not merely transmit the authority vested in it by the communal authority of the church and ultimately the external authority of God. The printed text acquires itself the imprimatur of authority, not only in that it can carry the royal stamp or the stamp of the Stationers' Company, but more importantly because print, even without these legal imprints, becomes the cause of authority. Once printed, the text possesses authority, and the writer,

Id. Milton is often referred to as the most prominent writer occupying this transitional juncture. See Peter Lindenbaum, *Milton's Contract*, 10 CARDOZO ARTS & ENT. L.J. 439 (1992).

¹⁸ See BENJAMIN MOORE, REFORMING AUTHORS: LITERARY PROPRIETORSHIP AND SOCIAL AUTHORITY IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND, where the author provides the converse perspective from that of Woodmansee and Rose by viewing "authorship and publication as instruments of social control," emerging out of "the regulatory practices that were derived from royal proprietorship and directed at the threat of sedition," *id.* at 2; ANNABEL PATTERSON, CENSORSHIP AND INTERPRETATION: THE CONDITIONS OF WRITING AND READING IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND (1984). See John Feather, *From Rights in Copies to Copyright: The Recognition of Authors' Rights in English Law and Practice in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, 10 CARDOZO ARTS & ENT. L.J. 455 (1992).

however lacking in knowledge or experience, becomes an author who possesses the authority imprinted in the text, whose words must be attended to because someone saw fit to print them. Ironically, the publicly accessible materiality of print encourages the privatization of possessible authority and the internalization of truth. The conspiracy between the printing press and the Reformation had already made this fact clear. Even the writer who has no claim to authority, or especially such a writer, in the eyes of the church or the state, must be attended to, in that he must be denounced. The more the state or church feels compelled to denounce such private authorities, the more they publicize the erosion of their own public authority.

A. *The Attack On State Authority: Pope and The Dunciad*

The ritual of poet laureate is an extension of the state's control of the writer's authority. The poet laureate's power to speak is granted literally by the state; his authority as a poet is reflected in his power to speak for the state; likewise, the power of the state is reflected in the power to authorize prophetically inspired writers when and how to speak. For Pope, the poet laureate is necessarily a "Pretender, Pseudo-Poet, or Phantom."¹⁹ This is not because the power of the state is questionable, but rather because Pope wants to differentiate between legitimate state power and illegitimate authorial power, between the prerogative of the crown and the privilege of the author. By reducing state power—the whole range of cultural authority—to the existence or nonexistence of an actual stamp of authority, state authorities unintentionally reduce the question of authorial authority to the lowest level of either petty court politics or vulgar commercial economics. A poet laureate is not appointed for his skill as a writer, or for his authority as an author, but for his serviceability to the crown. By separating out the rites and rights of the author from the politics of authority, Pope seems to declare writers free from state manipulation and free to write what they please, according to their own inner light—a sort of writerly Reformation.

Of course, Pope is doing no such thing. In Pope's view, the writer is neither free from state manipulation nor free to write what they please. Instead, in order to acquire authentic authority the writer must bind himself to an authoritative tradition and to the laws and rules that govern that tradition. Rather than being divorced from politics, the writer is wed to politics; a politics that

¹⁹ POPE, *supra* note 11, at 710.

emanates from the authority of the tradition from which the writer writes. There is a subtle difference between a state hireling, a Colley Cibber, whom Pope blasts in *The Dunciad*, and a genuine poet, who writes from a political position legitimated by the tradition which reflects his own voice. So subtle that it actually leaves the throne of authority vacated: "We have ordered the said Pretender, Pseudo-Poet, or Phantom, utterly to vanish, and evaporate out of this work: And do declare the said Throne of Poesy from henceforth to be abdicated and vacant . . ." ²⁰ If the state poet is always and necessarily a pretender, a phantom, occupying an illegitimate position of authority, then where does the authority of the author rest? If that authority cannot be licensed or granted directly from the power of the head of state, then who can license or grant it? If the author's authority cannot be mediated by the power of the state, then on what basis can any mediation of authority occur?

In banishing Lewis Theobald from the poem, Pope is enacting a ritual of authorial differentiation. Theobald easily becomes identifiable as a false authority; the pretender aiming for the crown. But, of course, Pope cannot banish Theobald from the poem, for Theobald is a phantom, an enemy who must be identified in order to claim the rightful authority of good poets. Once the throne is vacated, it must be reoccupied, whether by Colley Cibber or some other unsuspecting victim, for the only way Pope can assert the authority of the author is to denounce the constant usurpation of illegitimate authority by illegitimate heirs to the throne of poesy.

According to Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, Pope is attacking a sort of diversion or diminution of authorship through contamination with low culture at the very point when authorship is claiming its right as authority within high culture:

The "crime" of Theobald, Cibber, Settle and others is the act of mediation: they occupy a taboo-laden space *between* the topographical boundaries which mark off the discrete sites of high and low culture. They transgress domains, moving between fair, theatre, town and court, threatening to sweep away the literary and social marks of difference at the very point where such differences are being widened. ²¹

It is not social difference alone, however, that is at stake here;

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ PETER STALLYBRASS & ALLON WHITE, *THE POLITICS AND POETICS OF TRANSGRESSION* 113-14 (1986).

more fundamentally, it is authorial authority itself that is constituted both by the attacks on false authors and by the construction of an empty, unmediated space, occupied only by phantom poets.

To emphasize authorial authority, Pope fills *The Dunciad* with phantoms, shadows, and obscure allusions to half-forgotten personages. While there are many pretenders to the crown, no rightful heirs exist, for any rightful heir would not need the crown, and would not need state mediation. By proliferating his satire with soon-to-be-forgotten pretenders, Pope reminds us that genuine authority is never obscured by the years that intervene or the factious political intrigues that fall by the way. He forces us to remember the names of those whom he wants forgotten, for those names become, in his authoritative rendering, exactly that; mere names, phantoms of voices, rather than real voices that can command our attention.

In order to affect his satire, Pope also risks dimming his own name into an ineffectual phantom. He risks becoming a pretender to the throne that he has declared intrinsically illegitimate and inherently self-vacating. Literally, his name is blotted from the authorial position. Pope becomes another name in the poem, virtually exchangeable with those of the false poets and false authorities on poetry and politics. Martinus Scriblerus, the fictitious editor of and commentator on *The Dunciad*, takes over the position of the real author, and numerous other commentators and critics supplement the poetic text. All of these scribblers find their way into print, claiming by virtue of being in print, that they are authorities on that which they discourse.

B. *The Effects of Print*

When print becomes the cause of authority rather than merely its effect, what results is the compulsiveness of print. Writers who scribble become automatically authors who are licensed to print, intensifying and proliferating the spiral of pretenders to authorial authority. Ricardus Aristarchus, the supercritic or hypercritic, must add his bid for authority to the hyperactivity of the printed poem: "Of the Nature of *Dunciad* in general," he scribbles, "whence derived, and on what authority founded, as well as of the art and conduct of this our poem in particular, the learned and laborious Scriblerus hath, according to his manner, and with tolerable share of judgment, dissertated."²² Aristarchus must comment on Scriblerus' comment on

²² POPE, *supra* note 11, at 711.

the poem, calling into question Scriblerus' judgment, and implicitly his authority. The poem's communal authority is the tradition which authorizes it, "our" authority, the authority of the august members of the Scriblerus Club. The "our" in Aristarchus' words "our poem" becomes perversely communal, as one writer exploits the authority of another in order to establish his own. But isn't this the mirror image of Pope's own vision of authentic authority? Isn't the writer supposed to write out of an authoritative tradition that binds him to a network of principles that can be communally adhered to? It seems that the ideal of a community of voices speaking from a tradition of authority is itself easily warped by the hyperactivity of print, which enables anyone who can write to take a stab at joining this community.

The wonderful perversity of *The Dunciad* is exactly Pope's hyperawareness of this mirroring effect, a proliferation of mirrored phantoms. And typographically the poem mirrors this proliferation of phantoms. It hits the eye as a barrage of names, as a mob of notes appended by Pope to satirize these names, and appended by later, modern editors, who, in bringing light to all those forgotten names, satirize themselves just in the way Pope was satirizing his own phantoms. In the final book of *The Dunciad*, Pope addresses directly this tendency of poetic authority to desiccate into disputatious prose, the tendency of mighty authorities, like Aristotle, to waste into trivial allusions, becoming mere prosaic Aristarchuses, the tendency of authority itself to splinter into the factiousness of printed words and dead letters:

Thy mighty Scholiast, whose unweary'd pains
 Made Horace dull, and humbled Milton's strains.
 Turn what they will to Verse, their toil is vain,
 Critics like me shall make it Prose again.
 Roman and Greek Grammarians! know your Better:
 Author of something yet more great than Letter;
 While tow'ring o'er your Alphabet, like Saul,
 Stands our Digamma, and o'er-tops them all.
 'Tis true, on Words is still our whole debate,
 Disputes of *Me* or *Te*, of *aut* or *at*,
 To sound or sink in *cano*, O or A,
 Or give up Cicero to C or K.²³

The authoritative community of authorized voices always threatens to become merely factions of competing authorities, disputing dead letters. If Pope's community of respected voices, in

²³ *Id.* at 778.

writing a satire against the mob of self-authorized authorities, falls into an anarchy of print, what hope is there for keeping the sheep in the gentle fold and the goats outside in the rugged terrain where they belong? If anarchy can break forth from the staunch and rigid harmony of the heroic couplet, where sense descends into senseless sounds, then there is little hope that the question of authority can be easily settled in an age when print itself is the only weapon.

If we return to the question that generated this discussion, then, we begin to realize how deceptive that question was. What qualifies a writer to be an author? Pope's answer to the question is that all writers are authors by virtue of the fact that all writers are licensed to scribble and all scribblers can easily find a license to print. In a culture where not even the crown can control print—even if it could retain the authority to do so—the waywardness of scribbling can always find ways of manipulating the uniformity of print. Once print supplants manuscript, it does not purge that waywardness, but rather authorizes it. The technology of print does not merely facilitate this process of giving the aura of authority to individual scribbling; it mandates this process. Ironically, as print makes the copying of manuscript easier, eventually leading to the accessibility of books and even to their affordability, it also makes the concept of individually possessed authority inevitable. Caught at this turning point of history, Pope helps to authorize the individual's possession of authority as an effect of print, even as he attempts to prevent this process by printing satires against individually possessed, self-proclaimed authorities. That the Scriblerus Club should take their name from the act of scribbling is itself a poignant reminder of their plight, for however much they cling to this ideal of a living tradition of authoritative writing, they in fact help to bring into ascendance the age of mechanical reproduction in print.

VI. CLASS STATUS: IDENTIFICATION WITH NATIONAL HISTORIC CULTURE—A SOURCE OF AUTHORITY

It is sometimes difficult to distinguish gleeful laughter from nervous laughter, and so Pope and his coterie necessarily remain on that borderline between self-confident mastery based on univocal authority and panic-stricken satirical violence aimed at purging the convincing pretenders to an authority that is all too equivocal. This ambivalence is also indicated in the practice of fabricating history as fiction. After the middle of the eighteenth

century, this elaborate game of fabricating authors and histories turns into a serious pastime and rather quickly into a serious profession. Men of letters become historians of literary artifacts, searching out and researching the primitive, founding texts of their national heritage. Lewis Theobald, the target of Pope's ire in the 1729 *Dunciad Variorum*, is a precursor to this movement with his studious reconstruction of Shakespearean texts. This interest in reconstructing a national past is, of course, part of a larger history of the emergence of the liberal bourgeois state. As such, it indicates a shift in thinking about the relation of the individual to the national whole, and the relation of the individual to the source of authority. With the emergence of the liberal state, the individual's source of authority begins to shift from a vertical emphasis on obedience to the rank above one's own to an emphasis on horizontal identity, not merely in terms of class identity, but more importantly for our purposes, identity across history. The source of authority becomes identified with the continuity of a national tradition and the wholeness of a national people, toward which each individual contributes, regardless of rank or class. In fact, with the construction of a national identity based on the similarity of all individuals in relation to the whole rather than the difference according to rank, status itself becomes a contested source of authority. For the writer who hopes to become an author, this means that there are two avenues to success: the old path of pursuing classical knowledge in preparation for sustaining and exploiting the authority vested in classical texts and a newer path of discovering one's own voice in relation to the originary documents of the culture.²⁴

The authority of national origins bases itself on a naturalist paradigm, in which identity implies natural, blood identification and an authentic history that can verify this identification. The dominance of print plays a vital role in the construction of this authoritative national history. This is ironic because the authority of the past appealed to is an authority deposited in artifacts that both precede the era of print and resist desiccation to the dead letter of the press. In addition to medieval manuscripts on fragile parchment, these include old paintings, fragments of buildings, architectural designs, helmets, swords, shields, elaborate insignia, pottery, furniture, tapestries, and of course oral legends. We could read the passion for these artifacts both as a

²⁴ See OLIVIA SMITH, *THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE 1791-1819* (1984) (explaining the ideological contests that result from this classical versus native dualism).

resistance to the authority invested in print in the modern age and as a compulsion to translate the past into print and thus confirm the authority of that national past by printing it. In this sense, the Society of Antiquarians structurally functions in a similar manner as the earlier Scriblerus Club.

A. *The Antiquarians*

Halfway between the Royal Society of Scientists, which was established as a formal institution to spread the authority of science through rigorous empirical methods, and the Scriblerus Club, an informal group of leisured writers hoping to foster good taste by scribbling hardhitting, playful literary satires, the Society of Antiquarians combined the drive for institutionalized scientific method and the playful mania of a leisured pursuit. On the one hand, the antiquarians pursued their interests as a sign of their leisured, elite status, or as an attempt to codify or to gain the cultural privileges promised by that status. In this sense, antiquarianism was viewed as an idle, eccentric avocation, whose purpose was to give occasional pleasure by enabling dabblers to fabricate fanciful genealogies of the self, the clan, and the nation. On the other hand, the antiquarians were early anthropologist historians methodically pursuing an interest which could yield facts about the development of a great civilized nation-state out of a bold primitive people. In this paradigm, status does not seem to matter. All one needs are the skills of antiquarian scholarship and the commitment to reconstruct one's relation to a real past out of the meanest surviving artifacts. Insofar as the antiquarians looked to the Royal Society as a model, they pushed their culture forward towards an ideal of a culture based on progressive knowledge and meritorious advancement of individuals. But insofar as they thought of themselves as a congenial group of genteel collectors with a dilettantish taste for gothic artifacts, they looked back nostalgically to a time when the authority of their status did not need to be bolstered by the trappings of past glory.

The antiquarian movement also makes explicit the split in authority that is present from the moment writing is invested with the power to transmit and transfer authority. On the one hand, antiquarianism was a nascent system of knowledge, which demonstrated how authority existed objectively and could be mastered by those who diligently searched for truth in the details of everyday life. On the other hand, antiquarianism was a private

obsession, which indicated to what lengths self-aggrandizing individuals might go in order to create or sustain the myth that authority can be mastered by the acquisition of personal properties, both attributes and possessions, which reveal one's intimate relation to the origins of a nation's past.

1. Profile of an Antiquarian: Horace Walpole—The Aristocrat

We do not have a better example of the midcentury antiquarian than Horace Walpole. The youngest son of the most powerful politician of the eighteenth century, Walpole occupies that crucial space between politics and pleasure, authenticity and artifice, the authentic scholar and the hoaxing saboteur, and authority as legitimate knowledge and authority as mere dilettantish taste that results from leisured status. Walpole represents the way in which authority-panic, with its emphasis on competing camps, ordained hierarchy, authoritative judgment, and cultivated refinement, can easily be stylized into "mere" gossip and intrigue, status and privilege, and the standard of taste turned into the acquisition of a fashion. According to R. W. Ketton-Cremer, Walpole "wished to write books on antiquarian subjects without becoming associated with the pedantry and dinginess of antiquaries; he vaguely thought that his books, the productions of a gentleman's leisure, ought to be exempt from the searching criticisms of professionals."²⁵ With Walpole, we witness the status of authority unintentionally reduced to the authority of status. In other words, just as print becomes the cause of authority, rather than merely its vehicular effect, so the status of a writer becomes a putative cause of authority, rather than merely its vehicle. Similarly, just as authority of print derives ironically from the fact that it becomes a contested source of power—a battleground on which monarchs, church leaders, protestant dissenters, levelers, court patrons, printers, booksellers, copyright pirates, independent writers all battle for authority—so status also becomes a contested battleground, or conquered territory, assaulted by writers from the middling ranks and weakened from within by the lack of inherent integrity.

One example will have to suffice. In printing his famous journals in which he hopes to record the definitive history of his age, Walpole exposes all of the petty intrigues of the upper classes, not only to the upper classes themselves, to whom it would come as no surprise, but also to the world at large. The

²⁵ R.W. KETTON-CREMER, *HORACE WALPOLE: A BIOGRAPHY* 155 (3d ed., 1964) (1940).

journals are full of collected artifacts—gossip, intrigue, namedropping, bon mots, anecdotes, etc.—all intended to suggest Walpole's right to scribble the journal and assume the authoritative mantle of historian of the age of George III. These precious journal tidbits, verbal artifacts collected in the same way that he acquired antiques for his mock-gothic Strawberry Hill, reveal how Walpole's authority to speak for his time is based solely on his status as a leisured, wealthy aristocrat. Walpole can assume that his journals are historically significant—indeed can assume that they are historical—because they record the daily intrigues of those who possess authority, whether political, social, aesthetic, or literary, since all of these merely reflect one another. No matter how trivially personal these entries become, they constitute the author's authority. More precisely, the more personal these entries become, the more they can claim authority as the effect of Walpole's status.

By this point, the possessibility of authority has been so privatized that politics itself—the sphere of public affairs—has become identified with the personal authority of individuals who influence politics through their personalities, and with the personal influence of the historian who is personally involved with those politics. The rise of the party system, with its Whig emphasis on coalitions of powerful men cemented by the personal charisma of an opposition leader capable of diminishing or subverting the personal power of the king and his insidious court cabals, encourages the personalization of the historian's authority. The very waywardness of eccentricity, which the medieval scribes attempted in theory to sublimate in their manuscript scribbling, is transformed by the political conditions of the state and of print, into the heart of authority. Perhaps Walpole's journals are the logical consummation of the attempt to write authority. We move from the personal embellishment of uniform script in order to enforce the authority of scripture by scribbling scribes, to the eccentric titillation of private journals printed by a man whose only claim to authority is the authority of the status from which he scribbles the foibles of his class. In the fountain-head of print, we find its tail.

Where does this leave the writer who has no authority by virtue of the fact that he does not possess proper status? Will classical learning, a knowledge of history, an awareness of the rules and kinds of polite literature, etc., enable him to possess the authority which Pope tries so hard to make unpossessible by the individual writer alone? Will the acquisition of aristocratic

friends, patrons, and readers provide such authority? Or must one seek to create authority from the sheer power of print itself, and the number of readers that the technology of print enables? It is impossible for the middle-class writer, who may have property and skills but lacks status and connections, to invent his authority without first constructing a myth of his natural relation to the national origins of authority in the people or the folk. If it is the people who give a native character and integrity to the nation-state, then likewise it is the culture of the people—rather than the universalizing, transhistorical, transnational classical culture of the upper classes—that grants authority to the nation itself.

Though this scenario of the middle-class writer negotiating authority through a natural connection to the national past no doubt enacts itself in a variety of ways, the case of Thomas Chatterton is especially apropos.

2. Thomas Chatterton—The Middle-Class Writer

When Chatterton constructs his myth of national authority, he does so by fabricating a fifteenth-century priest, whom he names Thomas Rowley. Rowley is a scribe who records for history not only the literature, architecture, art, and sociopolitical history of his own scribal time, but also the history of his country in a prescribal time, the eleventh century. He copies records left by an Anglo-Saxon monk Turgot, who lived during the time of the Norman invasion—a time when the native traditions of the English people are invaded and interrupted by a foreign aristocracy. And notably, a history of that invasion, a poem recording the Battle of Hastings, is one of Turgot's greatest achievements. Rowley mediates between the authentic national past, the prescribal and pre-Norman time of his own fictitious past and his own scribal present, in the same way that Chatterton himself, through the fabrication of this myth, mediates between his own age of print and the preprint era of his national culture, the time of the fictitious Rowley. As Louise Kaplan points out, Bristol in the eighteenth century was the epitome of the dingy, provincial, middle-class town, monied as a result of its wealth in trade and vulgar because of its monied origins. Kaplan writes:

By filling the streets and walls of Redcliffe with more ancient history, monuments, and antiquities than any other section of Bristol, Chatterton establishes his birthplace as the first and culturally most superior neighborhood of the most important

city in England. And as supplemented by Rowley's footnotes, St. Mary's Church and her latest builder, Sir William Canynge, become the emotional and spiritual centers of that history.²⁶

The bourgeois vulgarity of Bristol is magically transformed into the origin of native English civilization, just as Chatterton's own vulgar class origins are magically transformed by the history he fabricates.

The forged poems, histories, architectural drawings, and antiquities that Chatterton writes do not usurp Chatterton's own voice as an author; rather, they constitute that voice, as Chatterton turns the disadvantage of his middling status into an advantage. If he has no authority as a sixteen-year-old legal apprentice, without money, status, connections, or advanced classical learning, he must exploit the authority of the national origins from which he certainly descends. What better way to do this than by forging a genealogy that connects his family and his neighborhood to those origins. If Chatterton's forgeries had remained merely in his own hands, or merely in the hands of his bourgeois patron, the antiquarian William Barrett, who also lacked good taste, breeding, and connections, then he could never have traded in obscurity for fame, mere scribbling for the authority of print, a fictitious authority for real authorship.

The interchange between Walpole, the "authentic" authority, whose status guarantees his authorship (he even owned his own printing press) and authority, and Chatterton, the faker, forger, and pretender to authority, reveals the moment in which exchange value wins out over the value of status. Though we do not have time to analyze this moment in proper detail, one point must be made. Chatterton sends his Rowley forgeries to Walpole, partly because Walpole had already offered his own fictitious preprint document to the reading public in the form of *The Castle of Otranto*,²⁷ which met with great success, even after it was revealed that the "gothic tale" was actually the forgery of a clever writer. Fabricated history had paid off for Walpole and his ability to deceive was applauded as a sign of his superior skill, good taste, and knowledge of the medieval past. Chatterton also sends his forgeries to Walpole because he needs Walpole to certify his aspiration to authority, metonymically by being associated with someone of Walpole's rank and authority, and literally by provid-

²⁶ LOUISE KAPLAN, *THE FAMILY ROMANCE OF THE IMPOSTOR-POET THOMAS CHATTERTON* 88 (1988).

²⁷ HORACE WALPOLE, *THE CASTLE OF OTRANTO* (Oswald Doughty ed., 1929).

ing access to a printing press. When Walpole first responds, he grants Chatterton all the civility, and even deference, accorded to someone who has merited the attention of a man of higher rank:

*I give you a thousand thanks for it, and for the very obliging offer you make me, of communicating your MSS. to me. What you have already sent me is very valuable, and full of information; but instead of correcting you, Sir, you are far more able to correct me. I have not the happiness of understanding the Saxon language, and without your learned notes should not have been able to comprehend Rowley's text.*²⁸

The irony here, of course, is that Rowley's "Saxon language" is really Chatterton's primitive and primal imitation of a language he had no real knowledge of. In relation to the construction of a native national tradition, the ambitious, middle-class Chatterton can appear to have an advantage over the classically trained Walpole, whose upper-class training would have stressed the need to *Latinize English, rather than the glory of its native origins in low Anglo-Saxon tongues*. Walpole concludes his letter thus:

I will not trouble you with more questions now, Sir, but flatter myself from the humanity and politeness you have already shown me, that you will sometimes give me leave to consult you. I hope, too, you will forgive the simplicity of my direction, as you have favoured me with no other.

I am, Sir,

Your much obliged and obedient humble Servant,

*HOR. WALPOLE.*²⁹

Just as the difference between the playfulness and nervousness of early eighteenth-century satirical laughter is very subtle, so the difference between sincere patronage and a patronizing sneer is really merely a matter of tone or mood. The self-condescending patronage of this first letter turns into the condescension of a patronizing sneer in the next letter, after Walpole begins to think, on advice from Thomas Gray, that the Rowley manuscripts are forged:

For myself, I undoubtedly will never print those extracts as genuine, which I am far from believing they are. If you want them, Sir, I will have them copied, and will send you the copy. But having a little suspicion that your letters may have been designed to laugh at me, if I had fallen into the snare, you will

²⁸ Letter from Horace Walpole to Thomas Chatterton (Mar. 28 1769), in *A SELECTION OF THE LETTERS OF HORACE WALPOLE* 196 (W.S. Lewis ed., 1926).

²⁹ *Id.* at 197.

allow me to preserve your original letters, as an ingenious contrivance, however unsuccessful.³⁰

What is the difference between the way in which Walpole at first duped his readers in the *Castle of Otranto* and the way Chatterton first duped Walpole? Why does Walpole discount the worth and genius of these fabrications, having offered his own genius in the guise of a similar fabrication? The condescension and uneasiness that make their way into Walpole's tone in the second letter are already implied in the first letter, for the nature of the interchange is troubled by the levelling authority of print. If Walpole had printed Chatterton's forgeries, it surely would have brought fame to Chatterton, and infamy to Walpole, despite the respective social status of each man. Indeed, Walpole's social status is supposed to protect him from the ingenuity of a man pretending to authoritative knowledge. Furthermore, having printed Chatterton's work, Walpole would have given him a direct entryway into the fame and authority of print; Chatterton would no longer need Walpole's patronage, and likewise would no longer need the stamp of Walpole's authority.

That Walpole is conscious of this dynamic is revealed by the final sentences of his second letter to Chatterton:

I own I should be better diverted, if it proved that you have chosen to entertain yourself at my expense, than if you really thought these pieces ancient. The former would show you had little opinion of my judgement; the latter, that you ought not to trust too much to your own. I should not at all take the former ill, as I am not vain of it; I should be sorry for the latter, as you say, Sir, that you are very young, and it would be pity an ingenious young man should be too early prejudiced in his own favour.³¹

Actually, the latter depends upon the former: if Chatterton has too high an opinion of his own authority, it will necessarily manifest itself as not having a high enough opinion in the putative authority afforded by Walpole's status. Walpole's opinion of himself, his vanity, is at stake; otherwise, he would not even hesitate to return the Rowley documents. Chatterton's ingenuity not only tears away the veil that is supposed to protect status-authority from the vulgar eyes of the mob but it also suggests how such status-authority is really a stage-prop; easily set up by those who

³⁰ Letter from Horace Walpole to Thomas Chatterton (Aug. 1769), in *A SELECTION OF THE LETTERS OF HORACE WALPOLE*, *supra* note 28, at 205.

³¹ *Id.* at 205-06.

are supposed to be in the know as a result of their status, and easily torn down by those who merely pretend to be in the know, regardless of their status.

In other words, Walpole's status functions in relation to Chatterton not as a medium of authoritative value, determining and limiting Chatterton's assumption to authority, the way patronage is supposed to work, but rather as a medium of exchange, providing both the cultural capital and literally the start-up capital for Chatterton's publishing enterprise. The best evidence for the nature of this relation is the fact that Walpole's rejection of patronage contributes to Chatterton's success as an author. Chatterton can, and does, get into print by other means. Once he does, the authority of print is enhanced, rather than hindered, by the scandal of Walpole's rejection. Chatterton understood this dynamic well, as we see in his bitter poem addressed, but never sent, to Walpole:

Thou, who in Luxury nurs'd behold'st with Scorn
 The Boy, who Friendless, Penniless, Forlorn,
 Asks thy high Favour,—thou mayst call me Cheat—
 Say, didst thou ne'er indulge in such Deceit?
 Who wrote *Otranto*? But I will not chide,
 Scorn I will repay with Scorn, & Pride with Pride
 Had I the Gifts of Wealth & Lux'ry shar'd
 Not poor & Mean—Walpole! thou hadst not dared
 Thus to insult. But I shall live & Stand
 By Rowley's side—when *Thou* art dead & damned.³²

As the poem wavers between humiliation and scorn, between self-revealing vulnerability and self-confident bravura, it promises to match Walpole's pride of place with Chatterton's own pride of stance. Even Chatterton's awkward handling of the diction and forms of poetic address—a genre preserved for those of high status—is turned into a kind of self-mastery, as Chatterton matches each of Walpole's prerogatives of status-authority with his own presumptions of authority beyond status. Chatterton takes the ultimate stance, as he turns Walpole's insult into his own, being so generous as to refuse to "chide" Walpole, as though he has any right to chide in the first place, and despite the fact that Walpole has chided, and thus insulted, him. The fact that this poem, not published in Chatterton's lifetime, eventually finds its way into print and reprint fulfills Chatterton's prophecy

³² EDWARD H. W. MEYERSTEIN, *A LIFE OF THOMAS CHATTERTON* 271 (1930) (quoting poem Chatterton addressed, but never sent to Horace Walpole).

at the end of the poem. It is not status, but print, that will have the final word, for authority itself is no more than a matter of who has the final word.