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The Expansion of the Reading Public, the Standardization of Educated Taste and Usage, and the Essay as Blurred Genre

Unitary language constitutes the theoretical expression of the historical processes of linguistic unification and centralization, an expression of the centripetal forces of language. A unitary language is not something given but is always in essence posited—and at every moment of its linguistic life it is opposed to the realities of heteroglossia. But at the same time it makes its real presence felt as a force for overcoming this heteroglossia, imposing specific limits to it, guaranteeing a certain maximum of mutual understanding and crystallizing into a real, although still relative, unity—the unity of the reigning conversational and literary language, "correct language."

—Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*

EARLY IN THE eighteenth century, neoclassical writers like Dryden and Swift complained that English was a language without a grammar, but by the end of the century no one could complain about a shortage of English grammars. While only two had been published in the sixteenth century and seventeen in the seventeenth century, thirty-five were published in the first half of the eighteenth century, with over five times more in the latter half of the century.[1] These works formalized the conventions of educated usage and established "the unity of the reigning conversational and literary language, 'correct language.'" With the publication of authorities for judging what common idioms meant and which ones were too common to be correct, standards were established for English. At just this time professors of rhetoric were also institutionalizing English in higher education.[2]

The "unification and centralization" of English came at the same time that changes in technology and literacy were expanding the reading public beyond the confines that had been maintained by learned languages, courtly patronage, and the high cost of books. Bookmaking had been one of the first crafts to be transformed by technology, and pamphleteering had been a major force in the Puritan Revolution, but not until the eighteenth century was the public sphere transformed by print. Parliamentary debates became published as the news of the day; the end of the perpetual copyright made polite literature a popular commodity; and literary forms like the novel and essay blurred the boundaries between personal refinement and the public experience. In such an era, it is easy to understand why English became important enough to be widely studied and problematic enough to need to be formally taught. Print both dispersed knowledge and provided a paradigm for its standardization (see Eisenstein, and Febvre and Martin). Such dialectical developments have been discussed by Bakhtin in terms of the "centrifugal" and "centripetal" forces in discourse—with the movement outward to include more diverse groups in the cultural dialogue resulting in efforts to consolidate the authority of the dominant culture. Bakhtin stresses that a language is "heteroglot from top to bottom" because it contains "socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, . . . between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth" (291).

In the eighteenth century these contradictions expanded and intensified. England's union with Scotland in 1707 and Ireland in 1799 expanded the cultural authority of English and increased pressures for linguistic unification. English and French were replacing Latin as languages of international relations, and cheap books and periodicals were circulating the educated culture to broader classes of readers who had not been formally taught to respect the proprieties of educated taste and usage. The spread of literacy created a demand for encyclopedias, grammars, digests, and dictionaries to organize and explain educated discourse and the educated culture, promising to make them as accessible and systematic as print itself. Histories, anthologies, and critical treatises formalized English literature, while dictionaries and grammars intensified the awareness of the dialectical variations within English, including the provincial idioms that the first professors of English worked to eradicate.

The rhetoricians who introduced college English studies assumed that few of their provincial students would speak from positions of public authority but all would need taste to be accepted into civil society (see Blair, "Lectures," 1: 8). The emphasis on taste was consistent with the view that consumption is the driving force in commercial society. According to the first great theorist

of consumer society, Adam Smith, "consumption is the sole end and purpose of all production; and the interest of the producer ought to be attended to, only so far as it may be necessary for promoting that of the consumer" (*Wealth of Nations* 660). In "commercial society," as Smith conceived it, the individual is not a political so much as an economic agent: "when the division of labour has been once thoroughly established. . . . Every man thus lives by exchanging, or becomes in some measure a merchant, and the society itself grows to be what is properly a commercial society" (37). Smith was instrumental in establishing a laissez-faire conception of the public sphere that divorced civil society from the domain of party politics, and from practical political arts such as rhetoric. Civil society had to be kept free from factional interests and political enthusiasms if people were to be able to "essay" experience from a disinterested perspective and thus learn to respect the natural laws that maintained the balance of self-interest and the common good within the individual consciousness and the general political economy.

The subordination of composition to criticism in the formation of college English was consistent with the nature of the reading public as a consumer society. Eagleton has argued that "the modern concept of literary criticism is closely tied to the rise of the liberal, bourgeois public sphere in the early eighteenth century" (*Function of Criticism* 10). Habermas's *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* has further argued that the "bourgeois reading public of the eighteenth century" is where modern conceptions of the public sphere began to develop out of traditional definitions of the "public" as "the critics of art and literature" (85, 32). According to both these accounts, the reading public provided a domain where the middle classes could develop a critical understanding of their social experience. Rather than equating critical reflection with political action, I want to examine how criticism became a means to instill taste as the reading public expanded beyond the traditional elite, and readers began to conceive of literature not as all "eloquent" discourse—discourse that they themselves might compose—but rather as the literary work or production of a particular class of writers gifted with productive genius. While *criticism* and *composition* are both abstractions from actions, the actions are quite different. Criticism implies passing judgment (*censurer*), while composition means putting (*poser*) together (*com*). While the former is concerned with making distinctions, the latter is synthetic and treats critical analysis as a prelude to action. The dichotomy of production and reception provides a convenient, if ultimately reductivist, point of reference for examining how the critical stance of the disinterested spectator dislocated readers from becoming more productively engaged with political action.

In this chapter I sketch out how cheap print literacy publicized the educated culture and blurred distinctions between polite arts and popular forms of leisure, creating the need for the first histories and critical treatises on English literature. Next I review how such blurred boundaries led to attempts to standardize literate usage, beginning with neoclassicists' calls for a courtly academy and concluding with the dictionaries and grammars that formalized the conventions of published writers in order to demarcate the world of print from the idioms of common people. The attempt to reason inductively from literate usage to the laws that governed educated discourse was part of the project of redefining the language arts according to the grammatical laws, experiential logic, and unadorned rhetoric authorized by the "science of man," a project that was most systematically undertaken by George Campbell. While the first professors of English were rhetoricians, they modeled taste and usage not on traditional oratorical forms but on the essay of taste and manners, especially the essays of the *Spectator*. While it was to become institutionalized as the model of academic discourse, the essay is a "blurred genre" that had predecessors in the popular press as well as the learned culture. To divorce themselves from the party politics that fueled the periodical press, belletristic essayists assumed the cosmopolitan perspective of the disinterested observer of public controversies.

Such stances served to maintain the proprieties of civil society as revolutionary ideas were spread among the working classes by the cheap pamphlets and correspondence societies that gave reading and writing practical political significance. In order to assume the stance of the impartial spectator as a means to self-improvement, "organic" intellectuals had to distance themselves from provincial idioms and class conflicts, and as a result became alienated from the experiences of those at the margins of the educated culture. As the educated public became more diversified, higher education took up the modern mission of teaching broader classes of students to respect the cosmopolitan tastes of the dominant culture—a mission that only became important as higher education expanded beyond classically educated upper-class males.

Publicizing the Literate Culture

Not until the beginning of the nineteenth century does the reading public begin to include the majority of the public, but in the eighteenth century the secular book-buying public grew to include better educated, more prosperous crafts and trades workers (see Graff, *Legacies* 230–48). About half the

families in England were still living at subsistence levels at the beginning of the century (see Porter), and until almost the end books remained too expensive for the lower classes. Literacy among adult English men apparently rose from over 50 to around 65 percent, with approximately two-thirds that rate for women.[3] Literacy did not increase as dramatically as in the Puritan era, partially because unprecedented population growth put tremendous strain on educational institutions, but also because the Anglican establishment tended to associate popular literacy with the public unrest of the previous century.[4] As discussed in chapter 3, dissenters helped foster critical literacy by founding academies that were more broadly accessible and practically engaged than the English universities and grammar schools. Dissenters were largely from the middle classes, who generally enjoyed almost universal literacy. Of course, statistics on literacy provide only the broadest outlines of the reading public, with some of the best known authorities disagreeing over whether it extended beyond the middle classes (see, for example, Altick and Neuburg). The existing scholarship does suggest that the expansion of literacy was more qualitative than quantitative, a matter of refining reading tastes and writing styles rather than simply teaching basic skills.

While it is difficult to know who read what, the records of who wrote for the reading public suggest that authors increasingly came from the middle classes as literature became commercialized by the print economy. From his analysis of the social backgrounds of the writers included in the *Oxford Introduction to English Literature,* Williams has concluded that authorship expanded to include the middle classes as courtly patrons lost influence to the exigencies of the marketplace.[5] For the first time, fewer British writers came from the nobility and gentry than from backgrounds in trades, merchandizing, and crafts. Also for the first time, the majority had not received a classical education at Oxford and Cambridge. Women began to publish increasing numbers of works, including the over five hundred novels noted in Spender's *Mothers of the Novel,* most of which did not become part of the canon of "English literature." "The present age," according to Johnson, "may be styled, with great propriety, *The Age of Authors;* for, perhaps, there never was a time in which men of all degrees of ability, of every kind of education, of every profession and employment, were posting with ardour so general to the press." Kernan has contrasted the attitudes of Johnson's generation with that of Pope, whose *Dunciad* describes "Printing as a scourge for the Sins of the Learned," with paper "so cheap, and printers so numerous, that a deluge of authors cover'd the land" (qtd. 74, 11). This "deluge" swept away barriers around the literate culture, creating anxieties among those who had depended on courtly patrons, but opportunities for those who hoped to earn a living by teaching the public a taste for politeness.

In the eighteenth century print transformed reading and writing. Spelling became standardized, and prose styles became simplified and more accessible as people began to read more widely and less intensively than they had when books were precious possessions.[6] Books on cooking, gardening, and other leisure activities became popular genres, as did literature for children. Books were serialized and excerpted to fill the pages of journals that combined political broadsides, ads for personal products, and cultural commentary aimed at self-improvement. Those who could not afford to buy even penny installments of books could borrow them from libraries. One of the first libraries was Allan Ramsay's in Edinburgh, which opened in about 1725, but by 1800 London alone had 122 circulating libraries, with 268 more in the rest of England (Houston 174–75). Johnson claimed that England had become a "nation of readers," and he noted that "he who writes otherwise than for money is a fool" (qtd. Prior 1: 70). The boundaries between the "low" and "high" cultures became even more blurred when the perpetual copyright was finally eliminated in 1774 and innovative booksellers made polite literature into a popular pastime. The classics of English literature were reprinted in cheap series that sold for around a shilling a volume, series like Bell's British Theatre (21 volumes, 1776 to around 1778) and the Poets of Great Britain (109 volumes, 1776 to around 1792). The mechanical reproduction of literature publicized and hence demystified the elite culture (see Benjamin). Whole classes of readers now had to be taught to distinguish the truly polite from the merely popular.

Johnson, the son of a lower-middle-class bookseller, was a leader of the generation of critics who taught the public how to appreciate "English" literature. When he could not afford to complete his education at Oxford, Johnson turned to selling his writing to booksellers. He wrote essays for popular journals like the *Gentleman's Magazine* that appealed to those who turned to magazines for quick summaries, abstracts, and criticisms of popular periodicals and books to gain easy access to the culture of "gentlemen" (see Kaminski). A consortium of booksellers who recognized the market for works of taste hired Johnson to survey the emerging canon of British literature in his *Prefaces, Biographical and Critical, to the Works of the English Poets* (10 volumes, 1779–1781). As I discuss in the next section, Johnson's *Dictionary* was the consummate work of print, for it was an index of literate usage that used published authors to systematically distinguish the written language from common speech. His edition of Shakespeare was also a product of the print economy, for it was the first edition to collate published editions to reconstruct the intentions of the authorial subject (see Kernan 93, 171).

The commercialization of authorship and the commodification of literature are but two examples of how the print economy publicized the educated

culture. While pamphlets and broadsides had mobilized popular opinion in the Puritan era, print did not transform the public sphere until the eighteenth century because periodicals were virtually nonexistent and books tended to be expensive and largely confined to religious and scholarly domains.[7] At the same time that the reading public was expanding, other public outlets for polite culture began to appear. In the seventeenth century even London had been without a public opera, ballet, music festival, or concert hall, but in the eighteenth century theaters and concert halls became common throughout Britain. In provincial towns, assembly rooms were built on a subscription basis so that the middle classes could attend the concerts and balls that had been reserved for the salons of the gentry. Such rooms were often used for the sort of lectures on taste and elocution delivered by Sheridan, Smith, and Blair that are discussed in subsequent chapters. As the audience for the theater grew, the number of new plays almost doubled from 1,095 in the first half of the eighteenth century to 2,117 in the second (Plumb 279, 276). While the music of the high culture had generally been reserved for sacred occasions or state celebrations, a "concert going public" arose that was an integral part of the bourgeois reading public (Habermas, *Structural Transformation* 39). Plays and musical scores became best-selling books, and print helped to professionalize the theater and other forms of popular entertainment by providing access to national audiences, in the process bringing the provinces into the increasingly unified national culture.

The popularization of classical music, literature, and theater was part of the general commercialization of leisure that accompanied the rise of a consumer society. According to McKendrick, a "consumer boom" reached "revolutionary proportions" by the last quarter of the eighteenth century (9). Per capita consumption increased fifteenfold during the century, with the sales of excised goods like tea and tobacco growing at twice the increase in population in the last decade alone. More people were buying more goods, which were becoming valued for their style rather than just their utility or durability. As the public began to emulate the tastes of the leisured classes, traditionalists became anxious about maintaining the subservience necessary to social order. Such anxieties were fostered by Mandeville's widely popular *Fable of the Bees* (1714), which satirized the traditional view that public order depended on private economy. Mandeville cynically noted that "Luxury Employ'd a Million of the Poor, And odious Pride a Million More: Envy it self, and Vanity, Were Ministers of Industry; Their darling Folly, Fickleness, In Diet, Furniture and Dress, That strange ridic'lous Vice, was made The very Wheel that turn'd the Trade" (1: 25).[8] In 1776 the birth of a consumer society was heralded in less provocative and more scientific terms by Adam Smith's

Wealth of Nations. After Smith's generation, the classical opposition of private luxury and civic virtue broke down as self-interest became accepted as not just natural but actually conducive to public prosperity.

As conservatives had feared, traditional hierarchies were undermined as refined tastes spread beyond the leisured classes. Wealth began to lose its traditional association with land and became reconceived as a transferable commodity. The circulation of wealth became understood as an abstract system or "economy" distinct from, and perhaps even opposed to, traditional hierarchies. And individuals began to be defined not by their positions in those hierarchies but by how effectively they had mastered the logic of the market economy. That logic was seen as intrinsic to the system, rather than as arbitrarily imposed by the power of the state or the authority of tradition. According to Habermas, "a liberalized market economy" was a "precondition" for the bourgeois public not simply because that economy provided economic opportunities for social advancement but also because liberal political economy provided the logic in which the middle classes came to understand themselves as possessing a social identity and "natural" power apart from their subservient positions within the class system of the time (*Structural Transformation* 11). In the context of the liberal political economy, culture became "a commodity" and evolved into "something that pretended to exist merely for its own sake" (29). Literature became a popular leisure—a relief from the demands of the marketplace within which it circulated. Writers and critics of imaginative literature developed, according to Eisenstein, "a vested interest in idleness, in promoting the value of pleasure-seeking and leisure, in cultivating consumption of the 'finer' things of life" (1: 156). To teach the public a taste for leisural refinement, critics presented the psychological reactions of enculturated readers as models of appropriate responses, and essays of taste and manners taught readers to assume perspectives that were consistent with the natural laws that governed liberal political economy.

To bring order to the print economy, efforts were made to chart the boundaries of all the polite arts in the middle of the century. According to Lipking's *Ordering of the Arts in Eighteenth-Century England* (1970), music, painting, and poetry were each formalized by an array of critical treatises that provided authoritative histories, standards, and models of appropriate responses. The first histories of English literature included such works as Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient Poetry* (1765), V. J. Peyton's *The History of the English Language* (1771), and the first book-length history of English literature, Thomas Warton's *History of English Poetry* (1774–1781). The modern sense of *literature* as nonutilitarian and generally nonfactual discourse oriented to achieving an aesthetic effect emerged in the latter half of the eighteenth century, though

poetry and *belles lettres* had previously been used in this sense upon occasion, and like *literature* continued to be used in the broader sense of all "polite letters" or "works of taste" (see Terry). Ironically, as Eagleton has discussed, "the birth of aesthetics as an intellectual discourse coincides with the period when cultural production is beginning to suffer the miseries and indignities of commodification" (*Ideology of the Aesthetic* 64). While commentators on English literature claimed to speak disinterestedly for the values of the aesthetic experience, those values need to be situated in the economy in which they circulated to understand the purposes they served. As leisure became commercialized, polite literature had to be demarcated from popular cultural forms if its commentators and consumers were to be able to claim it was a means to self-improvement and social advancement.[9] Just as the distinction of polite literature from popular entertainments enabled educated readers to distinguish themselves by their refined tastes, the conventions of educated usage had to be formalized if correct usage was to be employed to distinguish the formally educated from the merely literate.

Formalizing English

In this section, I briefly review how efforts to standardize educated usage intensified as the reading public expanded beyond the confines maintained by learned languages, courtly patrons, and the high cost of books. In a letter to the *Tatler* in 1710 Swift first proposed establishing a courtly academy to establish standards for the republic of letters. The initial proposals to "fix" English were shaped by the classical backgrounds of traditional intellectuals (Swift, *Works* 9: 33). As a dead language, Latin was impervious to change, and scholars of Swift's perspective hoped to create a universal grammar with the same timeless authority. While Swift assumed a royal academy could simply dictate correctness, Johnson recognized that the reading public had grown beyond the control of traditional authorities. To distinguish the written language from the speech of common people, he compiled a dictionary of the language of printed authors. Following Johnson, Priestley and Campbell established principles for scientifically determining correct usage by compiling and systematizing the conventions of authoritative writers. Once grammarians and lexicographers had established "the unity of the reigning conversational and literary language," college professors took up the project of teaching it to provincials who hoped to gain acceptance in polite society by mastering its conventions (Bakhtin 270).

While Swift's idea that a handful of people could dictate the language of the educated may seem absurd today, Swift and other neoclassicists did not

view discourse as a freely circulating commodity. Of course the French did establish such an academy, and the English might well have done so if Queen Anne had not died. The failure to do so was noted with regret a century later by Matthew Arnold in "The Literary Influence of Academies." Arnold felt that the lack of an academy had left English infected with a "provinciality" that prevented the development of "classical prose, prose of the centre" (*Works* 3: 245). The question for Swift, as for Arnold, was who would have the authority to regulate taste and usage. Of course Swift's "Proposal" for an academy and related works such as *The Battel . . . Between the "Antient" and the "Modern" Books* (1704) were not disinterested speculations but purposeful responses to particular conflicts within the patronage system.[10] Swift maintained that English "offends against every part of grammar" because he assumed that a *grammar* was by definition a rational and thus universal system (*Works* 11: 6). Later conservatives such as Bishop Lowth cited Swift as an authority for their efforts to prescribe correct usage, concluding that Swift's views had "never yet been questioned" (*Grammar* iv). More empirically oriented grammarians such as Campbell found Swift's position to be not unquestionable but unintelligible (*Philosophy of Rhetoric* 140–41). Campbell could not understand how English could systematically violate its own grammar because he defined grammar as a systematic description of the observable features of a language, noting that "there cannot be such a thing as an universal grammar, unless there were such a thing as an universal language" (34).

Johnson's *Dictionary* documents the developments that had made the conception of a universal grammar unintelligible to empiricists such as Campbell. When Johnson "took the first survey of my undertaking, I found our speech copious without order, and energetick without rules" (*Dictionary* ix). Like Swift, Johnson was a neoclassicist who defined change as corruption. Swift had hoped that if English "were once refined to a certain standard, perhaps there might be ways found out to fix it for ever" (Swift, *Works* 11: 9). In his initial *Plan* for the *Dictionary,* Johnson also set out to "fix the English language," but by the time he completed the work, he came to realize that English could not be "fixed" (*Plan* 11). Instead, he set standards for judging change by providing an index to published writers of "classical reputation or acknowledged authority" (*Dictionary* ix). While he continued to view variations as dangerous "spots of barbarity," he ridiculed his initial plans to "embalm" the language (*Dictionary* x, xxiii). Johnson had changed other positions as well. He refused the patronage he had previously sought from Lord Chesterfield, a former patron of Pope. Johnson claimed autonomy as a freely employed author in a famous letter to Chesterfield that is a noted transitional point in the shift from courtly patronage to a print economy governed by the exigencies of the marketplace (see Kernan 198–203).

The *Dictionary* was itself a product of that economy, for as Ong has stressed, "dictionaries are essentially printed constructs, their totally alphabetized reference economy being virtually inoperable in a nontypographic script culture" (*Interfaces* 21). Johnson straightforwardly rejected the very idea that literate usage ought "to comply with the corruption of oral utterance" (*Dictionary* x). He compiled authorities from the printed record in order to prevent the literate idiom from becoming as mutable as he perceived the dialects of spoken English to be. Johnson particularly proscribed the language of "the laborious and merchantile part of the people." Their "fugitive cant, which is always in a state of increase or decay, cannot be regarded as any part of the durable materials of a language, and therefore must be suffered to perish with other things unworthy of preservation" (xxii). As a person of lower-middle-class background, Johnson was quick to distinguish himself from the "common people," but his distaste for the "corruption of oral utterance" is more than class anxiety, though it is obviously that as well. For Johnson, the literate culture possesses the permanence of books, while the common experience is as quickly forgotten as an exchange in the marketplace. As Ong has noted of such perspectives, "away from print, all was chaos, for away from print, 'corruption was likely or even sure to set in'" (*Interfaces* 21–22).

Johnson's was but the most influential of the numerous dictionaries that reduced English to an orderly system. While only seven dictionaries of English had appeared before 1700, ten were published between 1700 and 1750, and over forty appeared in the latter half of the century, reproduced in over two hundred total editions (see Alston). These dictionaries, and the numerous grammars that accompanied them, methodically distinguished educated usage from the idioms of common speech. Formalizing conventions can make them easier to explain to outsiders, but the systematic distinction of literate English from common usage can also limit less educated people's ability to express themselves in print (see Olivia Smith). Textbooks often propounded complex rules that were more systematic than helpful. For example, Lowth defined irregular verbs using the suffix *en* in this way: "The irregulars of the third class form the past time by changing the vowel or diphthong of the present; and the participle perfect and passive, by adding the termination *en*, beside for the most part, the change of the vowel or diphthong. These also derive their formation in both parts from the Saxon" (50). Many familiar grammatical laws were first codified in this period, for example the absurdly logical principle that two negatives equal a positive and the systematic distinction of *shall* and *will* and *between* and *among*.

Lowth felt that the problem with English was not that it lacked a grammar but that it was not studied enough: "were the Language less easy and simple, we should find ourselves under a necessity of studying it with more care and

attention" (see Baugh and Cable 276–77). By providing an elaborate codification of the laws of English, Lowth helped ensure that it would have to be studied with "more care and attention" if it was to be used correctly. Violations of the rules marked one not only as ignorant but also as morally corrupt and even politically suspect because illiteracy, immorality, and rebelliousness were commonly compounded. According to Johnson, a writer may gain "publick infatuation" who does not know "the original import of words," but such a writer "will use them with colloquial licentiousness, confound distinction, and forget propriety" (*Dictionary* xxiv). Even grammarians such as Priestley who assumed that they were merely compiling "prevailing custom" advised writers to avoid the idioms of spoken English because of the "danger of debasing their style, by vulgar words and phrases, or such as have been long associated with, and, in a manner appropriated to, vulgar and mean ideas" (Priestley, *Theory of Language* 184; *Rudiments* 56). Such advice became a mainstay of the teaching of composition (see Glau).

Johnson based his standard on authors of "classical reputation," but Priestley and Campbell claimed authority for a broader class of writers, including provincials such as themselves. Campbell defined standard usage as that which is *reputable, national,* and *current,* a definition that maintained its authority into the twentieth century. This definition mapped out the boundaries of the reading public by granting authority to writers throughout Britain who maintained the proprieties of civil society. Campbell was quite precise about who was to be excluded as disreputable:

> The far greater part of mankind, perhaps ninety-nine of a hundred, are, by reason of poverty and other circumstances, deprived of the advantages of education, and condemned to toil for bread, almost incessantly, in some narrow occupation. . . . As the ideas which occupy their minds are few, the portion of the language known to them must be very scanty. (*Philosophy of Rhetoric* 142)

Liberal grammarians like Campbell and Priestley were no less class-oriented than prescriptivists. Liberals simply defined their class in broader terms because they lived farther from the cosmopolitan center of the culture than a more conservative commentator such as Johnson. Like Johnson, they formalized the conventions judged appropriate by their class—that language "found current, especially in the upper and the middle ranks, over the whole British Empire" (Campbell, *Philosophy of Rhetoric* 145). They granted authority to writers from the provinces as well as the capital of the reading public but treated most readers as essentially mute, or at best with but a "scanty" vocabulary.

Campbell and Priestley did depart from traditional intellectuals in claim-

ing the authority not of a classical or neoclassical tradition but of an empirical investigation of the natural laws of language itself. Priestley was most explicit about the scientific nature of the new grammar:

> *Grammar* may be compared to a treatise of *Natural Philosophy;* the one consisting of observations on the various changes, combinations, and mutual affections of words; and the other of the parts of nature: and were the language of men as uniform as the works of nature, the *grammar of language* would be as indisputable in its principles as the *grammar of nature.* (*Rudiments* vi)

However, it was Campbell who developed a methodical set of strategies for eliminating variations in usage. Grammarians were to observe the language of reputable writers, systematically codify it, eliminate all inconsistencies, and then teach it to those "comdemned to toil for bread" who had a "scanty" vocabulary and hence few ideas of their own. Because Priestley and Campbell took a descriptive approach concerned with reasoning inductively from literate usage, they have been hailed as the most progressive grammarians of the eighteenth century.[11] Their application of the scientific method to grammar was part of the broader project of founding the laws of discourse upon the "science of man" developed by Locke, Hume, and others who looked inward to discover the laws that govern human experience. As discussed in later chapters, the "science of man" provided a reliable methodology and point of reference for reformulating the three language arts—logic, rhetoric, and grammar—according to experiential modes of reasoning, dispassionate forms of exposition, and unadorned style that were consistent with the emerging sciences of political economy and psychology. This reformulation of the language arts mirrored the conception of a liberal political economy in which discourse circulated free of externally imposed authorities governed only by the natural laws of the system itself, leaving individuals free to operate within the system as long as they internalized its logic and respected its laws.

Once the laws governing English had been systematically compiled and codified, the public had to be taught to obey them. According to Murray Cohen, "to most later-eighteenth-century linguists, the ostensible categories and capacities of language seemed settled" (78). Cohen examined how pedagogical concerns gradually gained priority over theoretical speculations, which became confined to passing references to more scholarly works that were increasingly removed from the educational project. Earlier proposals for universal grammars and academies came to be seen as arcane speculations that were irrelevant to teaching students to obey the rules. Webster noted that "it is the business of grammar to inform the student, not how a language might have been originally constructed, but how it is constructed" (*Dictio-*

nary 3). Lindley Murray's popular *English Grammar* (1795) ran through over sixty-five editions and six hundred printings, and he claimed to supply nothing original, just an accessible survey of established rules with "common" words conveniently listed to be methodically eliminated (Murray 5; Downey xv). English schools gained popularity, and traditional grammar schools were criticized for only teaching English indirectly through translation and ignoring "English classics" (Priestley, *Rudiments* viii–ix). The authority of the classical tradition itself was directly challenged by popular texts such as James Buchanan's *A Plan of an English Grammar-School Education. With an Introductory Inquiry, Whether by the English Language alone, without the Embarrassment of Latin and Greek, the British Youth, in general, Cannot be Thoroughly Accomplished in Every Part of Useful and Polite Literature, and Qualified to Make a More Early, Advantageous, and Elegant Figure in Life* (1770) and Butler's *An Essay upon Education Intended to shew that the Common Method is Defective in Religion, Morality, Our Own Language, History, Geography, and that the Custom of Teaching Dead Languages, When Little or no Advantage can be Expected from them is Absurd . . .* (1753).

More utilitarian and less classically oriented schools became common from the 1740s onward, resulting in a 250 percent increase in endowed nonclassical schools during the century. Such schools helped fuel the explosion of grammars, dictionaries, and rhetorics that began a decade later (see Tompson, "English and English Education"). In these schools, as elsewhere, English was taught as a means to mold character.[12] Students were taught to assume a detached perspective and eliminate provincial idioms that might identify them as outsiders. Reasoning from the assumption that language was but a window on the mind, style was studied as an index to sensibility, readers were taught to conduct experiments upon themselves to assess whether they responded appropriately to experience, and criticism turned from classical authorities to psychological concepts like sympathy and sublimity that could be used to model appropriate responses. Every system of discourse establishes positions from which one can speak and works to silence those who do not follow its laws, but epistemologically oriented rhetoricians, grammarians, and critics were especially systematic in their effort to found the laws of discourse upon a scientific study of human psychology. The whole formation of English as a logically consistent system was centered on the project of teaching people to internalize a tasteful self-restraint and a disinterested perspective on experience. The essay of taste and manners was a perfect vehicle for instilling polite tastes because it divorced itself and its readers from the political rhetoric of the party press that had popularized the essay.

The Essay as Blurred Genre

The interaction of the polite culture and the popular experience shaped the formation of the novel as well as other novelistic forms of discourse such as the essay. The novel is better recognized for being a blurred genre—a hybrid form that evolved from courtly romances and vulgar tales of adventure that had traditionally been confined to chapbooks aimed at the marginally educated (see, for example, Watt; Rogers, *Literature and Popular Culture*). The novel is one of the most studied genres in English departments, but what such departments produce is the essay, not only in the composition courses that initiate students into academic discourse, but also in the classes where students write about literature and in the journals where professors demonstrate their professional expertise.[13] The genre is commonly traced back to Bacon's *Essays* (1597) and Montaigne's *Essai* (1590), which apparently coined the term *essay* from *essayer*, to try, taste, or test the fitness of a thing or idea. Like the novel, the essay had predecessors in the popular press, and it is characterized by the intermingling of fact and fiction that was common before journalism became distinguished from literature, and literature became limited to nonutilitarian nonfactual genres. While the novel and the essay have evolved over the last two centuries, English classes have maintained a narrow concentration on the proprieties of syntax and sensibility with such success that the student essays written today are not too removed from the compositions that were written in the first university classes on English, as discussed in chapter 5. Such uniformity is striking when one considers the dialectical nature of the genre.

The style and content of Bacon's and Montaigne's essays are so different that it is hard to understand how they are read as the sources of the same genre. However, the essay has always contained conflicting purposes and voices in a manner that is typical of novelistic discourse. Montaigne was the first to emphasize the essay's self-expressive purpose and highly personalized conversational style, while Bacon provided the model for essays that represented experience in simple unadorned language that did not call attention to itself. These somewhat conflicting views of language and experience have been dynamic parts of the essay since its origins. According to Good's *The Observing Self,* "the essayist's authority is not his learning, but his experience," with the essay providing the occasion "where self and object reciprocally clarify and define each other" (7, 8). With both Montaigne and Bacon, the observer claims to stand outside of traditional hierarchies and received ways of knowing to speak in an unmediated way from the immediate experience. Both assume that an "informal" style provides a clear window on expe-

rience, though Montaigne expresses a personalized experience and Bacon conveys empirical experience from an "objective" perspective that purports to make the event directly available to be experienced by the reader. Despite their differing purposes, Bacon and Montaigne are often read the same because both are read as literature. While Montaigne is unproblematically literary in the modern sense of the term, Bacon's essays helped define the conventions of scientific literature. When read as literature, the essay became self-contained and decontextualized from the rhetorical contexts and purposes that shaped its production, reception, and reproduction. This mode of reading is enacted in essays themselves when essayists distance themselves from received traditions in order to speak freely from unmediated experience (see Trimbur).

The continuities from Montaigne to belletristic essayists such as Addison and from Bacon to the plain style advocated by the Royal Society are so well established that little attention tends to be paid to how the rhetorical functions of the essay changed as it became popularized. Bacon and Montaigne wrote for an elite audience who could afford expensive folios, with Bacon spending the last years of his life translating all his works into Latin because he believed that "these modern languages will . . . play the bankrupts with books" (qtd. Baugh and Cable 259). In the eighteenth century essays became a staple of the print economy sold in cheap pamphlets on street corners, often to promote the politics of the party in power. Essayists such as Swift, Steele, and Defoe were political rhetoricians, publicists paid to legitimize the political positions of the day, though that is not how they were read by the critics who first canonized them or by the professors who taught students to imitate them. When the essay is situated in the party politics that popularized it, then such decontextualized readings become even more problematic, for they reproduce the tendency of the essay to deny its rhetorical nature as a purposeful response to a less than disinterested situation. Essays have often been characterized and taught as free-form expressions of personal feelings or as mere representations of the facts themselves. When romanticized or upheld as a transparent genre for reporting information, the essay becomes a model for the cosmopolitan perspective that positions individuals outside of traditional hierarchies in order to enable them to speak freely from experience in a disinterested fashion.

The essay, like the novel, had predecessors in the popular culture as well as the literary tradition. From courtly romances and chapbook tales of adventure and romance, the novel evolved into a form that included domestic affairs, personal experience, and the adventures of realistically portrayed individuals. Newspapers and novels often used quite similar strategies to claim

verisimilitude, with the former often reporting more fantastic stories than the latter and occasionally adopting a dialogue form to "converse" with representative readers about party politics. The very terms *novel* and *news* still referred to overlapping domains that included reports of novel events and news of daily life because fact and fiction were just beginning to diverge into distinct discursive categories (see *OED* and Davis's "Social History of Fact and Fiction"). The first newspaper was established in 1665 to publish government-sanctioned news, but the official voice of the government lost its legal monopoly with the lapse of traditional licensing requirements in 1695. The first daily appeared in 1702, and from 1711 to 1753 the newspaper press grew from two and a quarter million to seven million copies, doubling again by 1780 (Harris 83; Bond 10; Williams, *Long Revolution* 184). In the process periodicals were transformed from a printer's sideline into stock corporations that shaped public opinion. Early newspapers and magazines fed the popular taste for news with a pastiche of voices, forms, and topics, combining commentary on polite improvement and public executions, reports on bankrupts and miracles, and accounts of affairs in the House of Lords and the bedrooms of prime ministers.

The heteroglossia of the popular essay is dramatically evident in the journal that gave Johnson his first job as an essayist, the *Gentleman's Magazine* (founded 1731). Magazines "essayed" the expanding domain of print by publishing an inexpensive collage of excerpts, summaries, and criticisms of diverse periodicals and books. The motto of the *Gentleman's Magazine* was "more in Quantity, and greater Variety, than any Book of the Kind and Price." Essays from various periodicals were reprinted in a section labeled "A View of the Weekly Essays and Controversies." The essays included in the first issue were summarized on the title page as "Q. *Elizabeth;* Ministers; Treaties; Liberty of the Press; Riot Act; Armies; Traytors; Patriots; Reason; Criticism; Versifying; Ridicule; Humours; Love; Prostitutes; Music; Pawn brokers; Surgery; Law." The *Gentleman's Magazine* treated the essay as a vehicle of popular controversy that respected few proprieties, with queens and prostitutes both appropriate subjects, and criticism and poetry situated amid riots and pawnbrokers. The essays themselves include polemics on political and religious controversies that ridicule each other as well as the powers that be. The various essays are distilled and reprinted free of explicit editorial commentary to fit them into little five-paragraph snippets that can be conveniently read before moving on to the other sections of the magazine—"*Domestick* Occurrences," "Poetry," "Remarkable *Advertisements*," "Prices of Goods and Stocks, and a List of Bankrupts," as well as articles on topics ranging from gardening to witchcraft. This packaging of the essay helped to make it readily

accessible to readers but also dislocated it from the party journals that were abstracted by the anonymous editors of the *Gentleman's Magazine*.

While the *Gentleman's Magazine* anthologized essays that took an openly rhetorical stance on the controversies of the week and the news of the day, the growth of the periodical press gave rise to journals that concentrated entirely on social commentary aimed at self-improvement. These journals popularized the essay of taste and manners that would become a key element of the formation of college English. In a manner that embodied the centrifugal and centripetal forces that expanded the educated public and standardized educated taste and usage, the essay of taste and manners refined the novelistic dynamics of the essay to combine commentaries on social conventions with a unifying authorial voice that spoke for tasteful self-restraint. The essay of taste and manners is characterized by the disinterested perspective of the critical commentator whose personal character is revealed in a polished style, restrained sense of polite decorum, and critical attention to how gestures and expressions reveal individuals' sensibility. The narrative voices of belletristic journals such as the *Spectator, Rambler, Idler,* or *Loiterer* represented a coherent and stable authorial perspective that provided a perfect model for the experiential modes of reasoning and belletristic sensibility that were taught by the first professors of English. Outside as well as inside the classroom, essays of taste and manners were widely used to initiate new classes of readers into the proprieties of civil society. Such essays were reprinted in self-improvement manuals like Moore's *Young Gentleman and Lady's Monitor* to teach the polite code of conduct under headings such as "Sobriety," "Cleanliness," "Genteel Carriage," and "Elegance of Expression."[14] Those who needed further instruction on "elegance of expression" could turn to works like William Scott's *Lessons in Elocution* (1779), which went through over thirty-five editions in America before 1820. Scott provided extracts from belletristic essays, along with excerpts from the elocutionary textbooks of John Walker and James Burgh, to teach provincials to speak with the voice of the *Idler* or *Spectator.*

When such essays are situated in the context of the popular press, one can see that the essay of taste and manners popularized a rhetorical stance that served clearly defined political purposes. According to Addison, reading the essays of the *Spectator* "draws Mens Minds off from the Bitterness of Party and furnishes them with Subjects of Discourse that may be treated without Warmth or Passion." Addison noted that "the first Design" of the Royal Society had also been to distract the public from "Politicks" (*Spectator* 2: 519). As discussed in the next section, Johnson also identified the *Spectator* and the Royal Society with the common purpose of diverting the public from politics to self-improvement. While the essays of the popular press were often un-

abashed polemics, the *Spectator* distanced itself from the politics of the day in order to preserve the proprieties of civil society. The essay of taste and manners helped to constitute a discursive space at the boundaries of the political and the private. Manners were understood to be public enactments of personal character, and a person of taste had the self-restraint to avoid discussing politics and religion in public. When readers were taught to parse the style and sentiments of the *Spectator* in the first university courses on English, the political contexts and rhetorical purposes of the essay were placed outside the realm of critical analysis, and it became established as literature, in the modern sense of that term. The political purposes served by this arhetorical stance can be traced back to the rhetorical context that gave rise to the essays that were canonized by the first professors of English.

Readers as Spectators in Civil Society

From their initial publication between 1709 and 1715, an edition of the *Spectator* or its predecessor, the *Tatler,* was published about once a year throughout the eighteenth century (see Winton 30). While other journals were also widely anthologized and reprinted, the *Spectator* set the standards for taste and usage that were taught by belletristic rhetoricians such as Hugh Blair. An issue of the *Spectator* was a single essay of about twenty-five hundred words printed in double columns on a single sheet. The purported author of the essays characterized himself in the first issue as a disinterested "Spectator" of public affairs, and in the second issue he began the commentary on his private club that set the context for later essays. The Spectator Club included a carefully balanced cross-section of the journal's intended readers. Prominence was given to a country gentleman, Roger de Coverly, whose perspective was balanced by the character of Sir Andrew Freeport, a wealthy merchant who spoke for the free-trade interests of the Whigs. The other members were represented in ways that distanced their personal characters from public controversies—a clergyman with no set theological orientation, a captain whose modesty led him to prefer a private life to public office, and a law student who is "disinterested and agreeable" because "few of his Thoughts are drawn from Business" (1: 9–13). Also included is a thrifty merchant who maintained that "A Penny saved is a Penny got," a sentiment that Franklin took to heart when he joined countless other provincials in refining his style by parsing the sentences of the *Spectator* (*Autobiography* 11). The Spectator pointedly emphasized that he always maintained "exact neutrality" in politics, never entering "into the Commerce of Discourse with any but my particular Friends, and

not in Publick even with them" (1: 5, 19). He can "discern the Errors in the Oeconomy, Business, and Diversion of others better than those who are engaged in them" because he is a silent and uninvolved "Spectator of Mankind" who does not become involved in "any Practical Part in Life" (1: 4, 5). Studiously maintaining a public anonymity as a disinterested "Looker-on," the Spectator retired to his chambers and composed his private thoughts to "Print my self out" in the essays of the *Spectator* (1: 5).

The *Spectator* thus modeled a disinterested rhetorical stance for readers, showing them how to step back from public debates and confine their political opinions to personal essays. The Spectator Club became a popular model for the literary societies where provincials gathered to imitate the style and sensibility of English essayists. These literary societies routinely proscribed discussions of public controversies that might disturb the decorum of "conversible society." In them provincials could rise above political and religious divisions and develop a unifying commitment to cultural assimilation as a means to social progress. In groups like the Select Society and the Aberdeen Philosophical Society, Smith, Blair, and Campbell discussed philosophy and taste and corrected each other's compositions, including drafts of the works that introduced English studies into the university. These societies provide an archival site to examine the cosmopolitanism that linked college English studies and the trends in public discourse that popularized the essay of taste and manners. With Smith and his colleagues, the impartial spectator became institutionalized as the perspective of the critic, the social scientist, and the personalized author who has internalized the dominant culture in the form of a second self, Smith's famous "inmate within our breast." This second self served as a means to internalize self-restraint in a "commercial society" where social mobility and economic change were undermining established hierarchies and traditional values.[15]

The *Spectator* became one of the best-selling publications of the eighteenth century because the essay of taste and manners provided accessible commentary on polite self-improvement that served the needs of a society that felt threatened by increasing social diversification. The essays' original audience was small compared to the generations of students who would be taught to imitate its style and stance. Addison made the "modest computation" that twenty people read each of the three thousand copies of the *Spectator* (1: 44), and he may not have been overly immodest because its essays were passed from hand to hand in coffeehouses, of which there were some two thousand in London (Plumb 269–70). Coffeehouses and private literary societies provided a place apart from established forums and hierarchies where intellectuals, shopkeepers, and the gentry could meet as equals. The

Spectator provided standards of taste for those who wanted to distinguish themselves from the workers who might be sitting at the next table listening to a literate colleague read the news, a common practice that spread the values and voices of the print culture even among the illiterate. Readers interested in self-improvement valued the *Spectator*'s commentary on how to distinguish between the merely popular and truly polite, and by helping readers to make such distinctions, the *Spectator* strengthened the popular authority of the polite culture. As Ketcham discusses, the essays of the *Spectator* "do not test conventions" to explore "their inadequacies or hidden potentials," instead the essays "create conventions which will, in turn create a self-confirming system of values" (5).

The essay of taste and manners popularized by the *Spectator* created a "self-confirming" set of values by modeling how tasteful self-restraint is conveyed through a studious attention to appropriate manners, keeping the code of conduct as informal as the conventions of the essay itself. The *Spectator* silently and dispassionately viewed urban society as a theater of human nature where one can observe from a critical distance how people converse in the street, how the sexes communicate their desires with veiled gestures, and how individuals with taste exercise self-control to preserve a sense of decorum. From a self-detached perspective, the *Spectator* represented individuals revealing their personal character through their modes of expression and behavior, providing details on the polite code of conduct while unmasking the pretenses of those who attempt to play the part of a gentleman or lady but do not have the taste to master the nuances of the role. Such details were dutifully studied by readers who had not inherited a position in polite society but hoped to earn one by improving their manners. Essays often digressed into personal observations on a chance encounter or conversation that convey an ironic awareness of social conventions, while at the same time effacing the essay's own formal conventions and rhetorical purposes behind an apparent indirectness and artlessness that is common in essayistic discourse. With space for personal narrative and endless digression but not explicit argumentation, the essay of taste and manners enacted the conventions of civility without explicitly explicating them, preserving the sense of decorum by not saying too much. An incident can be narrated, but the convention it dramatized need not be explicated because taste is a matter of sympathy, not system—an experience as natural and unmediated as the essay of taste and manners itself.

The essay of taste and manners depends on the readers' sympathetic identification with the personal character of the critical observer who has the sensitivity to pick up on the nuances of gesture and tone. The doctrines of sympathy popularized by the *Spectator* arose out of a rhetorical awareness of

how speakers express their character when they deliver a speech, but the effectiveness of the rhetorical stance of the *Spectator* depended on its appearing to be a disinterested position divorced from public controversies. The assumption that "every passion gives a particular Cast to the Countenance, and is apt to discover itself in some Feature or other" was drawn from rhetorical theories of "delivery" (1: 365). For a sense of "the inward Disposition of the Mind made visible" the *Spectator* cited Cicero as a point of reference, and according to Ketcham, Addison's specific source may have been a 1699 translation of Cicero's *De officiis* that included a chapter titled "Outward Carriage discovers the inward Dispositions of the Mind" (*Spectator* 1: 366; Ketcham 31–32). Classical theories of delivery also influenced Hume's and Smith's sense of how hearers sympathize with speakers by feeling the emotions written on their faces. Cicero's *De oratore* is cited by Potkay as a source for Hume's observation that "when I see the *effects* of passion in the voice and gesture of any person, my mind immediately passes from these effects to their causes, and forms such a lively idea of the passion as is presently converted into the passion itself" (46). Hume's conception of the "lively idea" had a major impact on George Campbell's effort to redefine rhetoric by the "science of man," and such sources also influenced the elocutionists' efforts to make gestures, facial expressions, tones, and pauses into a formal sign system that would script speech according to the laws of human nature. Commentators on taste and manners turned to rhetoric for analyses of how gestures and facial expressions influenced audiences' responses, but the essay of taste and manners was represented as an arhetorical form that remained aloof from the politics of the day in order to speak disinterestedly for the virtues of self-restraint.

The essay of taste and manners encouraged readers to look inward and refine their responses and attitudes according to the manners deemed appropriate in polite society. These essays provided perfect models for studying style as the expression of character, for the very form of the essay was understood to be an enactment of the author's personal experience. Belletrists' commentary in the *Spectator* had a broad impact on the introspective turn of rhetoric and moral philosophy later in the century, particularly the tendency to conflate ethics and aesthetics in terms of the refinement of personal sentiment. The four essays in the *Spectator* on the "Pleasures of the Imagination" are one of the first attempts to give a psychological account of the effects of literature on readers, and they formed the point of departure for many later accounts, including the first publications of the moral-sense philosopher Francis Hutcheson—Adam Smith's teacher and predecessor as professor of moral philosophy at Glasgow. The psychological effects of imaginative literature would be widely studied by moral philosophers such as Hutcheson and

Smith who turned to the sympathetic imagination to maintain civility in an increasingly diversified society. In a fashion that was consistent with the introspective turn of later belletristic critics and commentators on moral sentiments, the *Spectator* set out to enter "into the Passions of Mankind, and to correct those depraved Sentiments that give Birth to all those little Extravagancies which appear in their outward Dress and Behaviour" (1: 70). The refinement of taste was valued because the tastes of the leisured classes were spreading beyond the confines of the educated culture and broader classes of readers had to be taught to exercise self-restraint and respect traditional hierarchies.

The essay of taste and manners was a very effective media for instilling cosmopolitan tastes in broader classes of readers. According to *Spectator* 411 and many later belletristic accounts, the "Pleasures of the Imagination" are confined to leisure hours and serve the purposes of self-improvement. When appropriately refined, the imagination provides not "criminal" but "idle and innocent" pleasures, unlike the leisure activities individuals often resort to when they "step out of business." A refined imagination enables a person to take as much pleasure in observing as "another does in the possession. It gives him indeed, a kind of property in everything he sees" and enables "him" to discover "in it a multitude of charms that conceal themselves from the generality of mankind" (qtd. Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric* 1: 423–26). Such sentiments were highly valued by belletristic critics such as Hugh Blair, who devoted four of the lectures of the first volume of his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* to explicating these essays as a model of style that has "no labor, no stiffness, or affectation" (1: 424). As I discuss in chapter 8, Blair confined his critical analysis to explicating Addison's unlabored style and had his students labor over essays imitating it, but he did not look beyond the level of syntax to explicate the ideas or forms of the essay of taste and manners because he found them to be as natural and free from controversy as the style he taught his students to internalize. Such instruction was part of what Eagleton has termed the "process of refashioning the human subject from the inside," or what Gramsci has called simply "hegemony" (Eagleton, *Ideology of the Aesthetic* 43).

Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of the essay of taste and manners, especially when compared to the rest of the periodical press of the time, is how studiously it avoided any explicit commentary on political controversies. The *Spectator* did occasionally dramatize political themes in images that suited the tastes and interests of middle-class readers, but it did not openly take a stand on political issues. For example, in the third issue, a member of The Club visits a bank and then dreams of a beautiful virgin on a golden throne, "Publick Credit," whose chamber is piled high with money and lined with various symbols of British freedom like the Magna Carta. Suddenly, pairs of

horrible phantoms burst in: "Tyranny and Anarchy," "Bigotry and Atheism," "the Genius of Common-Wealth," and Charles the Jacobite Pretender. In the presence of such political extremes, the heaps of money begin to shrink. The vision disappears and is replaced by another: "Liberty, with Monarchy at her right Hand"; "Moderation leading in Religion"; and a third person who had never been seen before, Prince George, who had yet to visit England. Upon his entrance, the money bags swell to their former size (1: 15–17). Easy credit was of dramatic significance to the *Spectator*'s readers. It contributed to the rise of the mercantile class whose "moveable" wealth challenged the classical conceptions of property that made the landed gentry the voice of civic virtue because only they had a permanent stake in the public good. However, when one considers the polemics of the popular press, such political imagery is as restrained as the ideals it promoted. Within the essay of taste and manners and the polite society it helped popularize, "man" is defined as a "Sociable Animal" who joins together in clubs, "knit together, by a Love of Society, not a Spirit of Faction" (*Spectator* 1: 39, 42). This ideology and the groups modeled upon it helped to translate the ambitions of provincials into the language of civility, a language that maintained the decorum of civil society by popularizing a cosmopolitan sensibility that was carefully divorced from the civic rhetoric of party politics.

The distinctiveness of the essay of taste and manners was recognized at the time by one of its most important practitioners, Samuel Johnson. According to Johnson's "Life of Addison," the *Tatler* and *Spectator* had made the essay a popular form and used it to divert public attention from politics to politeness in a time of social unrest. The essay had first become popular during

> the Civil War, when it was much the interest of either party to raise and fix the prejudices of the people. . . . ; but hitherto nothing had been conveyed to the people, in this commodious manner, but controversy relating to the Church or State, of which they taught many to talk whom they could not teach to judge. . . . It has been suggested that the Royal Society was instituted soon after the Restoration to divert the attention of the people from public discontent. The *Tatler* and *Spectator* had the same tendency. (*Lives* 1: 334–35)

Johnson valued the essays of the *Spectator* precisely because they moved the genre out of the domain of popular politics and made it a means to teach readers to remain silent and learn the virtues of self-improvement. Following Addison's own reference to the Royal Society, which I already quoted, Johnson echoed Sprat's comment in his *History of the Royal Society* that that group had also sought to persuade the public to renounce factions and concentrate on "*calm* and *indifferent* things, especially *Experiments*." Conflicting parties could then learn to coexist "with the same peacableness as men of different

Trades live one by another in the same *Street*" (Sprat 426–27; see also Ward, *Lives* 1: x).

In his comments on how to divert public opinion from politics to progress, Sprat modeled the commerce of discourse according to economic transactions in civil society, much as Adam Smith would do in his theories of rhetoric and political economy. Like Smith, Sprat followed Bacon in assuming that political rhetoric should be excised from civil society. According to Sprat, "eloquence ought to be banish'd out of all civil Societies, as a thing fatal to Peace and good Manners" (111). As has often been noted, the Royal Society advanced very persuasive arguments against persuasion and the general "luxury and redundance of speech" because Sprat and his colleagues hoped to make language as objective and disinterested as the scientific method was understood to be (111). What is less noted is that this criticism was a rhetorical response to a specific political situation, and it was recognized as such by essayists such as Addison and Johnson. As a Royalist, Sprat had witnessed popular orators promoting public unrest in the Commonwealth era, "when the greatest affairs" had been "manag'd by the violence of popular assemblies and those govern'd by the most plausible speakers" (22). Since Sprat, the "plain style" has been identified with the "rise of science," but the language of science was from the outset defined in opposition to the heated oratory of political assemblies and the highly figured style that was used by popular orators to inflame the passions. Sprat and other advocates of the "progress of reason" viewed science as a better subject for public study, and he looked to the relations of independent economic agents as a model for depoliticized social relations, as would later advocates of the science of political economy such as Adam Smith.

According to Johnson, the essay had originally served as a historical distraction to "minds heated with political contest" (*Lives* 1: 335), and in the eighteenth century, the polite diversions of essayists established a domain of civil discourse well suited to teaching readers to mind their manners:

> Before the "Tatler" and "Spectator," if the writers for the theatre are excepted, England had no masters of common life. No writers had yet undertaken to reform either the savageness of neglect or the impertinence of civility, to show when to speak or to be silent, how to refuse or how to comply. We had many books to teach us our more important duties, and to settle opinions in philosophy and politics; but an *arbiter elegantiarum*—a judge of propriety— was yet wanting, who would survey the track of daily conversation, and free it from thorns and prickles. (*Lives* 1: 334)

The essay of taste and manners directed public attention to a middle ground between "savageness" and "civility," a space apart from politics where "masters of common life" taught readers how to speak and when to remain silent.

This was the domain of civil society, and the essay of taste and manners helped maintain its boundaries by teaching readers a tasteful self-restraint and a well-mannered aversion to politics and religion as inappropriate topics for polite conversation. At a more subtle level, the essay of taste and manners itself inscribed such boundaries by representing a discursive domain free of traditional hierarchies, political divisions, and arbitrary authorities—a domain accessible to any individual who had internalized its logic and values as a natural part of his or her experience.

In the decades following the appearance of the *Spectator,* the print economy spread cosmopolitan tastes throughout the provinces of the English empire. A separate department of the post office was set up in 1787 to mail newspapers free of charge to the provinces, with four and a half million being mailed from London by 1790, over four times as many as a quarter-century earlier (Asquith 101; Black 299). At least thirty-six towns also had newspapers of their own (Jackson 3). The essay of taste and manners was a popular filler for newspapers in the provinces, and not simply because provincials wanted to imitate cosmopolitan tastes. Printers and booksellers outside metropolitan markets needed to appear impartial to avoid alienating factions within their limited audiences (see Asquith 105). Polite diversions from political differences were also welcome because armed rebellions continued to divide educated society up to the middle of the century in Scotland, and through the next century in Steele's own homeland, Ireland. The *Spectator* and its imitators spread a unifying commitment to personal refinement as a means to social progress through cultural assimilation. The essay of taste and manners was the perfect vehicle for teaching provincials to respect the proprieties of civil society, because it spoke directly to their anxieties and ambitions in an accessible style that was as natural as speech (once they had studiously eliminated all the idioms of their own society) and as disinterested as science (once they had learned to divorce themselves from the political conflicts of the time). In literary societies and in the works composed in them, provincials learned to assume the cosmopolitan perspective of the impartial spectator who has internalized the polite decorum of civil society in the form of a second self who monitors the propriety of every thought, word, and deed.

Conclusion: Reading Publics and Politics

The formation of college English was shaped by the centrifugal and centripetal forces that expanded the literate culture and standardized literate usage. Print provided both the means for expanding the reading public and a model for its standardization. The print economy came to be viewed as a do-

main for the free commerce of discourse that was governed by its own natural laws, rather than by political hierarchies or ancient authorities. Critics, grammarians, and rhetoricians took up the task of formalizing those laws by reasoning inductively from the conventions of educated discourse, while at the same time the "natural laws" of political economy were being formalized into a science by the moral philosophers who helped introduce English into higher education, most notably the great theorist of consumer society, Adam Smith. Essays of taste and manners were the perfect vehicle for spreading cosmopolitanism. They provided accessible surveys of the conventions of civil society and reinforced the authority of those who possessed the natural faculty of taste. By setting themselves outside traditional hierarchies and factional divisions, essayists represented civil society as a discursive domain open to all—all who had internalized its cosmopolitan sensibility and disinterested perspective on political controversies.

In the reading public of the eighteenth century, "public opinion battled with public power" according to Habermas (51). To understand the domain where those battles were waged, one must complicate Habermas's views of the early modern public sphere as a domain for social critique with Gramsci's conception of civil society as a depoliticized discursive domain where individuals are taught to internalize the hegemony of the dominant culture. The subordination of rhetoric to belletristic criticism within the formation of college English was consistent with the view that conversible society was distinct from political society, and that taste could bring advancement in the former even if one lacked the power to speak in the latter. Hume's "Of Civil Liberty," for example, argued that political freedom is not necessary to cultural advancement, with France the historical exemplar of a tyrannical society that had refined belles lettres as part of the general "*Arte de Vivre,* the art of society and conversation" (*Essays* 91). Hume, like Smith and other provincials, spoke from the experience of cultural provincials who had little access to political power but were beginning to gain influence as commentators on the conventions of taste and manners.[16]

The political limitations of the reading public become clear when one considers those who were excluded from civil society—the vast numbers of the public who lacked civility. For the reading public, the poor were generally objects but not agents of discourse. Whether writers advocated paternalistic acts of charity or greater severity in punishing the indolent, the urban working classes were generally discussed but not addressed. Nonetheless, as print expanded beyond the confines of civil society, literacy helped laboring people become aware of their shared history and problems, and the working class became constituted as a "social and cultural formation" (Thompson 11). Class

consciousness, according to Thompson, was developed in workers' improvement clubs that differed quite significantly from literary societies. Rather than assuming that politics and religion were inappropriate topics of discussion, workers' groups routinely combined discussions of self-improvement and political reform in the belief that collective action was necessary to gain real progress. Correspondence societies shared the costs of printing radical tracts in revolutionary numbers, with sixty thousand copies of Price's *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty* (1776) sold in six months, and sales of as high as one and a half million for the second part of the *Rights of Man* (1792) (see Altick 71). Such workers' groups fostered critical reflection as a prelude to practical action and often had close ties with liberal reformers in the dissenting academy tradition discussed in the third chapter. The political crises of the time not only kept the presses running, they shaped how people read, as is clear in the emphasis that corresponding societies and debating clubs placed on critical literacy—the ability to read texts against their intended purposes and compose texts to accomplish one's own purposes, a very different sort of relationship among readers, texts, and purposes than that formalized by the essay of taste and manners.

As political opposition spread among the working classes, the state responded in 1799 by imposing anticombination, censorship, and sedition laws specifically aimed at containing print literacy. Revolutionary writings were banned, booksellers were imprisoned for selling cheap radical tracts to the public, and laws were passed against the correspondence societies, where working people came together to read the news and write about how to organize. Conservatives congratulated themselves on having been right that public literacy led to public unrest, and liberals and evangelicals redoubled their efforts to teach the public to read with propriety. Conservatives and liberals shared the basic assumption that the purpose of education was to create a more stable and productive society; they only differed on whether literacy made the poor more industrious or more presumptuous (see Neuberg 1–2). The most effective efforts to dissuade the working classes from reading radical political tracts were made by the Wesleyans. Hannah More imitated the popular chapbooks that preceded the novel to compose a series of Cheap Repository Tracts that promised sensational tales of romance and adventure but delivered the familiar moral lesson that industrious self-improvement was best for one and all. More's works reportedly sold some two million copies in 1795 alone (Lawson and Silver 232). "When it was impossible to prevent our reading something," Priestley's student William Hazlitt wrote, "the fear of . . . a *Reading Public* . . . made the Church and State anxious to provide us with that sort of food for our stomachs, which they thought best" (qtd. Altick 73).

As revolutions abroad led to unrest at home, the state openly intervened in civil society to reestablish the controls on public opinion traditionally maintained by a deference to educated proprieties. As Gramsci has discussed, only at times when the hegemony of the elite is directly threatened does one see the "apparatus of state coercive power" openly exercise its authority in this way (see *Prison Notebooks* 12). When systems of cultural reproduction such as schools and the literature of self-improvement are fulfilling their purposes, individuals are taught to assume appropriate positions and fulfill their duties. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, such systems of cultural reproduction were put under great strain by unprecedented population growth and changes in technology and economic relations. These changes have been broadly surveyed in this chapter: the spread of cheap print literacy, the expansion of the educated culture beyond the confines of learned languages, and the resultant blurring of the boundaries between the educated and popular cultures that gave rise to such blurred genres as the essay and novel. In response to these centrifugal trends, efforts were made to contain the educated culture by formalizing the conventions of correct expression, standardizing appropriate modes of response, and modeling the process by which individuals were to internalize "a spectator within the breast" to judge changing morés with tasteful self-restraint. These centripetal and centrifugal forces created the awareness of cultural differences and the need to explain them away that led to English first becoming established as an object of formal study in higher education.

Of course how one interprets the politics of the reading public will depend upon how one views the politics of reading and writing. Such views need to be carefully assessed against the material conditions and political relations of the time, more carefully than I have been able to do in this chapter. For example, I have suggested that the reading public was a consumer society that was taught to concentrate its attention on the reception rather than the production of discourse. The subordination of composition to criticism could be explained by the simple empirical fact that it took much longer to teach the public to write than to read. A teacher of the time estimated that he could teach reading in a year, while writing tended to take three to four times as long. Since the average student only attended his working-class school for thirteen months, few of his students would have become fluent writers (Schofield, "Measurement" 317). The material conditions of reading and writing tend to be ignored by even the best studies of the reading public. In my analyses, I have several times cited Altick's history of "the reading public as a social phenomenon." Altick has argued that "the democracy of print" was a "revolutionary social concept" that was instrumental in the "democratizing

of reading" (8). Much like Habermas, Altick has concluded that "the history of the mass reading audience is, in fact, the history of English democracy seen from a new angle" (1–3). Such conclusions depend on the modern tendency to equate literacy with democracy and prosperity. However, the equation of literacy and progress has been challenged by research on literacy's contributions to industrialization, the historical test case of the modern experience. Schofield and other researchers have argued that industrialization did not depend on literacy and may actually have suppressed it, with early industrial towns often having lower levels of literacy than more rural communities, especially those where land ownership was dispersed and trades and crafts workers were organized (Schofield, "Dimensions of Illiteracy" 211–13).

Such historical facts call into question the assumption that literacy expanded along with increased individual opportunities to create a reading public that provided access to critical debate and political reform. The culture of literacy had a complex historical relationship with industrialization. It is a commonplace that ears attuned to the school bell are more likely to obey the factory whistle because children who have been taught to accept a routine of unfulfilling labor with promises of self-improvement will grow up to accept assembly lines and savings plans. The culture of literacy also changed relations between less and better educated workers, including those with the abilities and aspirations to make improvements in themselves or their communities, the sort of potential leaders Gramsci termed "organic intellectuals." According to Lacquer, "by the late eighteenth century, reading among the most articulate elements of the working class was no longer just another leisure activity, or a means for functioning more effectively in everyday life," but a "process of individual self-improvement." Literacy came to distinguish "the respectable from the nonrespectable poor, the washed from the unwashed . . . a division which was far less clear" earlier in the century (268). As a result, those who spoke, or rather wrote, from the working-class experience "became powerfully attached to bourgeois forms of reason and reasonableness; they fundamentally accepted bourgeois definitions of improvement and of the parameters of political action" (275). For those at the boundaries of the reading public, including middle-class provincials as well as the working classes, the culture of literacy maintained the existing hegemony by teaching organic intellectuals from marginal social groups to assume the perspective of a refined member of civil society, a perspective internalized as a second self in the form of the impartial spectator. Print itself facilitated this process by restructuring consciousness to separate "the knower from the external universe and then from himself" and thus creating "alienation within the human lifeworld" (Ong, *Interfaces* 17–18). The essay of taste and manners

mediated this alienation by representing experience in a "conversational" style that was accessible to all who had internalized the tasteful self-restraint and polite proprieties of the literate culture.

The conventions of English were charted to map out the boundaries of the literate culture, but as literacy expanded and the working classes became politicized, more attention needed to be paid to teaching the public to obey the laws of correct usage and polite taste: As discussed in the next chapter, Oxford and Cambridge remained aloof from broader changes within the literate culture and continued to reproduce traditional intellectuals in the traditional way—by perpetuating the authority of the ancient languages and formalistic modes of reasoning that had long preserved the boundaries of the learned culture. Beyond the centers of the educated culture, provincial colleges began to take up the modern mission of public education because the Scottish universities and dissenting academies were more accessible and hence more responsive to the middle classes. Of course efforts to regulate language will inevitably concentrate on the margins of the dominant discourse because that is where boundaries are drawn and the awareness of cultural differences is most intense. The fact that English was introduced into provincial academies and universities over a century earlier than at the centers of English education challenges the view that educational change begins at the top, among influential theorists at elite institutions. Such a view cannot account either for the institutionalization of the modern culture by rhetoricians in the eighteenth century or for the reintroduction of rhetoric into the humanities in public universities in America two centuries later. To understand such developments, we need to pay more attention to the rhetorical strategies involved in formalizing and transmitting disciplinary knowledge, and the rhetorical situations to which such strategies responded.

The discursive relations that constitute an academic discipline only make sense within a well-defined economy that has been demarcated as a system of values and methods, including formalized modes of evaluation and reference and institutionalized positions of authorship. As traditionally understood, an academic discipline is essentially a print construct that tends to be defined by the research published in the field, not by the teaching practices, funding sources, and other practical activities that situate intellectuals in the work of institutions and the general political economy. The disciplining of discourse is a highly rhetorical process, but rhetoric becomes effaced when a discipline establishes its modes of inquiry, reference, and authority as natural parts of work in the field, rather than as the purposeful responses of a particular group to a specific social situation. While the first professors to translate the humanities into English were rhetoricians, they deemphasized the composi-

tion of public discourse and concentrated on teaching taste to adapt higher education to the mission of instilling a common culture in the reading public, a mission higher education had not had to concern itself with when the educated culture was demarcated by learned languages, ancient authorities, and highly formalized modes of reasoning and expression. The belletristic perspective that first defined the formation of college English ended up making the study of English synonymous with the study of literary discourse, eliminating rhetoric as a domain of scholarly study in the humanities in Britain if not completely in America. While rhetoric's engagement with political controversies had traditionally served to preserve the public authority of the educated, such associations threatened to politicize class relations within the heterogeneous reading public, which was precisely what the cosmopolitan sensibility fostered by the essay of taste and manners worked to avoid. In the academy, as in civil society, rhetoric had to be effaced for the culture of literacy to be able to claim authority as a disinterested critical enterprise.