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The Use of Humor in the Dissemination of the Ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment

Megan E. Hills
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The Use of Humor in the Dissemination of the Ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts of the City College of the City University of New York

Advisor:  
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Megan E. Hills  
May 7, 2014
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The Use of Humor in the Dissemination of the Ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment

By Megan Hills

Abstract

The Scottish Enlightenment is best known for its contributions to moral philosophy—the study of human behavior and what prompts man to do what he does. People associate it with Adam Smith, David Hume, and Adam Ferguson and think of weighty tomes filled with metaphysical analyses of the world. There is, however, a less ponderous side to the Scottish Enlightenment, one that forwarded the same ideas that rationality, progress, civic pride, and logical debate were within man’s power. In the later years of the eighteenth century, what is known as the “High” Enlightenment, in actuality became low: ideas of reason, individualism, interest in improvement, and the right to question traditional authority were given light-hearted treatment in cheap print—humorous broadsheets, caricatures, comedic newspaper columns, and satiric poems.

Both humor and less rarified publications deserve thoughtful consideration because they combined to permit the transmission of new ideas beyond those individuals who could parse through difficult theories. While the critical essays offered up by intellectuals required some higher education, the wider populace could understand appeals to a rational ordering of the world and to challenges to traditional thinking, when presented in a lighter vein in forums accessible to them like the popular press, broadsheets, chapbooks, and prints.

Ideas that might otherwise be rejected were made palatable by being couched in a non-threatening form in innocuous publications. Individuals disseminated their opinions through humor, satire, and even low-brow wit in cheap print. These avenues for the dissemination of Enlightenment ideas were geared towards a wider audience, one that needed little education to
grasp the described concepts. Historical inquiry into both the technique of humor and the publications where the latter is used was appropriate, for it shows how the ideas of rationality, improvement, and sense of self permeated all sectors of society.
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Introduction

The Scottish Enlightenment is best known for its contributions to moral philosophy—the study of human behavior and what prompts man to do what he does. People associate it with Adam Smith, David Hume, and Adam Ferguson and think of weighty tomes filled with metaphysical analyses of the world. There is, however, a less ponderous side to the Scottish Enlightenment, one that forwarded the same ideas that rationality, progress, civic pride, and logical debate were within man’s power. In the later years of the eighteenth century, what is known as the “High” Enlightenment, in actuality became low: ideas of reason, individualism, interest in improvement, and the right to question traditional authority were given light-hearted treatment in cheap print—humorous broadsheets, caricatures, comedic newspaper columns, and satiric poems.

In general, Western thought rejects a scholarly inquiry into humor, adopting previous negative characterizations of it.\(^1\) In the context of the Scottish Enlightenment, the fact that humor made its most common appearance in the popular press for the lower-class compounds its neglect. However, both humor and less rarified publications deserve thoughtful consideration because they combined to permit the transmission of new ideas beyond those individuals who could parse through difficult theories. While the critical essays offered up by intellectuals required some higher education, the wider populace could understand appeals to a rational ordering of the world and to challenges to traditional thinking, when presented in a lighter vein in forums accessible to them like the popular press, broadsheets, chapbooks, and prints.\(^2\)

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\(^2\) A chapbook “is anything from a broadside to a decent-sized volume, and it received its name, “chap-book,” not on account of its size or its contents, but in virtue of the fact that it was chiefly circulated by the peddlers . . . . These men were known as chapmen. The derivation of the word shews [sic] that a “chapman” was simply a
Thus, it is not just comedic treatment of Enlightenment ideas that has been overlooked, but also the formats in which it was used. Individuals disseminated their opinions through humor, satire, and even low-brow wit in cheap print. Ideas that might otherwise be rejected were made palatable by being couched in a non-threatening form in innocuous publications. These vehicles for Enlightenment thought were not different in substance, but different in form. They prompted the same type of debate on current events. They engendered discussion of political acts. They caused people to wonder about Scotland’s place in the world. They did it through a variety of means by which to reach the greatest number of people—not just through theoretical writings—but also with pictures, light-hearted poems, and humorous satire. These avenues for the dissemination of Enlightenment ideas were geared towards a wider audience, one that needed little education to grasp the described concepts. Historical inquiry into both the technique of humor and the publications where the latter is used was appropriate, for it shows how the ideas of rationality, improvement, and sense of self permeated all sectors of society.

As a gloss, the playful presentation of Enlightenment concepts to a resistant audience is important to understand. Humor disarms. It puts people in a receptive mood. It approaches human beings in a non-threatening way, using an emotional lure, which catches them off-guard, thereby allowing them to consider matters in a non-traditional light. Much as Adam Smith proffered the idea that ideas of right and wrong sprang from individuals’ identification with the sentiments of others, a sympathetic response to others’ predicaments, humor similarly instructs the mind through the heart. One is laughed out of faults when playfully shown the foolishness of a contrary belief. Instead of approaching the mind directly, pleasentries attack one’s feelings, gaining the psyche’s acceptance before one’s mind has a chance to dismiss the proposition.

“cheap-man”; and chap literature may therefore be truthfully set down as “cheap literature.”” William Harvey, *Scottish Chapbook Literature* (Paisley: Alexander Gardner, 1903), 12.
These fanciful presentations are most commonly found in material for the lower class. The theoretical writings of Scotland’s educated elites were not geared towards the general public, nor can they be characterized as “entertaining” reading. The authors sought to challenge their peers and elite society. To a great extent, their primary goal was not to change the thinking of the masses. As the eighteenth century wore on, however, the new rationality trickled down—one that saw fruition towards the end of the eighteenth century when elite experimentations dripped down to the “gutter” press—located in formats that appealed to less-educated people.

The famous texts associated with the Scottish Enlightenment mainly appeared shortly after the midpoint of the eighteenth century. Although David Hume’s self-proclaimed “science of man,” Treatise of Human Nature, came out in 1739, it garnered such a poor reception that he revised and reissued it in 1748 as An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding. This treatise set out Hume’s skeptical beliefs regarding man’s ability to truly know the world about him. Adam Smith’s philosophical musings on the moral thinking of his time and the influence that social relationships had on the individual to curb the natural inclination towards selfishness, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, arrived in 1759. His book, An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations, came out in 1776. Adam Ferguson’s thoughts on the origins and causes of modern society, An Essay on the History of Civil Society, was published in 1767.

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3 As an example, David Hume almost always refers to the lower class in negative terms. He explained that the poor’s “‘sentiments, actions and manners’” are different from “‘those of a man of quality’” because “we are products of the societies and ranks to which we belong.” Neither the rich, nor the poor were capable of understanding the philosophy of reason, for “[t]he Great are too much immers’d [sic] in Pleasure; and the Poor too much occupy’d [sic] in providing for the Necessities of Life.” Harvey Chisick, “David Hume and the Common People,” in The Science of Man in the Scottish Enlightenment: Hume, Reid and their Contemporaries, ed. Peter Jones (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989), 13 (quoting David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge (1738, rept., Oxford, 1888), 402; and Essays Moral, Political and Literary, ed. Eugene F. Miller (1748, rept., Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985), 546, respectively).
These works were written for the most educated and contained in books with prices far exceeding the means of the average worker in eighteenth-century Scotland.  

Current historiography on the Scottish Enlightenment focuses primarily on the elites’ contribution to moral philosophy and their elucidation of human behavior. Scholars analyze the ideas of the “Great Men” of the Scottish Enlightenment, like David Hume, Adam Smith, and Thomas Reid, concentrating their inquiry on the culture, lives, and historical context of the individual producers of the treatises. For example, Nicholas Phillipson’s intellectual biography, *Adam Smith: An Enlightened Life*, explains Smith’s work by exploring Smith’s formative intellectual inheritance, his exposure to the different academic and commercial cultures of Glasgow and Edinburgh, and how Smith’s ideas developed through his interaction with David Hume.  

Phillipson’s earlier book, *David Hume: The Philosopher as Historian*, examines Hume’s application of his philosophical concepts to his histories, which removed religion and politics from Hume’s recitation of past events.  

Concentration on the upper echelon’s production of ideas is the common investigation of the Scottish Enlightenment. Even John Robertson’s revolutionary, comparative approach to the Scottish Enlightenment, geared towards reconstituting an “umbrella” Enlightenment in *The Case for The Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples 1680-1760* is “primarily intellectual,” concerning itself with arguing that the regions produced a commonality of ideas to improve society that Naples and Scotland’s *intelligentsia* independently expressed.  

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discussion of the philosophical, cultural, and circumstantial influences on the theories produced by those areas’ educated authors.  

In a series of essays, Nicholas Phillipson also described the Scottish Enlightenment solely in terms of the elites. In the earlier set of writings, Phillipson contextualized Scotland’s intellectual development as brought about by the mid-eighteenth century’s economic situation, which allowed elites to live in the city. To create an identity for themselves, the landed gentry joined intellectual clubs, in which the theories of Hume and Smith flourished. In subsequent writings, Phillipson argued that starting in 1780, the leadership in the increased metropolis passed to lawyers, ministers, and professors, who promoted an active civic virtue as more appropriate to their callings. But just as Richard Sher defined the Scottish Enlightenment as “the culture of the literati of eighteenth century Scotland,” Phillipson concludes that it was the resolution of the elites’ role in the city that prompted the “sociological” understanding of the science of man. For these scholars, the Scottish Enlightenment consisted of very few people.

Albeit a small region, five to ten men alone could not and did not pull Scotland from her hidebound Calvinist attitude to her glorified status as the “Athens of the North.” Rather, society as a whole joined in the exploration and exploitation of man’s individual capabilities. In this study, I investigate how humor conveyed ideas of the Enlightenment, first stated in the erudite treatises, which the whole of society subsequently absorbed in more light-hearted forms. By the third quarter of the century, even Voltaire quipped about Scotland: “It is an admirable effect of

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8 Ibid., 201-324.
11 Sher, Church and University, 8, 11; Phillipson, “The Scottish Enlightenment,” 22.
progress of the human mind, that at this day we receive from Scotland rules of taste in all the arts
from Epic poetry to gardening.”

Although incipient earlier in the century, the use of humor began in earnest in the middle
to late eighteenth century. Coincidental with its arrival, an oppositional school of thought arose
to counter Hume’s skepticism—Common Sense Realism. When the Commonsense School of
Philosophy based itself on the fundamental premise that every person had ordinary experiences
that gave implicit assurance of his reasoning power, it unwittingly promoted an egalitarianism, a
seeming endorsement of the belief that all men had equal capability to reason. This premise
implicitly extended the ability for comprehension of Enlightenment ideas to the broader public,
ideas spread by means of the cheap press.

This forum, an alternative avenue for disseminating Enlightenment thought, consisted of
items such as broadsheets, the popular press, and satirical prints. Accessible to the poor, these
outlets publicized Enlightenment concepts, often adopting whimsical attitudes, cloaking appeals
to reason in an entertaining tone. More humorous treatment of cosmopolitanism, progress, the
rational ordering of the world and the individual’s right to question authority and events more
commonly appeared during the later eighteenth century. Direct connection between

Enlightenment themes in the cheap press and the rise of Commonsense Realism may only be

12 Voltaire, “M. de Voltaire to the Authors of the Literary Gazette,” (1762). The occasion for his irony was
Voltaire’s review of Lord Kames’ book, Elements of Criticism, in which the Scottish author dared to judge one of

13 Founded by Thomas Reid, the “Scottish School of Common Sense” is a philosophical theory, which
argued against Hume’s skepticism. Whereas Hume argued that man’s powers of understanding were limited because
they were based only on his fallible perceptions and that all observational evidence was open to doubt because of
clear paradoxes and contradictions in man’s abstract reasoning, Reid argued that the foundation of man’s beliefs is
common sense principles that every person intuitively knew from ordinary experiences. Heiner F. Klemme,
“Skepticism and common sense,” in The Cambridge Companion to The Scottish Enlightenment, ed. Alexander

14 “Men,” not women. Alas, the Scots gave little credence to women’s intellectual capabilities, choosing to
adopt chivalric attitudes of benign domination. Barbara Taylor, “Feminists Versus Gallants: Manners and Morals in
random, but that philosophical thought introduced a theory of democracy that enveloped lower classes into the debate.\textsuperscript{15}

The concept of commonsense counterbalanced the influence of erudition. “In modern parlance, we sometimes use common sense to mean the basic human faculty that lets us make elemental judgments about everyday matters based on everyday [sic], real-world experience.”\textsuperscript{16}

No one, regardless of schooling, held a monopoly on the ability. The Scottish School of Commonsense used the modern matter-of-fact definition to convince men to reject David Hume’s skeptical musings. Instead of adopting Hume’s untrustworthy scheme of perceptions, impressions, ideas, and memories, the Commonsense School entreated man to use his innate faculty of feeling that certain self-evident principles were true.\textsuperscript{17} When this tenet was playfully presented, it sought man’s literal “gut” agreement that there were propositions about which no sensible man could disagree.

**Humor’s Place in Eighteenth-Century Scottish Society**

As the eighteenth century opened in Scotland, the most common characterization of humor was negative. Given their interest in the morality of man, eighteenth-century Scots were prone to adopt Classical theories of laughter because they emphasized the ethical implications of it.\textsuperscript{18} The oldest criticism against humor was that it was aggressive and anti-social.\textsuperscript{19} The


\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 1.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.


vice, particularly self-ignorance, in people who are largely weaker than ourselves. The delight of others’ self-blindness reflects a type of malice against them, which is a harmful thing.

Then our argument shows that when we laugh at what is ridiculous in our friends, our pleasure, in mixing with malice, mixes with pain, for we have agreed that malice is a pain of the soul, and that laughter is pleasant, and on these occasions we both feel malice and laugh.

Moreover, since laughter primarily focused on flaws, people were cautioned that those who were frequently given to laughter should take care that the blemish not rub off on them. As an added demerit, Plato warned that man should be wary of humor because it was an emotion in which one was apt to lose rational control. In his Republic, when describing how to set up an ideal state, Plato directed that the education of the young should involve teaching that humor was something to be avoided.

For Plato, ridiculousness was the negation of his fundamental principle, “Know thyself.” Lack of self-knowledge is a misfortune. Therefore, laughing at one’s friends’ conceit is to laugh at their adversity, which implies malice in the laugher. Malice, therefore, is essential to laughter. This line of thought continued with Aristotle who also added the idea that comedy concerned the lower-classes.

Aristotle (348-322 B.C.) continued to level the Hostility Objection against humor. While he did not concentrate exclusively on self-ignorance as the cause of humor, he too agreed that all laughter was derision. He even saw wit as a type of “educated insolence,” where one believed

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21 Moreall, “The Rejection of Humor,” 244.
23 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
27 Ibid., 153.
28 Moreall, “The Rejection of Humor,” 244.
oneself superior. 29 Although in the context of rhetoric, Aristotle admitted that jests were “‘of some service in controversy,’” he advised restraint in their use. 30 He believed that most people indulged too liberally in it, seeking to joke despite the potential harm to others. 31 He wrote that “‘most people take more pleasure than they ought in amusement and jesting . . . a jest is a kind of abuse, and law may forbid some kinds of abuse—perhaps they ought to have forbidden some kinds of jesting.’” 32

In his Poetics, Aristotle addressed the forms of comedy and tragedy. In his explanation, he introduced the idea that the former dealt with lower-type characters, while the latter consisted of figures for emulation. “Comedy aims at representing men as worse, Tragedy [sic] as better than in actual life.”33 Two millennia later, Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) adopted Plato and Aristotle’s unfavorable stance towards humor, articulating the classic version of the Superiority Theory, which incorporates the Hostile Objection and hints at the Incongruity Theory, in his work, Leviathan (1651). 34

Hobbes believed that whatever elicited laughter must be new and unexpected (e.g., the Incongruity Theory), causing “‘sudden glory [that] is the passion which makes those grimaces called laughter.’”35 Hobbes further delineated it in his musings on human nature: that laughter resulted from the “‘sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves; by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly . . . . To laugh

29 Aristotle, Rhetoric, 2.12.
31 Moreall, “The Rejection of Humor,” 244.
33 Ibid.
34 Moreall, “The Rejection of Humor,” 244.
too much at the defects of others bespeaks pusillanimity, for in so doing we attain superiority only by virtue of the inferiority of others.”

Hobbes’ reduction of humor from all its multi-varied forms to one subset—ridicule—prompted a forefather to the Scottish Enlightenment, Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746) to challenge it. In 1750, Hutcheson’s *Reflections Upon Laughter*, issued the rebuttal that for Hobbes’ assertions regarding humor to be correct, “there can be no Laughter on any occasion where we make no comparison of ourselves to others, or of our present state to a worse state, or where we do not observe some superiority of ourselves above some other thing: and again, it must follow, that every sudden appearance of superiority over another must excite Laughter, when we attend to it.”

In expanding the definition of what is deemed funny, Hutcheson makes three fundamental observations. First, people laugh at witticisms accompanied not by feelings of superiority, but with admiration for the genius. Laughter may appear from one great fund of pleasantry, the Parody, and Burlesque Allusion; which move Laughter in those who may have the highest veneration for the writing alluded to, and also admire the wit of the person who makes the allusion. . . . [W]e, often admire his wit in such allusions, and study to imitate him in it, as far as we can. Now, what sudden sense of glory, or joy in our superiority, can arise from observing a quality in another, which we study to imitate, I cannot imagine. I doubt, if men compared themselves with the alluder, whom they study to imitate, they would rather often grow grave or sorrowful.

Second, if Hobbes’ position was accurate, the greater the disparity between the superiority of the laughers and its object, the more intense the laughter should be. Selecting an example that hit hardest at Hobbes’ moralistic argument, Hutcheson points out that “[a]n orthodox believer, who

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38 Ibid., 7-8 (bolding added).
is very sure that he is on the true way to salvation, must always be merry upon heretics, to whom he is so much superior in his own opinion; and no other passion but mirth should arise upon hearing of their heterodoxy,” when “with people who value religion, the impiety of another is no matter of Laughter.”

Lastly, Hutcheson observed that if true, under Hobbes’ equation the proudest men must be in constant merriment and philosophers, possessing a superiority of knowledge, must be in “perpetual Laughter,” which they were not.

Per Hutcheson, prior philosophers on humor made their mistakes because they have never distinguished between the words Laughter and Ridicule: this last is but one particular species of the former, when we are laughing at the follies of others; and in this species there may be some pretence [sic] to allege that some imagined superiority may occasion it; but then there are innumerable instances of Laughter, where no person is ridiculed; nor does he who laughs compare himself to anything whatsoever.

Hutcheson, therefore, posits a new concept, the Incongruity Theory, of humor, whereby people are moved to laughter by “the bringing together of images which have contrary additional ideas, as well as some resemblance in the principal idea: this contrast between ideas of grandeur, dignity, sanctity, perfection, and ideas of meanness, baseness, profanity, seems to be the very spirit of burlesque; and the greatest part of our raillery and jest is founded upon it. We also find ourselves moved to Laughter, by an overstraining of wit, by bringing resemblances from subjects of a quite different kind from the subject to which they are compared.” Moreover, Hutcheson found that laughter and humor could promote good behavior.

Humans were given a sense of humor because the “implanting then a sense of the ridiculous, in our nature, was giving us an avenue to pleasure, and an easy remedy for discontent

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39 Ibid., 9, 12.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., 13.
42 Ibid., 20.
43 Ibid., 35.
and sorrow.\textsuperscript{44} Dugald Stewart of the Commonsense School of Philosophy adopted this argument some fifty years later ("Consider, too, in what state of mind men are chiefly disposed to be sceptical [sic]. Is it not when oppressed with low spirits, and when out of humor with themselves and with the world?")\textsuperscript{45} Further, laughter directs men’s minds toward new ways of thinking, allowing "a bend to the contrary side; so that upon reflection they may be more capable of settling in a just conformity to nature."\textsuperscript{46}

Laughter is also contagious and creates sociability, imparting cheerfulness to many.\textsuperscript{47} The perceived connection between the moral life and social life was a distinct feature of the Scottish Enlightenment.\textsuperscript{48} The science of man aimed to educate by obtaining a sympathetic response from the audience.\textsuperscript{49} As Hutcheson recognized, new ideas and those that appeared as of great consequence could lead men to "panic, [with] an unreasonable, impotent horror," but that "by our sense of the ridiculous, we are made capable of relief . . . by more effectual means, than the most solemn, sedate reasoning. Nothing is so properly applied to the false grandeur, either of good or evil, as ridicule."\textsuperscript{50} Lastly, humor had a corrective quality. "Men have been laughed out of faults which a sermon could not reform."\textsuperscript{51}

Humor, therefore, was a tool to lead man to a new use of his reason by attacking the head through the heart. Despite Hutcheson’s endorsement of the benefits of humor, however, Scotland was slow to take light-heartedness seriously. The first edition of the Encyclopædia

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\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 27.
\textsuperscript{46} Hutcheson, \textit{Laughter}, 29.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 27.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{50} Hutcheson, \textit{On Laughter}, 32-33.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 35.
\end{flushright}
Britannica (1771), which self-proclaimed that it would define important words would not have a
definition of “risible” until its third edition appeared in 1779. By that time, the “Dictionary of
Arts and Science” had swelled from the original three to eighteen volumes.

But giving Scotland the benefit of the doubt, historians point out that the idea of humor is fairly new. From its previous incarnation defining it as one of the bodily fluids, the modern
meaning of “humor” only arose in 1709 when Lord Shaftesbury (1671-1714) defined it in his
philosophical treatise, Sense communis: an essay on the freedom of wit and humour. There,
Shaftesbury freed humor from its prior usage where it meant mental disposition or temperament
and raised the idea that humor is comic, less intellectual and more sympathetic, than wit.

Regardless of when humor received its official definitional recognition, Scotland’s
authorities had previously recognized the power of the comical to convince. For example, in
1745, Scotland hosted the Jacobite Rebellion, in which Charles Edward Stuart sailed from
France in the hopes of regaining the English and Scottish thrones for the Stuart dynasty. The
invasion involved over 20,000 troops and at its height, Scottish troops penetrated England as far
as Derby. Soon put to flight, the Scots fell back to Culloden, near Inverness, Scotland, where
over 2,000 Scots died, and subsequent English persecution caused an additional 1,000 Scottish
deaths.

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52 “Risible” means “1. causing or capable of causing laughter; laughable; ludicrous; 2. having the ability,
disposition, or readiness to laugh; 3. pertaining to or connected with laughing.” Dictionary.com, s.v. “Risible,”
likewise defines risible as “anything capable of exciting laughter.”

53 Compare Encyclopædia Britannica, First Edition (Edinburgh, 1771) to Encyclopædia Britannica, Third
Edition (Edinburgh, 1797).

54 Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg, eds., A Cultural History of Humour: From Antiquity to the

55 Christopher Duffy, The ’45 (London: Cassell, 2003), 42-49, 209-26; John Leonard Robertson, The
Jacobite Wars: Scotland and the Military Campaigns of 1715 and 1745 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press,
After Stuart’s landing and during the hostilities, the English government had Scot Richard Cooper, the Elder, create a “Wanted” poster of Prince Charles Edward Stuart, the eldest son of Prince James Francis Edward Stuart—“The Pretender.” The government issued the poster in 1745. It satirizes Stuart’s attempts to ingratiate himself to the Scottish cause by donning Highland attire. The poster mocks the Prince’s awkward style, portraying a costume that no self-respecting Scot would wear, much less adopt as attire for battle. The feathers in the cap allude to Stuart’s French residence, as does the overly flouncing underlay of the kilt, creating an overall impression of a dandified youth that no hardened Scot should tolerate. Stuart is portrayed as doing a near curtsey as his manifesto of sovereignty drops from his hand. The caption reads: “A Likeness notwithstanding the Disguise that any Person who Secures the Son of the Pretender is Intitled [sic] 30 000 £.” With this picture, the English government hoped to persuade Scots to betray Stuart or, at least, not to follow him.

There were instances, therefore, before the High Enlightenment where humor was used to persuade, cajole, and convince the masses. But it was not until later in the eighteenth century that humor truly took off as a means to entice the people towards a new way of thinking. Contemporaneously, humor’s more general appearance occurred when the new Commonsense School of Philosophy came forward.

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The Scottish School of Commonsense

Responding to David Hume’s *Treatise on the Human Mind*, published some twenty years earlier, Thomas Reid (1710-1796) spearheaded the fight against skepticism with *An Inquiry Into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* (1764). The fundamental principles of Commonsense Philosophy are that the everyday axioms man takes for granted in the daily concerns of life, can be trusted as true, because of the original constitution of man’s nature.\(^{57}\)

Whereas skepticism results in all truth being relative to man’s judgments, which are based on nothing more than his belief in their validity, the Commonsense School argued that opinions based on our senses (e.g., a rock is hard) are not just impressions, but demonstrably true. Man holds a rock; his senses tell him it is hard; therefore, it is idiocy to argue that a rock is not hard.

With the intent of protecting religion,\(^ {58}\) which skepticism cast doubt on, Commonsense Philosophy permitted all men—not just rarified scholars—to become authorities—capable of judging the world for themselves.\(^ {59}\) The Commonsense Philosophy ended up elevating the instinctive, collective, quotidian beliefs of “common” men to a new high, rejecting the attribution of superior judgment to any one class, sex, race, or religion. . . . The common sense defense of common sense became . . . the foundation for a decidedly populist epistemology, rooted in the wisdom of the ordinary and the aggregate. When it came time to find truth in the realm of common life, they argued, there was no better starting point than what everybody already agreed to be true; the “unlearned” person was actually less likely to be misled than the overeducated person, and the collective sentiment trumped the individual or the isolated genius every time.\(^ {60}\)

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\(^{57}\) Klemme, “Skepticism and common sense,” 128.

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 131 (man can trust judgments based on his senses because God gave man those senses and God would not have made man to be deceived by them).

\(^{59}\) Rosenfeld, *Commonsense*, 62.

\(^{60}\) Ibid.
Because Reid’s *Inquiry* is dense and difficult to penetrate, in 1770, James Beattie (1735-1803), Reid’s contemporary, sought to distill commonsense tenets into a more easily digestible form in *An Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth*.\(^61\)

Beattie condensed Reid’s Commonsense Philosophy to the simple premise that man could rely on his sensations to provide dependable information about the world and man’s place in it because man’s intrinsic nature (for Beattie, given by God) was trustworthy.

To define heat or cold, identity or diversity, red, or white, an ox, or an ass, would puzzle all the logicians on earth; yet nothing can be clearer; or more certain, than many of our judgments concerning those objects. The rudest of the vulgar know most perfectly what they mean, when they say, three months ago, I was at such a town, and have ever since been at home: and the conviction they have of the truth of this proposition is founded on the best of evidence, namely, on that of internal sense; in which all men, by the law of their nature, do and must implicitly believe.\(^62\)

In order to prove the patent obviousness of his theory, Beattie uses humor to persuade that any contrary belief is absurd.\(^63\) He starts his Essay on truth with a veritable laundry list of concepts, denial or doubt of which would cast doubt on that individual’s sanity. “I exist”; “Things equal to one and the same thing are equal to one another”; “the sun rose today”; “Ingratitude ought to be blamed and punished”; “The three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, &c.”; “I am conscious.”\(^64\) In Beattie’s view, “you may as well attempt to blow out the sun, as to disprove these principles: and if you say, that you do not believe them, you will be charged either with falsehood or with folly; you may as well hold your hand in the fire, and say that you feel no pain.”\(^65\)

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\(^{62}\) Ibid., 81-82.

\(^{63}\) A damning proposition if one recalls that the 1771 Encyclopædia Britannica or Dictionary of Arts and Sciences defined the “absurd” as “an epithet for anything that contradicts an apparent truth.”


\(^{65}\) Ibid., 55-56.
Reasoning corrupts the inherent ability that all men have to discern the truth. As a further example:

[W]e cannot discern any necessary connection between reason and common sense: they are indeed generally connected; but we can conceive of a being endued with the one who is destitute of the other. . . . **Through a defect of common sense, we adopt absurd principles**: but supposing our principles true, our reasoning is often unexceptionable. The same thing may be observed in certain kinds of madness. **A man who believes himself made of glass, shall yet reason very justly concerning the means of preserving his supposed brittleness from flaws and fractures. . . .** [W]e sometimes meet with persons, whom it would be injurious to charge with insanity, who, though defective in common sense, have yet, by conversing much with polemical writers, improved their reasoning faculty to such a degree, as to puzzle and put to silence those who are greatly their superiors in every, other mental endowment.66

In contrasting the rationality of his theory against abstract reasoning, Beattie uses the humorous analogy of a man being made out of glass—the man’s actions, given his fundamental belief that he is made out of glass, are rational, but his underlying conviction of his breakability is ridiculous. One does not need higher education to understand Beattie’s argument that commonsense principles make more sense than esoteric musings. One need only exercise one’s (God-given for Beattie) commonsense.

Subsequent to releasing the *Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth In Opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism* [sic], in 1776 Beattie issued *An Essay on Laughter, and Ludicrous Composition*.67 In this work, Beattie sets out the first purely intellectual theory of laughter and its causes.68 Criticizing prior analyses from Plato, Aristotle, and Hobbes for failing to distinguish between ridicule and humor, and believing Hutcheson’s definition too limited in positing that only comparisons of high and low prompt levity, Beattie proposed that

66 Ibid., 42-43 (bolding added).
“[L]aughter arises from the view of two or more inconsistent, unsuitable, or incongruous parts or circumstances, considered as united in one complex object or assemblage, or as acquiring in sort of mutual relation from the peculiar manner in which the mind takes notice of them. . . . [I]t is an opposition of suitableness and unsuitableness, or of relation and the want of relation, united, or supposed to be united, in the same assemblage.”69 The opposition must not be customary or expected, but to some degree, surprising.70 This startles the mind into considering different associations.

Dugald Stewart (1753-1828), who became Chair of Moral Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh in 1785, took up Beattie’s advocacy of Commonsense Philosophy.71 Per Stewart, wit delighted both “from the unexpected relations which it presents to the mind, but arises, in part, from the surprise it excites at those intellectual habits which give it birth.”72 Stewart and Beattie were enthusiastic supporters of humor’s ability to increase men’s conviviality.73 In eighteenth-century Scotland, sociability, associations, and talking in groups were thought immensely important: “The idea was that all this talk would lead to self-improvement . . . to progress or reform in the world at large. Central to the very idea [was] . . . that sharing knowledge and reasoning in common would ultimately benefit the common good, producing intellectual, moral, medical, and even economic betterment on a collective as well as individual scale.”74 In addition to facilitating groups, Stewart also felt that humor served as a helpmate to morality, mildly chiding men out of their faults.75

69 Beattie, On Laughter, 155-56.
71 See generally Stewart, Elements of the philosophy of the human mind.
72 Ibid., 171.
73 Ibid., 154; Rosenfeld, Commonsense, 66.
74 Rosenfeld, Commonsense, 66.
75 Piddington, The Psychology of Laughter, 171.
Embedding Enlightenment concepts in humorous conceits allowed all orders of society to participate in the new modes of thought. Treating unfamiliar concepts with an entertaining gloss in material sold to the lower classes permitted the uneducated individual to engage with ideas of independent evaluation of the world. It allowed otherwise unassailable beliefs to be challenged in a subtle, almost surreptitious, way. Simultaneous with humor’s appearance in formats accessible to the lower orders, there arose a philosophical theory in which the common man’s ability to judge right from wrong was promoted. Humor was no longer criticized as an evil sin, something to be avoided as hostile to one’s fellow man. To the contrary, humor’s ability to rouse the individual to new ways of thinking was acknowledged. Joined to the Commonsense School of Philosophy and its recognition that anyone could assess the validity of a position, the public—educated or not—appreciated humor’s entertaining presentation of the age’s often bewildering concerns. Moreover, Scotland’s history of being dominated by Calvinism had created a populace that had the ability to read and appreciate these works.

**Lower-Class Literacy**

Although the extent of literacy in eighteenth-century Scotland is hotly contested among scholars, even the most dismissive historian of Scottish education admits that at least 65% of the Lowland population of Scotland was literate by 1750. Other historians maintain that between Scotland’s parochial and adventure schools, most everyone in the Lowlands could read from as early as the mid-eighteenth century, concluding that during and immediately after the eighteenth

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century, the Scottish educational system could boast of almost “universal and intelligent literacy” in the Lowlands.\textsuperscript{77}

John Knox’s \textit{First Book of Discipline} (1560) directed that a school be established in every parish with the primary function of educating the young in the ways of godliness by ensuring the ability to read the Bible.\textsuperscript{78} Although the intent of creating these academies was to spread religious orthodoxy, the schools also constructed a literate population.\textsuperscript{79} In 1616, the Privy Council legislated the religious decree and ordered that every parish establish a school. A 1633 Act levied a tax on every heritor (landowner) to provide the necessary endowment for a school building and teacher’s salary.\textsuperscript{80} In burghs (towns), municipal funds were used to pay for schooling, with very few burghs lacking an academy by 1700.\textsuperscript{81} Although education was not free, as that would have made it charity, the support gained through the heritors’ tax in the country and the municipal funds in towns meant that children could receive an elementary education for a very small sum.\textsuperscript{82} The \textit{Statistical Account of Scotland} (1791-1792) found that even day laborers gave their children a good education and that the price of education was sufficiently low to allow the poor access.\textsuperscript{83} For indigent parents who could not afford even a small tuition, the Church of Scotland paid the child’s school fee.\textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{77} T.C. Smout, \textit{A History of the Scottish People: 1560-1830} (London: Collins, 1969), 455, 479. “Adventure schools” were places where people paid to have their children educated and were unaffiliated with the Church of Scotland. Ibid., 455.
\textsuperscript{79} Anderson, \textit{Education and the Scottish People}, 3; Smout, \textit{A History of the Scottish People}, 88, 450.
\textsuperscript{80} Anderson, \textit{Education and the Scottish People}, 3; Smout, \textit{A History of the Scottish People}, 88.
\textsuperscript{81} Smout, \textit{A History of the Scottish People}, 450.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 451.
Culturally, there was social pressure to learn how to read. These pressures were “general societal ones . . . and not to any particular religious group.” Informal tutoring supplemented the instruction the network of schools provided. The Scottish schooling system succeeded in constructing a literate peasant society, not merely being able to read, but enjoying the habit of reading. The humble people were “able and anxious to read and read widely.” In peasant society, everyone owned books or tracts. Whereas the “gudeman” (a substantial tenant who could hold as many as 100 acres) bought books, the servant bought the cheaper pamphlets, both of which were obtained from the travelling peddler.

In addition to owning one’s own reading material, more and more libraries were established. By the end of the eighteenth century, circulating and subscription libraries brought books within the reach of everyone in Scotland. The poor not only used the libraries, but dictated the composition of library catalogues and founded their own institutions. In the 1790s, twelve working class and fifty-two reading societies for the poor existed, fourteen of the societies in industrial Glasgow and twelve in Paisley. The Dundee Public Library was founded in 1796 for the lower-classes, joining the three working class subscription libraries in Glasgow and the nine additional ones in the immediate vicinity. In 1794, an anonymous writer

85 Smout, A History of the Scottish People, 125-27.
86 Ibid., 127.
88 Smout, A History of the Scottish People, 460.
89 Chitnis, A Social History, 39.
90 Ibid., 306-07.
91 Ibid., 306.
comically crowed over the poor’s control over the working-class Dalkeith Subscription Library’s
catalogue—obtaining books beyond religious or “improving” texts that middle-class founders
purchased:

There’s Goldsmith, Godwin, Raynal, Cook,
Ray, Radcliff, Robertson, an’ Brooke,
An ‘Zimmerman, that lik’d a neuk,
To muse and think,
Young Thomson, Cowper, an’ a Buik,
Ca’d Baron Trenk.

There’s Monk and Marlborough, fetchers twa,
There's Wallace wight, cou’d lick them a’
There’s Lithgow, wha gaed far awa,
An’ gat sic crieshin
About some kirk court that they ca’ The inquisition.

There’s Voltaire, Volney, but, beside,
There's Fuller, wha does trim their hide,
An’ Addison, wha deep does wide,
An’ reasons strong,
An’ whirls them roun’ an’ lays their pride
An’ shows their wrong.

There’s Books by Bishops, Deans an’ Rectors,
Some gay an’ true, and some conjectures,
Wi’ Novels walth, an’ Select Lectures,
By some great guns,
An’ some cram’d fu’o’ ghaists an’ spectres,
An’ bleedin Nuns.96

As shown by this poem, the poor used humor to characterize the type of books that they
demanded their library stock. Rebelling against sponsoring bodies’ paternalistic
management of their reading matter that sought to limit material to promotion of traditional
and orthodox views, the poor either asserted control over catalogues or established their own

96 Ibid., 349.
rival library, requiring books as far-flung from devotional tracts as “Voltaire,” books that “trim their hide” to novels about ghosts. 97

The Prevalence of Cheap Print

Although the pamphlet had existed as a means of transmitting information to the public since the seventeenth century, in the 1790s, Scotland produced pamphlets on an unprecedented scale. 98 Contemporaries noted: “‘In the history of Britain there has not, perhaps, occurred a period when such a vast number of political pamphlets, handbills, circular letters &c &c [sic] attracted the notice of the public, as that which we live in.’” 100 A pamphlet is merely a booklet formed by folding pages and roughly stitching them together. A broadsheet is simply one sheet of printed paper. According to Gordon Pentland, the “advantages of this type of production are obvious: the flexibility of the format made it easy to respond to current events; pamphlets were simple to produce and cheap to manufacture; and they could be easily distributed.” 101 As noted above, peddlers mainly distributed these types of “cheap print,” thereby creating a wide circulation.

Pentland further noted that it “is beyond reasonable doubt that such cheap print was the main source of secular reading for the majority of Scotland’s common people.” 102 However, though cheap prints’ target audience was the lower classes (e.g., laborers, artisans, domestic servants, and rural workers), the items were passed around alehouses, inns, coffee houses, and

99 “&c” translates to the modern “etc.”
100 Ibid., 391 (quoting, Caledonian Mercury 30 Sept. 1793).
101 Ibid., 390-91.
other public gathering places. Thus, cheap print was also read by the educated in that a young laird would have skimmed a copy with his companions in any one of those locales. While its primary reader might be someone from the lower class, more educated individuals also read chapbooks. For example, Sir Walter Scott had a significant chapbook collection.

Patrons of cheap print were not even limited to those who could read. Pamphlets and chapbooks were often read to the less literate and, in this manner, their substance was conveyed to illiterate people. “The layout of narrative in popular chapbooks suggests they were meant to be read slowly and probably aloud.” Reading out loud meant that illiterate individuals could learn about what was contained in the press without necessarily being able to read the pages themselves. Pictures allowed even illiterates to engage immediately with presented concepts and permitted them to participate in the discussions elicited by the ideas embodied by the print.

The Theater Disputes

In the second half of the eighteenth century, the context in which humor was expressed is most apparent in the controversies surrounding the theater in Edinburgh. Whether a theater should exist in Edinburgh was a subject of almost constant contention. While it symbolized progress, cosmopolitanism, and polite manners—all aspects of the Enlightenment—it enraged the Scottish Kirk who saw it as sinful with actors who were liars depicting falsehoods. In

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103 Scally, “Cheap Print,” 374-75.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid., 375.
107 Ibid.
108 Ian Brown, “Public and private performance: 1650-1800,” in Ian Brown, ed., The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Drama (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 28-30. At this time, the official, recognized church in Scotland is synonymously known as “the Kirk,” the “Scottish National Church,” “the Established Presbyterian Church,” or “the National Church of Scotland.”
1756, the play, *Douglas*, written by the Presbyterian minister, John Home, set off a flurry of pamphlets both for and against the performance, and even served as the Kirk’s vehicle for libel charges against another minister, Alexander Carlyle. 109 Ironically, both proponent and opponent of the theater used humor to convince readers of the truth of their position.

Carlyle described his anonymously written pamphlet as written “in the ironical manner of Swift.” 110 Although he meant his satire to overwhelm the opposition, even he admitted that his sister and aunt read it and were “conceived it to be serious” until “a man of sense and reading, came in, and who soon undeceived them.” 111 Adopting the persona of one who argues against *Douglas*, Carlyle uses hyperbole to cast objections against the tragedy in a ridiculous light. Entitling his piece, *An Argument to prove that the Tragedy of Douglas Ought to be Publicly burnt by the hands of the Hangman*, Carlyle posits that “the stage” is “an invention of the devil,” “supported by his agents . . . pernicious to the morals of men, and altogether inconsistent with true religion,” including “puppet-shews [sic], ballads in dialogue, romances, fictions of poets, not to mention musick [sic], and painting, and whatever else imitates the passions and manners of men, absolutely unlawful,” encompassing even “Sir William Wallace Wight, and the Pilgrim’s progress, and Jack the giant-killer, together with the whole works of Henry Overton.” 112

In the original, Carlyle attaches a footnote to Henry Overton as having: “Wrote on the Revivals.” This note refers to the 1742 Cambuslang revival, an event of open air sermonizing that involved tens of thousands of people. The “Cambus’lang Wark” split the Kirk where the

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109 Alexander Carlyle, *Autobiography of the Rev. Dr. Alexander Carlyle*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1860), 312-13, 15. A “libel” is the vehicle to bring a complaint against a minister. If sustained, it can result in punishment from censure to removal of the minister from his parish.

110 Ibid., 313.

111 Ibid.

112 Alexander Carlyle, *An Argument to prove that the Tragedy of Douglas Ought to be Publicly burnt by the hands of the Hangman* (1757), Shelfmark 3.2360(17), The National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, UK, 5-6 (italics in original).
evangelical Popular Party, who were against polite learning, saw it as “a glorious work of the Spirit of God” and the Moderate Party, to which Carlyle belonged, viewed the mass preaching as a threat to enlightened Christianity, auguring a resurgence of the seventeenth-century’s fanaticism and chaos.\textsuperscript{113} Thus, by impugning Henry Overton as one who would be caught in the net of the objections to \textit{Douglas}, Carlyle derides the justness of the anti-theatre stance.

Carlyle’s reasons for his professed support for the attacks on \textit{Douglas} intentionally run the gamut. He “will muster up such a number of arguments, as cannot fail, one or other of them, to reach conviction to every true presbyterian [sic] in Scotland: Nor shall I trouble myself much about their consistency with each other; for I expect that every candid reader will be contented with that argument that hits his own fancy,” revealing the orthodoxy’s hypocrisy.\textsuperscript{114} His justifications for the suppression of \textit{Douglas} culminate with the clearest espousal of Enlightenment values. The theatre must be crushed because men should not “judge for yourselves,” but rather should “surrender yourselves implicitly to the direction of your pastors” for “religion is at stake” and “the nature of man cannot be altered!”\textsuperscript{115}

\textit{Douglas}’s true objector also produced a pamphlet, taking a mocking tone to convince the multitudes to abhor the theatre. The anonymous pamphlet, \textit{Epilogue to the Tragedy of Douglas, Spoke by the Author}, is less successful at providing reasons for condemning the play.\textsuperscript{116} It uses

\textsuperscript{113} John Willison, A FAIR AND IMPARTIAL TESTIMONY Essayed In Name Of A Number of Ministers, Elders, and Christian People Of THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND Unto The Laudable PRINCIPLES, WRESTLINGS & ATTAINMENTS OF THAT CHURCH; and Against the Backslidings, Corruptions, Divisions, and Prevailing Evils, Both Of FORMER & PRESENT TIMES And Namely THE DEFECTIONS OF THE Established Church; Of The Nobility, Gentry, Commons, Seceders, Episcopalians, Etc. Containing A BRIEF HISTORICAL DEDUCTION OF THE chief occurrences in this church, from her beginning to the year 1744, WITH REMARKS; and humble pleadings with our mother church, to exert herself to stop defection, and promote reformation attested & adhered unto by sundry ministers (1744), \url{http://www.angelfire.com/nh/politicalscience/1744willison231toend.html} (accessed April 21, 2013), 80-81; Sher, \textit{Church and University}, 31-32.

\textsuperscript{114} Carlyle, \textit{Tragedy of Douglas Ought to be Publicly burnt}, 5.

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 23.

\textsuperscript{116} Which should, perhaps, be forgiven, as Carlyle has been labeled one of the “literati” of the eighteenth century, one of those ten or so men who pulled Scotland into the Age of Enlightenment. Sher, \textit{Church and University}, 13.
ridicule with which to castigate the play, reiterating fights that currently occupied the Scottish Church. The writer has *Douglas*’s author reveal his true motives for creating the play: gratification of pride and further acclaim from the gentry. “SHROUDED in glory, and with praise full blown, Permit your *Bard* his gratitude to own. To mine *immortal genius* first I bow, And next, *great squire*, my thanks are paid to you.”

The gratitude to the squire alludes to the patronage dispute that divided the Kirk. The one-page broadsheet goes on to raise another controversy wreaking havoc in the Scottish clergy—the issue of clerical learning—when John Home, author of *Douglas*, is made to cry “O happy Edin! who ere long shall see Each pulpit fill’d by such bright wits as we.”

The furor over the existence of theatre in Edinburgh did not die down for the Canongate Theatre operated without a license into the 1760s. However, the controversy over whether a theatre should exist in Edinburgh passed to people debating the respective qualities of players who should act in it. A 1754 pamphlet, *An Essay on the Stage or The Art of Acting. A Poem*, written by a self-proclaimed “[c]omedian” opined that

[w]hen first a part’s design’d to be your lot,
Mark well the stile, the characters, and plot
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.
No affectation can with justice please;
Your speech be freedom, and your action ease.

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118 In 1712, the English Parliament passed the Law of Patronage, which in the majority of Scottish parishes gave the gentry the power to appoint the minister. The Moderates accepted the intrusion into church affairs while the Popular Party considered it as a violation of scripture and the laws of God. Stewart J. Brown, “William Robertson (1721-1793) and the Scottish Enlightenment,” in *William Robertson and the Expansion of Empire*, ed. Stewart J. Brown (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 15; Willison, *A Fair and Impartial Testimony*, 55-56, Testimonies 93, 95.
119 Anon. *Epilogue to the Tragedy of Douglas*, 1. The Moderates promoted secular learning. One of the reasons the Moderates supported patronage was their belief that the gentry appointed more qualified ministers, selected by individuals who were better educated, had an appreciation of the arts, and a wider perspective than congregations. The Popular Party thought that use of reason led to unworthy notions of God and heretical practices. Sher, *Church and University*, 49, 53-57; Brown, “William Robertson and the Scottish Enlightenment,” 15.
Avoid the habits, and conceit of those,
Whose constant flourishes each sentence close;
Nor join with those, who keep still drudging on,
All parts alike in one continu’d tone:

... For in the scenes of common life we see
What nature is, not what she ought to be.
In parts where strength of passion is requir’d,
Be not with rant, or tragic fury fir’d.
In mod’rate bounds be ev’ry speech restrain’d,
Who toils the most, we do not most commend.
But in those scenes where native humour’s hit,
Free from the curse of farce, or curse of wit,
 Spoil not the great design with paltry art,
But take from nature what you give part.\textsuperscript{121}

The author demands that stage actors accurately portray characters as an imitation of nature. The call is that depictions of men should mirror real-life men: “What nature is, not what she ought to be.” In other words, portrayals of men on the stage should make sense.

The issue of who properly acted upon the stage was taken so seriously that in 1767, patrons waged the Theatre Battle, which destroyed the interior of the Canongate Theatre. The public protest arose because of the theater manager’s failure to hire itinerant actor, Mr. Stayley, who affected a pompous accent that the country faction deemed great acting.\textsuperscript{122} Dated around 1766-1767, the broadsheet, “The Stage Blocks,” sets out the ongoing dispute for its audience. The broadsheet cartoon depicts the dispute waged between the public and the stage managers.\textsuperscript{123} The cartoon has each theatre manager expressing his intention to thwart the public’s desire to see

\textsuperscript{121} Anon., \textit{An Essay on the Stage or The Art of Acting. A Poem}, 1754, Shelfmark 3.2360(15), Rare Book Room, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, UK.
its favored players. Manager One: “We’ll stop playing till they forget my promise”; Manager Two: “Mr. Baker shan’t play”; Manager Three: “Stayley shan’t be engaged as I’m a man and a Christian”; Manager Four: “Blast the audience. Let’s laugh at em”; Manager Five: “Damn the Town my wife and I’ll leave it”; and Manager Six: “I can’t speak but are – an.” The poem at the bottom states:

![Figure 2. Anon., “The Stage Blocks” (@ 1766-1767)](image)

Shall BLOCKS so brave wise, and resolv’d as ours,
Yield to the Town, and not exert our Pow’rs
To crush at once, nor ever let appear
BAKER or STAYLEY to an audience here.
No since their Merit would eclipse us all.
They ne’er shall act here – D___ us if they shall.
Huzza my Blocks then—Shut the Doors and see
Whether the Public shall Submit or We.\(^{124}\)

\(^{124}\) Italics in original.
Using the double-entendre that the managers are blocking the players, as well as depicting them as literal stage blocks, the cartoon illustrates contemporaneous Edinburgh events, invites comment, and explains the controversy with a comedic gloss. It casts derision on the idea that the public should submit to the judgment of the theatre managers.

The Canongate Theatre closed in 1767, a casualty both of public rancor and religious hostility. The pamphlet, *The LAST SPEECH Confession, and dying Words, of the Play-House of Canongate, who was quartered and drawn on Saturday, January 24, 1767*, commemorates its passing. Condemning Edinburgh governors “who unjustly exhorted large sums of money, for a licence [sic] which you pretended to give, which was nothing but meer [sic] imposition,” the Theatre complains that “[t]he powerful prayers of the godly ministers, and other worthy Christians, have prevailed against me; I am now fallen no more to rise.” It worries that “[m]y sons and daughters [the actors] must now wander up and down the earth as vagabonds, and none to pity them.”

Written sometime after 1765, a fitting conclusion to the debates swirling around the theater is the pamphlet, *A Strange and Wonderful Account of an Inhuman Murder . . . On the Person of Common Sense* which nicely illustrates humor’s role in expressing Enlightenment ideas about the need to assess disputes for oneself and the desire for Edinburgh to take part in the cosmopolitan world. In this whimsical narrative, the villain of the piece, James Scoogy, represents hidebound, traditional thinking who rejects commonsense and its attendant acceptance of theater in Edinburgh. The narrative relates that on his way home from the Canongate Theatre,

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125 Anon., *The LAST SPEECH Confession, and dying Words, of the Play-House of Canongate, who was quartered and drawn on Saturday, January 24, 1767*, shelfmark R.B.m.261(22), Rare Book Room, The National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, UK.

Scoogy bumps into Commonsense and kills her. Scoogy has “an established hatred to the Deceased” because

some Years ago [he] sollicited [sic] Favours from me [Commonsense], which he could never obtain, tho’ he has always boasted of my kind Influence, in Common with that of other Females, whom he never knew, or but very slightly. Having always shunned, and frequently exposed him, he conceived an irreconcilable Hatred to me, as is plainly manifested by all his Actions. I have had many narrow Escapes from his Rage, and have been often greivously [sic] wounded by him . . .

Following a visit to her younger sister, Prudence, Commonsense finds herself grabbed by Scoogy and dragged into the Canongate Theatre. Commonsense then relates what happens:

“Wretch,” says he, “I know you have a natural Affection for Theatres, therefore I have chose one for the Place of your Death; one, from whence, to the utmost of my Power, I have banished you . . . But my Revenge is come; thou shalt die: But I will first convince thee that should I condescend to grace the Stage . . . Here he spouted various Passages, till the Torture grew almost beyond bearing . . . [H]e snatched up a Harlequin Sword and instantly dispatched me; observing that he hoped by my Death to reduce public Criticism to the Standard of his Opinion: But the Caitiff128 here is disappointed; for I this night appeared to my elder Sister, Judgment, who has promised to have a sharp and severe Eye upon whatever this Enemy to our Family may produce, not withstanding [sic] that pert and peremptory Dame, Fashion should chance for a short Time to be of his side!”129

Written by “Humanus,” the pamphlet seeks to bring the assassin to justice. In this material, the theatre and the pursuit of realistic acting is conceived of as progress, as civilizing, and as something desirable for the capital to have, for Commonsense has a “natural affection” for it. Opponents, like Scoogy who has never had acquaintance with Commonsense, must stoop to killing her in order to bring public opinion around to their contrary way of thinking. On the side of theatre in Edinburgh is “Prudence,” “Commonsense,” and “Judgment” with the theatre’s

127 Ibid.
129 Anon., INHUMAN MURDER.
detractors limited to Scoogy and “Dame Fashion.” The reader necessarily desires to place his loyalty with the first camp to avoid the accusation that he aligns himself with mere fashion over commonsense. This humorous portrayal of an ongoing dispute challenged readers and their hearers to assess the issue on their own, implicitly urging that those who have commonsense will avenge both her and the theatre’s deaths, regardless of the views of James Scoogy or Dame Fashion.

**Improvements to Edinburgh**

Comic treatment was not merely given to the wrangling over the theatre in Edinburgh. Similar arguments—though not as heated—occurred over improvements to the city itself. Some of the alterations to Edinburgh were pictorially represented by Edinburgh native, John Kay. Kay was a chronicler of his times, creating pictures filled with lighthearted satire and good humor that held a mirror up to men and enabled them to see their foibles.

Kay was born in 1742, the son of a stonemason, in a town near Dalkeith, approximately 11 kilometers southwest of Edinburgh.\(^{130}\) Kay’s father died when Kay was six and he went to live with his cousins who apprenticed him at the age of thirteen to a barber, George Heriot.\(^{131}\) After completing the six years term of apprenticeship and a nine year period as a journeyman, Kay opened his own barber shop in Edinburgh in 1771.\(^{132}\) There, Kay met and serviced the local nobility and gentry, one of whom, Sir William Nisbet of Dirleton, became Kay’s patron.\(^{133}\) Sir Nisbet took such a liking to Kay that he encouraged the barber to work on his drawings. Although Nisbet promised to remember Kay in his will, when Nisbet’s

\(^{131}\) Ibid., 13-14.
\(^{132}\) Ibid., 14.
\(^{133}\) Ibid., 15.
procrastination omitted any provision, Nisbet’s heir voluntarily settled a £20 annuity on Kay.\textsuperscript{134} At that time, £20 annually made a real difference to one’s fortune. Thus, when Kay’s wife died (and all but one of Kay’s ten children had passed in infancy, ridding him of dependents), Kay gave up barbering and became a printmaker and a miniaturist, opening a print shop in Parliament Close behind St. Giles, in 1785.\textsuperscript{135}

When Kay first opened his print business, Edinburgh had a relatively small population of 60,000.\textsuperscript{136} Edinburgh was also condensed in a small area.\textsuperscript{137} The compactness and density of the population meant that an individual’s existence was lived out in public. Meeting places were in taverns, coffee houses, and clubs; rather than in an individual’s private home.\textsuperscript{138} “The intellectual climate of Kay’s Edinburgh was one of balance, toleration and moderation.”\textsuperscript{139}

Although there are few records detailing his life, Kay’s career as an etcher is well-established.\textsuperscript{140} Kay also depicted his prosecution for libel based on the sale of one of his prints.

\textsuperscript{134} Hilary and Mary Evans, \textit{John Kay in Edinburgh: Barber, miniaturist and social commentator 1742-1826} (Aberdeen: Impulse Publications, 1973), 16.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 17.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 6.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 8-9.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{140} Both Michael Bryan, \textit{A Biographical and critical dictionary of painters and engravers} (London: George Bell, 1816) and Campbell Dodgson, ed., \textit{The Print Collector’s Quarterly}, vol. 16, no. 3 (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1929) list John Kay as an engraver in Edinburgh, High Kirk parish.
In “Examination,” Kay is standing in front of a desk while being questioned by the sheriff, regarding one of Kay’s prints. Kay’s accuser, Hamilton Bell, is the large man with an angry expression, sitting in the middle of the sketch.  

As one of the few caricaturists in Scotland during the eighteenth century, Kay used humor to comment on the happenings of the day. Owning a shop at 10 Parliament Close, Kay’s exhibition room was on the main thoroughfare (Parliament Close is off High Street) through Edinburgh, providing a space where the citizenry could look and comment on his wares. “Kay did not draw for the entertainment of one class alone, but for all who could appreciate the humour of the human body and the human condition.” Kay brings eighteenth-century Edinburgh to life, recording in a gentle, direct and personal way the oddities of the city’s

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143 Ibid., 108.
inhabitants. Kay reveals universal truths in his etchings, providing an “idiosyncratic view of humanity at large in all its infinite variety” with humor.\textsuperscript{144}

Kay’s treatment of the efforts to improve Edinburgh illustrates humanity’s well-meaning, if not always successful, efforts. The plan to modernize Edinburgh began in earnest when the municipal leaders approved a plan to erect a new part of the city—the New Town—in 1766.\textsuperscript{145} It entailed major structural changes to the landscape of Edinburgh, including filling in the crevices between the volcanic rock on which the older part of the city was situated to connect it to the proposed site for the new buildings.

Kay’s 1780 print, “A Whim or a visit to the Mud Bridge,” pokes fun at the proposal to connect Lawnmarket (a part of old Edinburgh) to the New Town. The scene that Kay portrays never took place, but the elites proclaimed that as soon as a carriage could pass along the mound, they would go. Surveyors collected money from these Edinburgh citizens to build the bridge; however, the treasurer subsequently ran off with the funds.

The print, “A Whim or a visit to the Mud Bridge,” portrays upper-class gentlemen pulling a carriage across the planned link between old Edinburgh and the new area. By having the elites haul the coach, Kay conveys not only the absurdity of the plan, but the ridiculous position in which the rich have put themselves by supporting it.

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 107-08.
\textsuperscript{145} Miles Glendinning and Aonghus Mackechnie, \textit{Scottish Architecture} (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004), 120.
Led by the foremost groom riding the shoulders of an elite, the gentlemen pull the conveyance with the drivers saying “Whip hard Geordie” and Georgie responding, “Dam it. I’ll not spare them Willie.” With subtle humor, Kay questions the wisdom of the upper class—the traditional authority—and its plan for Edinburgh by having them pull the carriage while their servants ride them. Enlightenment thought brought the idea that every individual had the ability to evaluate plans for himself; therefore, the right of all men to examine and even challenge schemes that heretofore were accepted without question solely because they were proposed by one’s “betters” was a new development in Scotland’s psychological makeup.

“A Whim or a visit to the Mud Bridge” is quietly subversive. It shows those lower-down on the social ladder in a superior position to their betters—whipping and riding the gentry. The picture implies that the elites earned their positions by rushing into a plan that lacked

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commonsense. The drivers will not “spare the horses” because that is the “punishment” for those who indulge in foolish whims.

Although eighteenth-century Scotland put the Enlightenment tenets of progress and improvement into practice for both her people and her city, people recognized that change was, at times, bittersweet. While society readily embraced enhancements to Edinburgh, it simultaneously acknowledged losses that acceptance of progress brought. A 1756 broadside proclaimed itself “The Last Speech and Dying Words, OF THE CROSS of EDINBURGH Which was hang'd, drawn and quarter'ed, on Monday the 15th March, 1756, for the horrid Crime of being an Incumbrance [sic] to the Street.”

This broadsheet parodies the last words prisoners often uttered before their executions. Standing outside St. Giles Cathedral, the Cross of Edinburgh (commonly known as the “Mercat Cross”) was the location, not only where the convicted were punished, but also the place where all important announcements and gatherings took place. So progress had its price as the Cross lets its readers know:

YOU sons of Scotia, mourn and weep,
Express your grief with sorrow deep

... And loudly mourn my overthrow------
For Arthur's ov'n, and Edinburgh cross,
Have by new schemers got a toss;
We heels o'er head are tumbled down,
The modern taste is London town.
I was built up in Gothic times,
And have stood several hundred reigns;
Sacred my mem’ry and my name,
For Kings and Queens I did proclaim;
I peace and war did oft declare

... Low rogues like ways oft got a peg,

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147 Anon., “The Last Speech and Dying Words, OF THE CROSS of EDINBURGH Which was hang'd, drawn and quarter'ed, on Monday the 15th March, 1756, for the horrid Crime of being an Incumbrance [sic] to the Street,” c. 1756, Shelfmark APS 4.83.4, Rare Book Room, The National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, UK.

148 In original: “A piece of very great antiquity, the property of a gentleman near Falkirk, who destroyed it, to build up a mill-dam-head the river Carron-But the river (swell'd as it ware with resentment) soon swept it off.”
With turnip, t-d, or rotten egg,
And when the mob did miss their butt,
I was bedaub’d like any slut.

. . . .
At my destroyers bear no grudge,
Nor do you stain their mason-lodge,
Tho’ well may all by-standers see,
That better masons built up me.
The Royal statue in the closs
Will share the fate of me poor cross;
Heavens, earth and seas, all in a range,
Like me will perish for Exchange.

Although the piece may sound conservative, it is actually an endorsement of the values for which
the Enlightenment is known: it does not seek to stop progress ("At my destroyers bear no
grudge"), but it simultaneously reveres a distinct part of Edinburgh’s past—akin to the nostalgic
furor over the Ossian Poems. The resolve to push forward despite tradition is not lessened by
the concurrent praise of the past.

This appreciation of the complexities that change brings was also brought out in one of
Kay’s prints illustrating other improvements to Edinburgh. "Untitled, this 1785 etching
comments on civic events and evokes a feeling of ambivalence, showing the different opinions
of the people portrayed.

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149 In the early 1760s, James Macpherson published *Fragments of ancient poetry* (1760), together with the
subsequent Ossianic “epics” *Fingal* (1761) and *Temora* (1763). These works were claimed to be the production of a
third-century highland bard. The Ossian's Gaelic epics were presented to the public in a series of pseudo-Homeric
English “translations” done by Macpherson. Macpherson's supporters were Edinburgh’s literati who saw the Ossian
poems as yielding “a dehistoricized and semi-mythic version of the ancient highland past that was far better suited to
enlightened, quasi-sociological methods of “conjectural” analysis.” Philip Connell, “British Identities and the
2006): 164, 168, 191. Thus, the elites revered Scotland’s past though they strove to move beyond it.
Pictured here is the enactment of the plan to level High Street, Edinburgh’s primary street. The proponents, Deacon Coveener Orlando Hart, Deacon Jamison, and Beattie McDowell, who is holding the plans, are pictured in the foreground. In the background, Provost Sir James Hunter Blair and Mr. Huy Surgeon are by the hole with Blair, who was a great proponent of improving the street, is in the hole, digging it out, while Surgeon, who protested against the street being leveled, is shown shoveling the dirt back in. The point that people are allowed to disagree is humorously made by the conflicting actions of the diggers.

These comic treatments of the developments in eighteenth-century Scotland were not a call for resistance to alterations; rather, they allowed for adjustment to the rapid modifications that were transforming the nation. They permit individuals to exercise their commonsense, use of which, many saw as essential to forming a judgment on the Scottish Enlightenment. By first approaching an individual through the sentiment of levity, the person engages with the presented

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150 John Kay, “Untitled” (regarding the leveling of High Street), 1785, Shelfmark 30.33(48), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Print Archives, New York, NY.
before he sees it as attacking his previous way of thinking. Humor gives people space—a way to step back—to consider things differently, to use their inherent good sense, to see matters in a new light, without provoking an immediate defensive reaction from the intellect.

Edinburgh citizens were, in fact, quite proud of the improvements to their city. This self-satisfaction shines through in the 1766 pamphlet, *A Letter from the City of Edinburgh to the Town of Glasgow*, in which Edinburgh (“Edina”) apologizes for not visiting Glasgow, but states that Glasgow knows “that it is no easy matter for us Towns to transport ourselves from place to place. An earthquake is, I think, the only vehicle which has as yet been invented for that purpose, and though it must be allowed to be the swiftest of all carriages, yet those of our brethren who keep these equipages are so very often overturned, but which means they almost always get broken bones, that I confess I shall not have the courage to set my foot in one of them till they are constructed upon a safer plan.” Edinburgh proceeds to list the enhancements that are being made to her.

First, Edina writes about her enlargement, expressing anticipation that she will be able to “shake hands” with Glasgow, as she “hope[s] to see our children, the Gallowgate and West-port [suburbs of Glasgow and Edinburgh], joined in the holy bands of wedlock.” In comedic tones, she despairs of the constant building taking place in her because the houses are so “insufferably neat and clean” that she labors “under the most dismal apprehensions, that I shall gradually lose that character for stink and nastiness which I have so long maintained in the world.” She modestly tells Glasgow “that it was sagely remarked by a certain Great Man, who, during his

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152 Ibid., 2.
stay with me, was extremely dear to my good people, that I resembled Athens.”

She goes on to detail why she deserves the comparison to Athens—describing her architecture, her men of letters, her music societies, and her play-houses—to justify the comparison.

What “Athens was to Greece, I am to Europe,” writes Edina. As to her buildings, “[t]hose simply majestic edifices, the Guard and Weigh-house, are lasting monuments of the taste of my ancient inhabitants in architecture, and the Exchange is likely to be a no less lasting and solid proof, that they are, in this particular, at least equalled [sic], if not excelled, by their posterity.” Like Athens, Edinburgh’s inhabitants are known for their taste in music, as shown by the plethora of music societies and performances existing in the latter. As in the classical days in Athens, Edinburgh “ostracizes” and “banishes” “dull unmeaning scribblers.”

Most importantly, Edinburgh’s inhabitants are “men of genius,” “respected and esteemed.” As much as Edinburgh’s denizens laughed at the foibles intermixed with creating the changes to their city, they were proud of the improvements to Edinburgh, presenting the accomplishments in whimsical fashion.

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154 Anon., A Letter from the City of Edinburgh, 2-3 (italics in original). Edinburgh was referred to as the “Athens of the North” because of her surrounding hills and intellectual accomplishments, but who first made the reference is obscure.
155 Ibid., 2-12.
156 Ibid., 3.
157 Ibid.
158 Ibid.
159 Ibid., 4.
160 Ibid., 3.
Humorous Criticism of the Scottish Kirk

Although the Moderate Party’s domination of the Scottish Presbyterian Church emphasized “polite, enlightened values,” “genteel manners, religious moderation . . . tolerance, [and] high esteem for scientific and literary accomplishments,” the eighteenth century witnessed ongoing battles between orthodoxy and Enlightenment concepts. As noted above, strict Calvinists attacked Edinburgh’s Canongate Theatre, playwright John Home, and audience member Reverend Dr. Alexander Carlyle for their respective roles in the dramatic endeavors. Home left the Church. For attending rehearsals and a performance, ministers from the Popular Party (evangelical Calvinists) brought a libel against Carlyle to censure him. Kay’s 1789 print, “The Modern Hercules Destroying the Hydra of Fanaticism,” portrays Carlyle with the club of Hercules slaying the Hydra with the heads of (from the top left down) Professor Dalzell from the University of Edinburgh, Reverends Drs. John Erskine, and Andrew Hunter below him, and Henry Erskine, the head in front, the lawyer for the Popular Party with his hand up as if cautioning Carlyle—the three individuals who brought the charge against Carlyle and their attorney.

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161 Sher, *Church and University*, 53-57.
162 A “libel” is a complaint brought against a minister and can result in punishments of varying degrees, from censure to suspension of preaching privileges to removal from the parish. See fn. 169, *infra*.
As the eighteenth century progressed in Scotland, society gained the ability to assess the Kirk’s hitherto predominant role in society. Whereas previously, the Established Presbyterian Church had controlled all aspects of life—religiously, educationally, and culturally—in bringing in Enlightenment values of reason, self-reliance, commonsense, the Scots were even able to laugh at their previous unquestioning devotion to strict dogma.\footnote{164 The Scottish National Church is synonymously known as the “Established Presbyterian Church” or the “Kirk.”}

One could now chuckle at a sleepy congregation and note its inattention without fear of accusations of blasphemy. The belief that damnation was the immediate punishment for lack of attention no longer held sway.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{sleepy_congregation.png}
\caption{John Kay, “Untitled” (regarding Sleepy Congregation, 1792)}
\end{figure}

For purveyors of Enlightenment thought, like caricaturist, John Kay, Carlyle was the type of
minister to follow—the minister who attended plays and engaged with progressive ideas: “The preserver of the Church from Fanaticism.”

Entertaining Political Commentary

Beyond questioning civic developments to the city, the late eighteenth century also saw humorous comment on political actions. A continual criticism of the Moderate Party’s domination of the Scottish Kirk was its perceived Erastian relationship with English politics that placed religion in a subordinate role to civil authorities. As noted above in the discussion of Carlyle’s pro-Douglas pamphlet, the enactment of the 1712 law on patronage, whereby the gentry and not the congregations, appointed ministers of parishes, split the Scottish Kirk. Because the Moderate Party aligned with the civil government to enforce this law, a common

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167 See fn. 118, infra.
denunciation of it was its perceived subordination of religion to politics. Although not a fan of religious extremism (as is shown in his 1789 etching, “The Modern Hercules”), in the 1793 etching, “Faithful service rewarded,” Kay commented on the failure of the Parliamentary bill to increase ministers’ salaries of that same year.\(^\text{168}\)

After an investigation into the clergy’s penury was conducted and report compiled, Viscount Melville, Henry Dundas, introduced legislation entitled “Augmentation of Ministers’ Stipends,” in Parliament.\(^\text{169}\) Opposition to an increase in taxation from Scotland’s landowners forced Dundas to withdraw the bill. Despite Dundas’s failure to obtain increased salaries, the General Assembly voted “thanks” to him with only a few members expressing displeasure over Dundas’s handling of the bill.\(^\text{170}\) The Reverends Alexander Carlyle and Henry Grieve, Dundas’s biggest helpmates, defended Dundas, arguing that the criticism stemmed from ingratitude.

“Faithful service rewarded” shows Dundas riding an ass with the heads of the Reverends Carlyle and Grieves. The Pastors are depicted as saying “Lo, are we not thine asses on which thou has rode these 30 years” and “Have we not served thee in Religion and Politics.” Dundas replies: “Yes but are ye not asses still.” After years of providing the civil government with its backing, “Faithful service rewarded” comments on the government’s failure to remunerate its biggest

169 Kay, Original Portraits, 118-20.
170 The General Assembly is the governing body of the Scottish National Church.
supporters, the Moderate clergy. The Moderate Party worked tirelessly to prevent opposition to government schemes and to maintain order by throwing its weight behind them. Although more orthodox ministers lambasted the Moderate Party’s alliance to the government, the Moderate Party unvaryingly forwarded government programs. Kay’s print pokes fun at the ingratitude that the English government had for its faithful supporters, commenting that Moderate ministers—far from being partners with the English government—were its “ass” and despite the clergy’s years of support, by thanking the government for its failure to help it, the Moderate Party was still its ass.

Henry Dundas was frequently the subject of caricature. Dundas was an eminent Edinburgh citizen who served in a variety of positions within the English government—Treasurer for the Navy, and most importantly for Scotland, as Home Secretary for Scotland based in London. Dundas exercised almost total control over Scotland. Referred to as “King Harry the Ninth,” Dundas was very unpopular, because of his use of patronage to achieve his political goals, which were frequently against Scotland’s interests. Dundas was also a close friend of Prime Minister Pitt, and therefore, often forwarded England’s goals to Scotland’s detriment.

Like “Faithful service rewarded,” the 1798 print, “The Modern Cain’s Lament,” also depicts Dundas and similarly questions London’s parliamentary actions. Kay’s print derides Prime Minister Pitt’s decision to commence hostilities against the French Republic, sending British troops into battle, and in Kay’s view, not only killing innocents, but also condemning

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British soldiers, to death. Kay’s lampoon shows Pitt complaining to Dundas (“Harrie”) with Pitt saying “O Harrie whether shall I fly! I am this day, A Murderer of thousands, Everyone that finds me will count me his Enemy and Slay me.”\footnote{John Kay, “The Modern Cain’s Lament,” 1798, Shelfmark 33.30(231), Metropolitan Museum of Art, Print Archives, New York, NY (illustration from reprint in Evans, John Kay, plate 28; Shiela Szatkowski, Capital Caricatures: A selection of etchings by John Kay, (Edinburgh: Birlinn Ltd., 2007)), 54.} Without polemic diatribe, Kay’s print criticizes Pitt’s actions by labelling him “Cain,” and humorously highlights Pitt’s effeminacy by juxtaposing Pitt’s slight frame against Dundas’s solid stature.\footnote{Szatkowski, 54.}

The 1780s-1790s saw increased political activism in Scotland. Beginning with her refusal to allow Parliament to extend the Catholic Relief Act to Scotland, the upshot of the American Revolution, the onset of the French Revolution, to the application of unpopular
legislation to Scotland—most notably, the Sedition Act, which broadly criminalized all words critical of the government—Scotland expressed resistance to the governmental status quo. All these events contributed to awakening a feeling of radicalism in Scotland.\textsuperscript{174}

On the king’s birthday in 1792, the crowds rioted for three days in Edinburgh, burning in effigy Dundas whose recent decisions regarding Scotland were the immediate cause of the riots.\textsuperscript{175} Dundas opposed the repeal of the Test Act as it applied to Scotland. The Test Act was a requirement whereby any individual who wished to hold public office in Britain had to take the sacraments in Britain’s official Anglican Church.\textsuperscript{176} Technically, this condition excluded Scottish Presbyterians from holding office; however, most individuals got around it by taking the sacrament once a year—“occasional compliance”—and the Moderates, who held sway in the General Assembly, aligned with the government and not wanting to cause conflict, failed to support the Act’s repeal.\textsuperscript{177} Dundas also supported the Proclamation Against Seditious Writings.\textsuperscript{178} Not only was this law draconian, but it technically violated the 1707 Act of Union by unnecessarily intruding English law into Scotland. Further, Dundas’s position on these


\textsuperscript{177} Ibid., 44-46.

matters prevented the legislature from considering Scotland’s opposition to slavery and her petition for reform of her burghs. 179

Kay’s 1792 print, “Patent for Knighthood,” depicts Dundas sheltering Sir James Sterling, Lord Provost of Edinburgh, under his cloak during the disturbances in Edinburgh. Sterling was the highest government official in Scotland, who enforced Dundas’s mandates. Sterling represented the British authority that the Scottish population abhorred. Sterling brought in the military to subdue the crowds. Kay’s title, “Patent for Knighthood,” refers to the honor given to Sterling the following year for managing the riots. The cartoon deftly conveys Sterling’s cowardice and Dundas’s position as the real power governing Scotland. Moreover, it ridicules the English award to Sterling.

Kay’s “Patent to Knighthood” illustrates the importance of the comical treatment of serious subjects. Although it challenges authority, its quiet humor points out the real power behind the throne—Dundas, as opposed to Sterling. Without directly commenting on the riots, it allows reflection of events. It subtly presents the right to question the government. It humorously asks the viewer to consider whether Sterling’s cowering behavior (during the

179 Meikle, 22.
protests, Sterling had soldiers fire on the unarmed crowd). As the prominent figure in the etching, it accurately shows Dundas as the real source of Scotland’s aggravation.

The 1796 print, “Freedom of Election - Turn-Coats and Cut-Throats,” illustrates the growing pains that democracy in action brought. The etching depicts the 1796 Dumfermline election. Since no town other than Edinburgh had the right alone to send a representative to Parliament, each of the burghs in the district had an equal voice in the choice of a representative. For Dumfermline, this meant that four different councils had to be persuaded to elect the desired commissioner who together with the other burgh commissioners proposed the person to be nominated as the representative to Parliament. The strength of the parties was associated with the election of these delegates.

“Freedom of Election – Turn-Coats and Cut-Throats” shows the seamy underside of democratic movements. The 1796 etching depicts the uproar that occurred during the general election of 1796 in Inverskeithing, the adjacent burgh to Kinghorn in the Dumferline district. While the Kinghorn vote proceeded to select Sir James St. Clair Erskine, subsequently the Earl of Rosslyn, without opposition, the race between the contestants in Inverskeithing, Sir John Henderson of Fordel, Bart., and the Honorable Andrew Cochrane Johnstone, subsequently the Governor of Dominica, was fiercely fought. When the outcome appeared doubtful, friends of Johnstone contracted the services of professional “tacticians,” Mr. Hutton and Lucky Skinner to further Johnstone’s cause. Hutton and Skinner’s strategy for winning campaigns included sequestering commissioners (who picked the burgh’s proposed representative) under the guise of

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181 Kay, Original Portraits, 402.
182 Ibid.
threatened intimidation. Once isolated in a genial environment, Hutton and Skinner exerted pressure on the commissioners to prevent any Whiggish (e.g., more liberal) influence.\textsuperscript{183}

“Freedom of Election” depicts the melee that occurred when the public learned that the Inverskeithing councilors had been taken to Kinghorn, and lodged there in an inn. A crowd, much of it armed with clubs, went there to take to abduct the electors.\textsuperscript{184} At the inn, a violent battle ensued

\textbf{Figure 12. John Kay, “Freedom of Election - Turn-Coats and Cut-Throats” (1796)}

between the attackers and defenders of the hostel. On the landing, Colonel Erskine, Mr Hutton, on whose left is Mr. Skinner, the landlord of the inn, are the most prominently portrayed fighters.\textsuperscript{185} In the lobby, at the foot of the stair with his back to the door is a famous pugilist, “Bruce” who, armed with the spoke of a carriage wheel, protected the back door until he was overwhelmed.\textsuperscript{186} No one was killed during the fray, but a chairman from Edinburgh had his nose

\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., 402-03.
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., 404.
\textsuperscript{185} Ibid., 405-06.
\textsuperscript{186} Ibid.

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completely destroyed by a blow and another individual is said to have had his neck deeply cut by a broken bottle thrown during the fight.\footnote{187} “Freedom of Election” comments on the fact that elections were not “free,” but run by “turn-coats” and “cut-throats.” It asks the viewer to recognize that the alleged “democratic” procedures for electing members to Parliament embodied tactics that were neither fair, nor representative.

The power that cartoons and comedic verse had to show the inherent truth of situations is further illustrated by the pamphlet, “Spirit of Democracy or Convention of Asses,” which commemorated the 1792-1793 meetings of The Society of the Friends of the People.\footnote{188} The Society of Friends was first established in England in April 1792.\footnote{189} The Scottish Society of Friends was soon after created in July 1792.\footnote{190} While both groups sought to widen the electorate and to reform and increase the timing of Parliamentary elections (the property qualification for Scots ranged from £100 to £400, which circumscribed the number of able voters to a negligible amount), in contrast to the English Society, the Scottish Society drew its members from the lower ranks of society.\footnote{191}

Perhaps because the Scottish Society did not have a leadership centered on a Parliamentary party as the Whig-dominated English Society, it was beset with internal divisions.\footnote{192} While the majority of the membership wished to join with its English brethren and

\begin{flushleft}
\footnote{187} Ibid.
\footnote{188} The organization’s full name was The Society of the Friends of the People, Associated for the Purpose of Obtaining a Parliamentary Reform.
\end{flushleft}
push for constitutional reform, radical leadership under John Muir argued for an alliance with the Irish and a Scottish break from the English union. Reading a manifesto from the United Irishmen to the Scottish Society that forwarded the premise that “the 1707 Act of Union between England and Scotland [w]as a continuation of the Norman Yoke, which had crushed the primitive liberties of both Anglo-Saxon and Celtic Britain,” the Scottish delegates considered the document “high treason” and after two days of bitter dispute, voted it down.

“The Rights of Asses or the Spirit of Democracy” and its accompanying cartoon illustrates the differing viewpoints and conflicting positions presented at the meetings. Rather than vilifying any particular opinion, the poem presents each position, the moderate, as well as the extreme, along with its respective meritorious points. The scenario for the convention is the agreed-upon premise that the “asses”—the working man—has no rights and has been robbed of his proper status. The radical President ass of the gathering opens the meeting with the statement that

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my friends, my fellow Asses,
Regard we naught what round us passes;
How other folk their rights maintain,
While we’re opprest and ne’er complain.

. . .

My friends, we have been long abus’d,
And for the meanest drudg’ry us’d,
While horses have been kept for pleasure,
And take their airings at their pleasure.
Of old, my friends, it was not thus,
For every great man rode his Ass;

AND tho’ not fram’d to lead in battle,
Yet we were deem’d most useful cattle,
Now horses get what we deserve,
And we are left to steal or starve;
Come then, my friends, my hearty bloods,
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194 Ibid., 52.
Let’s rise and kick them from their studs;  
Our cause is just. A few campaigns  
Will surely ease us of our chains.  
He ceas’d:--! Each Ass stretch’d out his crest,  
And bray’d applause, and speaker blest.195

This section of the verse seems to set out Muir’s pitch to the assembled crowd. (Horses may refer to better-off men like shopkeepers, artisans, etc., or the English, but since the poem goes on to detail the hardships of men, even British men, the analogy of who the horses represent is not clear.) The President argues for “ris[ing up] and kick[ing] them [presumably the English] from their studs,” as their “cause is just,” which was part of Muir’s message to the Society.

All appear taken with the speech until “an old cautious, mod’rate Cuddie” makes his observations. He begins by agreeing that “I own, my friends, we’re not’s we have been, Asses have many better days seen”; but qualifies the reflection with the statement that “[b]ut if we look around, we’ll see That others are as bad as we.”196 Cuddie goes on to note:

The former speaker talks of horses;  
What creature under heaven worse is?  
Do ye not see him plow the field?  
And we eat what his labours yield:  
By him we have our hay and straw,  
Tho’ whiles his litter we must gnaw,  
And, tho; our skins be not so sleek,  
Yet some get corn once in a week.  
‘Tis true, he boasts of birth and blood,  
And sprung from this, or that Lord’s stud,  
...  
At other times, he must gainsay not,  
But face a cannon or a bay’net;  
Compar’d with these, we live in peace,  
Our lives are lives of happiness.197

196 Ibid., 5.
197 Ibid., 5-6.
Unlike the leadership, the moderate Cuddie distinguishes between horses and man. He further notes that while asses may have fallen in regard, they are better off than men. He utters a complaint regarding taxes that was particularly apt in the 1790s when Pitt heavily levied them to address Britain’s financial indebtedness:

**Yet more, my friends, if we but trace**
Our breth’ren of the human race;  
I say, if we but view those great ones,  
Ev’n those who boast the birth of Britons:  
View them weith care, and ye will see,  
That they are more opprest than we.  
See how their rulers do oppress them,  
And strain their wits how to assess them.  
Soon as they see the light of day,  
They for that light must taxes pay;  
Nor yet one a Christian be,  
Until the King has got his fee;  
Nor can be buried when they’re dead,  
Unless their rulers first are fed.

I’VE often heard the farmers say,  
(Besides what they to landlords pay)  
From ev’ry ball there goes a firlot,  
To feed some drone, or great man’s harlot.  
The horse he feeds, he cannot ride,  
‘Till first a tax for him be paid;  
With tax on beer, and tax on malt,  
With tax on spirits and on salt;  
With tax on coaches—ten per cents.  
And, (what is stranger still to say)  
Tax’d if he should those taxes pay;  
Tax’d if he pay his honest debt,  
With stamps for this sum, stamps for that:  
Tax’d before he dare kill a hare,  
Either with dog, or gun, or snare;  
Tax’d if o’er pot the news do chat,  
And licences for this or that:  
With tax on hats, on gloves, and shoes,  
Tax’d for the road on which he goes.  
For physic tax’d—and tax’d for law;  
Tax’d if his wife lie in the straw.  
Thus, well and hearty, or relax’d,  
Alive, or dead, he must be tax’d.
THESE taxes, when they count them o’er,  
Amount to millions near a score;  
And of these millions, not a few,  
Are paid to bribe a venal crew.  

In the last stanza, Cuddie underscores a real complaint that society had against the government and why it wanted greater accountability—not only were taxes oppressive and voting limited—but that the monies taken from them were given to corrupt ministers.

Beyond the monetary despotism under which man lived, Cuddie points out that the Scots had no civil liberty.

BESIDES these ills, the folks in towns,  
Are whiles rode down by rude dragoons.  
See towns laid under martial law,  
Lest boys shou’d burn a whisp of straw!  
They’ll soon send bullets thro’ their heads;  
Or try for life a Brewer’s Beast,  
For only joining in the jest;  
And some are sent o’er seas, they tell us,  
Where they’ll be eaten by their fellows.

Two months before the inaugural meeting of the Scottish Society of Friends, English governmental forces fired on unruly, but unarmed, crowds, during the King’s Birthday Riots and subsequently increased the number of barracked troops in Scotland. Prime Minister William Pitt’s regime quelled all radicalism with draconian sedition trials, ordering execution or transport

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198 Ibid., 6-7.  
for defendants.\textsuperscript{202} Scottish agitation brought on “a campaign of repression including high-profile prosecutions and various forms of intimidation.”\textsuperscript{203}

Cuddie cautions the crowd against rebellious action. Citing current events on the Continent, Cuddie fears that should the English government see its tenure threatened, it might avail itself of the tactics embodied in the Brunswick Manifesto where, Charles William Ferdinand, Duke of Brunswick proclaimed to the population of Paris that if the French royal family were harmed, Parisians would face violent retribution.\textsuperscript{204}

\begin{quote}
Left for assistance they may seek  
That \textit{Tool of Tyrants, Blust'ring Bruns'ick},  
Who, doubtless, shortly with his Chaffieurs,  
Wou'd come in to increase our pressures.  
Ye know they're swifter on the road,  
Besides, their heels are iron shod;  
They we'll be driv'n from town to town,  
And where they find us, ride us down;  
They'll eat the fodder of each Ass,  
Nor leave one particle of grass.\textsuperscript{205}
\end{quote}

Cuddie presents the moderate position within the Scottish Society of Friends. Although he acknowledges that the working man’s position “have many better days seen,” he simultaneously recognizes that “others are as bad as we.” Despite the admitted alteration in status, he asks the group: “To learn to brook some small restraint, For folks were happy, if content.”\textsuperscript{206} While horses may enjoy a higher status, Cuddie notes that not only do they plow the field that provides

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{203} John Stuart Shaw, \textit{Political History of Eighteenth-century Scotland} (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 126.
\item\textsuperscript{205} Anon., “Rights of Asses,” 8 (italics in original).
\item\textsuperscript{206} Ibid., 5.
\end{itemize}
asses with food, but that they also must fight wars, which asses do not ("Do ye not see him plow the field? And we eat what his labours yield . . . . At other times, he must gainsay not, But face a cannon or a bay’net").

207 Men are even worse off than asses—"their rulers do oppress them," "Alive, or dead, he must be tax’d," and "towns laid under martial law"; yet, "man tho’ they’re "wiser far than we," Yet see how they to these agree, Nor ever raise such strange confusions But please themselves with CONSTITUTIONS.

208 Moreover, rebellion could bring worse things, such as a Brunswick Manifesto where asses (the population of Scotland) could be punished for their defiance of authority.

As the voice urging restraint, Cuddie’s words are met with opposition. A play on the names of the authority are voiced as a possible punishment for him. Cuddie is tarred with aligning himself with the English government.

Some said, he seems design’d by Fate, To be a Minister of State: To find examples of our misery: Some said, he seems a vast profound Ass, And some, a lousy, Hairy, Dun’d-Ass: Some said, to live, he is not fit, And some cried hurl him to a PITT.

210 Against Cuddie’s words, call is made to follow the example of the French Revolution:

YE see, my friends, how that the Franks Have drawn their heads out of the branks, They all distinctions have forbidden, Nor will they longer be Priest-ridden; The Pope no more can damn their souls, They laugh at him and all his bulls.

YE likewise see, in civil matters, They have broke off their iron fetters:

207 Ibid., 5-6.
208 Ibid., 5-8.
209 Ibid., 8 (capitalization in original).
210 Ibid., 9 (italics and capitalization in original).
They now the light of Freedom see,
And boast of strict equality:

. . . .
None now upon their rights dare trample;
Why should not we take their example?²¹¹

The purported meeting minutes are submitted by “A. DULLASS,” whose name implies that he cannot make sense of the situation and is only faithfully recording events so that the reader will reach a conclusion for him.

The cacophony of opinions expressed at the Scottish Society of Friends is illustrated in the accompanying cartoon to the poem. The 1792 “Convention of Asses or Spirit of Democracy” pictures asses stand facing each other as if on opposite sides of a hall. An ass stands between them, facing out, acting as the “President” of the meeting. The President ass says “Speak but three at a time”; the ass facing him says “Kick them from their Studs.” An ass from

*Figure 13. John Kay, “Convention of Asses or Spirit of Democracy” (1792)*

²¹¹ Ibid., 10.
the left of the crowd brays “Liberty & more Corn” and the ass opposite to him brays “Constitutional Opposition.” They are pictured in a field where behind them in the corner is a sign on a small building, which reads “Entertainment for Men & Horses.”

The “Rights of Asses” is a poignantly humorous take on the confusion that existed within the radical reform movement of Scotland in the 1790s. The movement’s internal divisions doomed it to failure. All speakers recognize that the working man lacked rights, but have thoroughly different thoughts on how to address the situation. Cuddie’s take—that all groups suffer under the governmental scheme, but that men—who are “wiser far than we”—content themselves with constitutions (alluding to the moderate position rejecting rebellion, but seeking constitutional reform), implicitly forwards the stance that if more intelligent groups are satisfied with working with constitutions, so should asses be content with them. The more extremist voices—the President (John Muir) and the second speaker—urge following the French example of revolution, advocating overt rebellion. The chapbook cartoon and verse elucidate the various opinions within the group and lodges Scotland’s issues within the wider European context (e.g., the French Revolution and the Brunswick Manifesto). The light-hearted presentation of serious issues allows the reader to approach each stance without preconceptions. The heart is engaged before the head can make a snap judgment about a conclusion’s validity. As a tool for promoting rational evaluation of an issue, the “Rights of Asses” diffuses heated rhetoric surrounding the idea of reform through farce while still presenting the issue in its full context.

The upshot of the meeting is to approve the vote to maintain the rights of asses, which brings down the might of the English government against the Society.  

John Muir, one of the founders and most radical of the Scottish Society of Friends, was brought up on charges of sedition for disseminating the works of Paine and other radical writers and of reading the seditious Irish Address at the Convention. The French Revolution created a backlash in Britain, such that any suggestion that a change should be made to common people’s political rights was seen as a threat to civil society.

The highly publicized sedition trial of John Muir badly backfired on the government’s attempt to extinguish reform-mindedness. Prosecution witnesses provided so little substantiation for the charges against Muir that Dundas—who managed the battle against the Scottish “threat” for London—fell back on the testimony of Muir’s former scullery maid, Anne Fisher, as to the “scurrilous” nature of Muir’s private readings, including French texts. Instead of availing himself of defense lawyer, Henry Erskine, who had secured acquittals for others similarly accused, Muir defended himself, turning the trial as the government had, into a political platform from which to espouse his views. His harangues to a government-packed conservative jury probably did him more harm than good. Despite the flimsy evidence against him, the court sentenced Muir to the unprecedented harsh punishment of fourteen years of transportation.

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218 Ibid.
The severity of the sanction and the obvious propaganda use to which the government put the Muir trial resulted in public outrage.  

Kay’s 1793 print, “Pension Hunter” memorializes the shoddy part in the prosecution that Reverend Dr. James Lapslie, played in Muir’s trial.  

News of Muir’s arrest sent conservative Lapslie into action with him scurrying to find and interview witnesses.  

Although previously a friend of the Muir family, Lapslie, as the minister for Campsie, apparently felt the need to stamp out all expression of liberal tendencies in his parish.  

Lapslie’s bias so tainted him that when the prosecution proposed Lapslie as a witness, the court sustained the defense objection.  

The caption, “Pension Hunter,” refers to

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220 Ibid.  
224 Ibid.
Lapslie’s motivation to aid the government in Muir’s trial. Lapslie, who authored a book on beekeeping, is pictured reading an “Essay on the management of Bees” with a cloud of bees surrounding his head, interpreted by historians as representing the “the cloud of witnesses to his shabby conduct.”

Lapslie stands on a Bible, opened to Revelations—“And the world wondered after the beast.” Lapslie seems to be the “beast,” to which the Bible refers.

“The Rights of Asses” and “Pension Hunter” invite debate on current events, presenting the issues in a light-hearted manner. With satiric flair, the cartoons and poem comment on contemporary events where the content approaches the audience in a disarming manner to elicit reactions from the heart before seeking judgments from the mind. Instead of portraying the highly controversial subject of reform in a ponderous essay, elucidating the pros and cons of the various positions, cheap print used humor to educate the reader, casting the confusing debate as a meeting of donkeys, braying at each other, such that one evaluates the sentiments expressed through enjoyment of the poem and picture before intellectual prejudice can rise. Similarly, whatever one’s view of John Muir’s prosecution, “Pension Hunter” allows one to acknowledge Lapslie’s inflammatory role without bias being immediately triggered. These items are examples of how cheap print fostered critical evaluation of current events by appealing to man’s sentiment—his humor—which permitted him to use his reason to look at concepts in a new way and apply his own judgment to situations and not merely accept the pronouncements of others.

Conclusion

The Scottish Enlightenment involved more than just a few extraordinary men writing intricate theories about man’s world and society. It engaged the entire populace. From a nation

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225 Evans, John Kay, 44.
wracked with debt and internal divisions, the Scottish Enlightenment affected all of Scotland, not just the educated few.

The permeation that ideas of reason, improvement, progress, and the right of all individuals had to question, not just traditional authority, but conventional ways of thinking is clear from the tremendous economic leaps Scotland made during the 1700s. There were significant developments in Scotland’s agriculture, commerce, and trade.\(^{226}\) “In the age when Scotland lost its sovereignty, its people asserted themselves with renewed vigour and acquired an unprecedented degree of international recognition for their achievements.”\(^{227}\) Even with the regional differences, contemporaries noted that wages rose for all rural workers over the course of the eighteenth century.\(^{228}\) Whole-scale advances were put into practice and realized in agriculture for the “‘educated peasantry more readily turn[ed] its back on immemorial tradition because it f[ound] on the printed page an alternative form of authority, and much of the new farming technology was disseminated in books and articles.’’\(^{229}\) Similarly, salaries of tellers, clerical workers, and even those of unskilled servants increased towards the end of the century.\(^{230}\)

None of these accomplishments would have been possible if the bulk of Scotland’s population were not made receptive to the innovations embodied by the Enlightenment. Elites alone did not create the widespread cultural changes. While they may have been the forerunners


\(^{227}\) Ibid.


that catalyzed the region to adopt novel modes of thinking, the rise of Commonsense Philosophy and the presence of concepts of reason, improvement, and progress in the cheap press meant that all men had the capability to participate in the movement. The existence of a literate underclass who not only could read, but enjoyed reading, created an atmosphere where society’s lower classes appreciated and adopted rational ways of viewing and acting in the world.

Humor softened the transition from unquestioning tradition-bound thinking to individualistic assessment of situations. From Hutcheson’s first observations in the early eighteenth century regarding humor’s ability to educate, to chide men out of faults, and to encourage flexibility of mind, to Stewart and Beattie’s embrace of humor’s worth to prevent skepticism and promote sociability, comic gloss on Enlightenment concepts helped transmit these ideas to a wider public. Humor taught men through their sentiments, before the mind had the opportunity to fixate on preconceptions. Beyond being valued by educated theorists, the working man enjoyed a good joke.

For the production of cheap print was a business, and a highly competitive one.231 Publishers would not print humor, satire, and levity unless there was a market for it—unless it would sell. The explosion of cheap print in the 1790s, including light-hearted publications, proves that such interest existed. Presenting the ideas of the Enlightenment in farcical tone, these items helped to transmit new ways of thinking to the whole Scottish society.

While humor’s use in less exalted formats does not supplant the extraordinary works by the “Great Men” of the Scottish Enlightenment, it deserves its place as a contributing factor to explain Scotland’s rise in the eighteenth century. The nation could not have made the advancement that she did unless there was larger participation in the ideas of the Enlightenment

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than just by the elites. Scotland’s ability to laugh—both at herself, from being an independent country to England’s possession, and the obstacles facing her, religious, economic, and cultural—allowed her to move forward, to engage with the world, and to become the recognized authority in everything from epic poetry to gardening.
Appendix

**Rights of Asses.**

As lately at a Muirland fair,
Where cadgers, tinkers, thieves, repair,
With many of them of like classes:
And most of them had with them asses.

To see how best they might devise,
To carry ‘oft some lusty prize;
The masters went to bouse together,
And left their beasts among the heather;
Where, after picking scanty supper,
Each Ass sat down upon his crupper:
I quite forgot to count them o’er,
But think there might be near threescore.

A DARING Ass presum’d to mention,
That now they ought to hold Convention;
And first, he mov’d to chuse a Preses,
(For there’s some order among Asses:)
This done, with more than Asses fire,
He rose, and audience did desire.-

He said, my friends, my fellow Asses,
Regard we naught what round us passes;
How other folk their rights maintain,
While we’re opprest and ne’er complain.

The sacred writers have reported,
How Patriarchs our service courted;
We then ate corn, or graz’d in meadows,
But now our riders seldom feed us:
When we for corn to Egypt went,
When Jacob’s sons were thither sent,
They trudg’d beside us on their feet,
And we ate what our masters ate.
But horses now in every land,
Stand in the stalls where we should stand;
Great folks now keep vast numbers by them,
Altho “forbid to multiply them:”
To us, one hearty feed’s a stranger,
While they are full at hack and manger.
The horse, of more majestie mein,
With coach and harness in his train,
They say, can learn his duty faster;
But, where’s the horse e’er taught his master.

My friends, we have been long abus’d,
And for the meanest drudg’ry us’d,
While horses have been kept for pleasure,
And take their airings at their pleasure.
Of old, my friends, it was not thus,
For every great man rode his Ass;

AND tho’ not fram’d to lead in battle,
Yet we were deem’d most useful cattle,
Now horses get what we deserve,
And we are left to steal or starve;
Come then, my friends, my hearty bloods,
Let’s rise and kick them from their studs;
Our cause is just. A few campaigns
Will surely ease us of our chains.
He ceas’d:--! Each Ass stretch’d out his crest,
And bray’d applause, and speaker blest.

SAVE an old cautious, mod’rate Cuddie,
Who said he had it from his goodie,
To learn to brook some small restraint,
For folks were happy, if content.
I own, my friends, we’re not’s we have been,
Asses have many better days seen;
But if we look around, we’ll see
That others are as bad as we.

The former speaker talks of horses;
What creature under heaven worse is?
Do ye not see him plow the field?
And we eat what his labours yield:
By him we have our hay and straw,
Tho’ whiles his litter we must gnaw,
And, tho; our skins be not so sleek,
Yet some get corn once in a week.
’Tis true, he boasts of birth and blood,
And sprung from this, or that Lord’s stud,

But see ye now how much he’s pain’d,
By spurs he’s driven, by bits restrain’d:
And of the faints upon the road:
See what he’s forc’d to draw from Leith,
And suff'ring strokes much worse than death.
Unless beyond his strength he draws,
Nor lifts, from morn to night, his jaws.
At other times, he must gainsay not,
But face a cannon or a bay’net;
Compar’d with these, we live in peace,
Our lives are lives of happiness.

YET more, my friends, if we but trace
Our breth’ren of the human race;
I say, if we but view those great ones,
Ev’n those who boast the birth of Britons:
View them weith care, and ye will see,
That they are more opprest than we.
See how their rulers do oppress them,
And strain their wits how to assess them.
Soon as they see the light of day,
They for that light must taxes pay;
Nor yet one a Christian be,
Until the King has got his fee;
Nor can be buried when they’re dead,
Unless their rulers first are feed.

I’VE often heard the farmers say,
(Besides what they to landlords pay)
From ev’ry ball there goes a firlot,
To feed some drone, or great man’s harlot.
The horse he feeds, he cannot ride,
‘Till first a tax for him be paid;
With tax on beer, and tax on malt,
With tax on spirits and on salt;
With tax on coaches—ten per cents.
And, (what is stranger still to say)
Tax’d if he should those taxes pay;
Tax’d if he pay his honest debt,
With stamps for this sum, stamps for that:
Tax’d before he dare kill a hare,
Either with dog, or gun, or snare;
Tax’d if o’er pot the news do chat,
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With tax on hats, on gloves, and shoes,
Tax’d for the road on which he goes.
For physic tax’d—and tax’d for law;
Tax’d if his wife lie in the straw.
Thus, well and hearty, or relax’d,
Alive, or dead, he must be tax’d.
THESE taxes, when they count them o’er,
Amount to millions near a score;
And of these millions, not a few,
Are paid to bribe a venal crew.

BESIDES these ills, the folks in towns,
Are whiles rode down by rude dragoons.
See towns laid under martial law,
Lest boys shou’d burn a whisp of straw!
They’ll soon send bullets thro’ their heads;
Or try for life a Brewer’s Beast,
For only joining in the jest;
And some are sent o’er seas, they tell us,
Where they’ll be eaten by their fellows.

THESE ills, and thousands more than these,
Are saddl’d on the human race;
And tho’ they’re “wiser far than we,”
Yet see how they to these agree,
Nor ever raise such strange confusions
But please themselves with CONSTITUTIONS.

THE toils of war we can’t endure,
It’s good a risk, its ills are sure;
Then cease ye from their fav’rite horses,
And be not doom’d to human curses;
Left for assistance they may seek
That Tool of Tyrants, Blust’ring Bruns’ick,
Who, doubtles, shortly with his Chaffieurs,
Wou’d come in to increase our pressures.
Ye know they’re swifter on the road,
Besides, their heels are iron shod;
They we’ll be driv’n from town to town,
And where they find us, ride us down;
They’ll eat the fodder of each Ass,
Nor leave one particle of grass.

HERE Cuddie bow’d, and then sat down,
And now a gen’ral hiss went round.
Some said, he makes a speech at least
As long as half a Pension List.
Some said, he seems design’d by Fate,
To be a Minister of State:
To find examples of our misery:
Some said, he seems a vast profound Ass,
And some, a lousy, *Hairy, Dun’d-Ass:*
Some said, to live, he is not fit,
And some cried hurl him to a PITT.

At last this clam’rous tumult ceases,
On hearing ORDER from the Preses,
Who said, to hear, he would be glad,
A sober speech. One rose, and said,
Altho’ of war I’m not a liker,
Yet I agree with the first speaker.

My friends, we have been long degraded,
Our rights these horses have invaded,
(They, each day, have their double ration,
While we do pine in mere *starvation*)
We ought our rights for to regain,
And with our lives these rights maintain.

The world has had its darksome nights,
Now every one perceives his rights;
Ev’n Man, who should know better things,
Have long been dup’d by Priests and Kings—
Have led captive at their will,
For hear of either hemp or hell;
Now wish to banish pension’d drones,
Ev’n Kings now sit on tott’ring thrones.

Ye see, my friends, how that the Franks
Have drawn their heads out of the branks,
They all distinctions have forbidden,
Nor will they longer be Priest-ridden;
The Pope no more can damn their souls,
They laugh at him and all his bulls.

Ye likewise see, in civil matters,
They have broke off their iron fetters:
Tho’ they were long in darkness held,
That darkness now, is near dispell’d.
A brighter sun dispels their mist,
(They say their sun rose in the West)
They now the light of Freedom see,
And boast of strict equality:
Now what they have can call their own,
Nor dread they thunders from a throne.
None now upon their rights dare trample;
Why should not we take their example?
The former speaker talks of Bruns’ick,
But who for him now cares a broom-stick?
My friends, ye plainly see that he’s
An ass that dup’d by refugees.
If ever he among us come,
We’ll soon find means to send him home;
We’ll gather round him in vast clusters,
And laugh at all his threats and blusters;
We’ll eat up all the hay and corn,
Or, what we cannot eat we’ll burn:
Then we’ll surround him in such swarms,
That he’ll be glad to ground his arms.

As it grows late, and ye seem weary,
(Except to see how votes may carry)
I’ll say no more at this first meeting,
But may resume at next night’s sitting.
And now, at length, the vote round passes,
Maintain, or not, the Rights of Asses;
To know the issue all were keen,
The vote was carry’d nem. con. Maintain.

Extracted from the Minutes,

Nil nifi verum.

A. DULLASS, N.P.
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