The Grounded Patriot: Oliver Goldsmith as Historical Compiler

A thesis submitted to the School of English, Trinity College, Dublin for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Declaration

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Dublin, March 29, 2019
Summary

Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774) began his career as a writer in London in 1757 and laboured as an anonymous hack until he leaped into literary stardom with the publication of his first, major poem, *The Traveller* (1764). His industriousness did not cease until his death, and he continued to produce numerous works. Not only does the quantity of his outputs impress us today, but his engagement in diverse fields of writing was arguably unmatched by his contemporaries.

However, of Goldsmith’s diverse writerly portfolio, much attention has been directed towards his great poetical, theatrical and novelistic works, at the expense of his historical compilations: *An History of England, in a Series of Letters from a Nobleman to his Son* (1764), the *Roman History* (1769), the *History of England* (1771) and the *Grecian History* (1774). Indeed, from the late-eighteenth century onwards, these texts have been endurably and progressively dismissed as lesser works.

Broadly speaking, this thesis attempts to dismantle the lowly regard with which Goldsmith’s histories continues to be regarded. To this extent, firstly, the deepening trend towards pushing these compilations to the outer reaches of the Goldsmithian orbit is traced in detail and a robust defence against such an outlook is provided. The great, potential value they hold as materials of scholarly import is thus established. Following this, the histories are used to discover specific aspects of Goldsmith’s mindset. To begin, the *History of England* is examined to reveal his socio-political inclination. It is argued that he was a relatively objective and principled historian with an increasingly strong desire to warn his English readers of the dangers that they faced as a nation and earnestly sought to forward his belief in the need for a more equitable distribution of wealth. Then, his approach towards Ireland and the Irish is looked at by comparing his two English histories. It is established that while he increasingly valued his sense of English identity, there was enough of an Irishman left in him that he, in 1771, voiced concern over Britain’s neglectful and overbearing treatment of Ireland both politically and economically. Lastly, his religious tendencies are revealed by considering all of his histories. It is asserted that while he was never able to extrapolate himself from the common prejudices of the time, he still fought to make a case for amicability and toleration, for the sake of social cohesiveness and power.
In conclusion, the need to reconsider Goldsmith’s histories as valuable works in and of themselves is asserted and, by drawing the strands of what has been discovered in the preceding chapters, it is proposed that he should be acknowledged as a grounded patriot; as one who soberly reflected upon the realities of the moment to champion the cause of both Britain and Ireland.

In terms of methodology, the historical context is paid attention to, and the manner in which Goldsmith had, in composing his historical compilations, deviated from, modified and re-conveyed remarks found in his source materials is taken into account. It should also be mentioned that in the second chapter, focus is primarily directed towards the *History of England*, as it has been the work most subjected to criticism along political lines. And in the following chapter, the *Letters from a Nobleman* and the *History of England* is examined in detail, as they contain the most direct and relevant clues to Goldsmith’s Irishness. Finally, in the last chapter, Goldsmith’s two English histories, along with his *Roman History* and *Grecian History*, are studied, as they all contain valuable information pertaining to Goldsmith’s religious sensibilities.
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Abbreviations

Published Histories by Goldsmith


Other Primary Sources


*IR*  *Goldsmith: Interviews and Recollections*, ed. by E.H. Mikhail (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993).


References and Journals

*DNB*  *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Online*

*PMLA*  *Publications of the Modern Language Association*
Chronology of Oliver Goldsmith’s life and career

1728: Oliver Goldsmith is born, likely at Pallas, County Westmeath, Ireland; the second son and fifth child of Charles Goldsmith and his wife, Ann.

1745: Admitted to Trinity College, Dublin as a sizar.

1747: Death of Goldsmith’s father.

1750: Graduates from Trinity, College, Dublin with a BA.

1750-52: Works as a tutor to the Flinn family in County Roscommon. Makes an unsuccessful attempt to emigrate to America. Fails to journey to London to study law.

1752-54: Studies medicine at the University of Edinburgh.

1754-56: Travels to the continent with the intention of furthering his medical education. Wanders through Flanders, France, Germany Switzerland and Italy by foot.

1756-57: Arrives in England. Works at various jobs, including that of an apothecary and physician.

1757: Introduced to Ralph Griffiths while under the employ of Dr John Milner as an usher at a boys’ school in Peckham, Surrey. Begins working as a regular contributor to the *Monthly Review*.

1758: Translates Jean Martheile’s *Memoirs of a Protestant*. Encounters Edmund Burke sometime in 1758 and 1759.

1759: Contributes to Tobias Smollett’s *Critical Review* and publishes *An Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning* and *The Bee*.

1759-60: Composes essays for the *Busy Body*, the *Weekly Magazine*, the *Royal Magazine*, the *British Magazine*, the *Lady’s Magazine*.

1760-61: Contributes the ‘Chinese Letters’ to John Newbery’s *Public Ledger*.

1761: Introduced to Samuel Johnson. Thomas Percy described meeting Goldsmith. The latter probably encounters Joshua Reynolds at this period.

1762: The ‘Chinese Letters’ are collected and published as *The Citizen of the World*. *The Life of Richard Nash* is completed and the manuscript of *The Vicar of Wakefield* is sold.

1764: *An History of England in a Series of Letters from a Nobleman to his Son* and *The Traveller, or A Prospect of Society* are published. The *Lives of the Fathers* and the *Life of Christ* likely printed sometime in this year. Founding member of The Club, along with Burke, Johnson, Reynolds and others.

1766: *The Vicar of Wakefield* is published.

1768: *The Good-Natured Man* is performed at Covent Garden.

1769: *The Roman History* is published. Second edition of the *Letters from a Nobleman* is released. Appointed Professor of History to the Royal Academy.


1771: *The History of England: from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Death of George II* is published.

1772: Abridged version of the *Roman History* is published.

1773: *She Stoops to Conquer* is performed at Covent Garden. Dictates to Percy a memorandum of his life.

1774: Goldsmith dies on the 4 April. The *Retaliation*, the *History of the Earth and Animated Nature*, an abridged version of the *History of England* and the *Grecian History* are posthumously published.

On 20 December 1768, an announcement appeared in the *Public Advertiser*, proclaiming the establishment of the Royal Academy in London under the patronage of George III; an institution that was described as holding the promise of furthering the cultural life of Britain: ‘His Majesty [George III], ever ready to encourage useful Improvements, and always intent upon promoting every Branch of polite Knowledge, hath been graciously pleased to institute in this Metropolis, a Royal Academy of Arts, to be under his Majesty’s own immediate Patronage… The principal Object of this Institution is to be the Establishment of well regulated Schools of Design, where Students in the Arts may find that Instruction which hath so long been wanted, and so long wished for in this Country…’ Among those installed in this prestigious school were literary and artistic luminaries, including the likes of Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792) and Samuel Johnson (1709-1784). The latter was appointed to the post of ‘Professor of Antient Literature’, as was noted in the 22 December 1769 print of the same newspaper. Notably, he was not alone in sharing the honour of being publicly recognised as a newly selected member of this budding organisation. In the advertisement is mentioned another name, that of an Irish writer, who was to occupy the role of ‘Professor of History’: Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774). To modern readers, it may come as a surprise that Goldsmith had been made the in-house historian to the Royal Academy. Since the twentieth century, he has been primarily remembered as an essayist, poet, playwright and novelist, with *The Citizen of the World* (1762), *The Traveller* (1764), *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), *The Deserted Village* (1770), and *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) being heralded as canonical works. Undoubtedly, they deserve the attention that they have garnered over the years. However, by focusing much attention on them, a crucial element of Goldsmith’s writerly career has been grossly overlooked: that he was also a prolific compiler of histories. Indeed, from 1764 onward, he was repeatedly engaged in producing extended, historical texts, derived from a reading of readily accessible, printed materials of established authorities. His first serious foray into this field of writing came in the form

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1 *Public Advertiser*, 20 December 1768, unpaginated.
of a history of England that was published anonymously in two volumes in an epistolary style, *An History of England, in a Series of Letters from a Nobleman to his Son* (1764), which expertly assimilated passages from the works of Paul de Rapin-Thoyras (1661-1725), Voltaire (1694-1778), Tobias Smollett (1721-1771), David Hume (1711-1776) and Edmund Burke (1729/30-1797). Following this, his *Roman History* was released in 1769 by Thomas Davies (1713-1785); for the composition of which he had primarily relied on Laurence Echard’s *Roman History* of 1695. Then, he was again employed by Davies to work upon an enlarged English history — four volumes in size — which was sold as the *History of England* in 1771. For this project, not only did he use the histories of Smollett and Hume again, but he also returned to his earlier compilation of 1764. Finally, on the eve of his death, Goldsmith mainly studied the history of the Greek civilisation by Temple Stanyan (1675-1752) and Charles Rollin (1661-1741) to complete his *Grecian History* of two volumes for William Griffin.

In addition to newly composing two national histories and that of ancient Rome and Greece, Goldsmith was also involved in revising and re-working these texts — with the exception of the *Grecian History*, which was published posthumously on 15 June 1774 — throughout the latter part of his life. Accordingly, he adapted the *Letters from a Nobleman* to be included in James Dodsley’s *The Geography and History of England* (1765) as *A Concise History of England*, and he likely had a hand in creating the second edition of the work, which was released on 1769. And he was contracted by Davies in 1770, allegedly at the instigation of the ‘Heads’ of some of the ‘principal Schools’ of Britain, to create a truncated version of the *Roman History*, which was published in a single-volume format on 1772 as *Dr. Goldsmith’s Roman History, Abridged by Himself*. As for the *History of England*, he wrote to Thomas Cadell (1742-1802), one of the publishers of the work, on either 1773 or 1774, requesting that an ‘interleaved’ set ‘of the history of England’ be sent to him for corrections to be made. Although ‘The Second Edition, Corrected’ was not released until December 1774, eight months

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3 The *Letters from a Nobleman* and its subsequent versions were his only historical compilations that were published anonymously.
4 The second edition of the *Letters from a Nobleman* lacks external verification of Goldsmith’s involvement in its correction, which was extensive. However, the preliminary address affixed to it alludes strongly to such.
5 See the advertisement fixed to *Dr. Goldsmith’s Roman History* (London: T. Davies, 1772), unpaginated.
after his death, it is almost certain that it contains authorial revisions that had been made by Goldsmith himself.

It is appreciable, as such, how the compiling of histories was, by no means, a negligible aspect of Goldsmith’s authorly repertoire. His close friend and literary colleague, Johnson, recognised this, and when he was tasked with composing an epitaph for him in 1776, to accompany the monument that was to be installed in the Poets’ Corner of Westminster Abbey, he remembered Goldsmith as having been a ‘Poet, Naturalist, and Historian, who left scarcely any style of writing untouched, and touched nothing that he did not adorn.’

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Johnson’s decision to accredit Goldsmith as a historian in his epitaph is reflective of the prestige with which histories were held in the eighteenth century. For many intellectuals and authors, history writing was deeply associated with the Enlightenment project. And it was a genre in which the promise of commercial gain was strong. Here, it will be pointed out how Goldsmith was likely inspired by the liveliness and profitability of this field of writing to become involved in the act of compiling histories. It will be shown that Goldsmith’s methodological approach towards his compilations was keeping with the spirit of the times, thus revealing the need to reconsider his status as a historian; to view his works with the same consideration that has been extended to those by established Enlightenment figures, including Hume and Voltaire.

As remarked by Harry Elmer Barnes, it was not the norm during the eighteenth century — with the notable exception of Edward Gibbon (1737-94) — for history writing to be engaged in by specialists who solely worked upon histories. Voltaire was ‘a man of letters, a publicist and reformer’, Hume was a philosopher and William Robertson (1721-93) was a ‘clergy man and university principal’. Subsequently, for Goldsmith to have partaken in history writing was not exceptional. Rather than perceiving it as an academic exercise only practicable by learned elites, history writing was open to a

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diverse range of thinkers and was considered to be an endeavour with wider intellectual, socio-political and moral relevance.

Indeed, for the likes of Hume, the historical project was deeply enmeshed with the larger Enlightenment movement; as a ground upon which to further test and promote innovative ideas. Accordingly, in composing his History of England (1754-62), Hume broke from the older, seventeenth-century tendency to include theistic themes, and, instead, composed it from a secular standpoint. As noted by Roger Emerson, Hume ‘thought the revelations and miracles of Judeo-Christian history were things we could not know had really happened, and he saw them as reflections of the ignorance of barbarous or simple peoples, the results of madness and delusion, or rooted in superstition that was grounded in fears.’ Consequently, in his History, Hume treated ecclesiastical history as ‘but another set of events’ and filled it with ‘ironic and derisive comments about religion informed by his reading of Fra Paolo Sarpi, Pierre Bayle, and English deists like Conyers Middleton’, whose own work against Christian miracles had upstaged his own.⁹

Much in the same vein, other writers, especially the Scottish philosophes, treated histories as an appropriate medium in which to deploy newly acquired thoughts on human progress. The History of America (1777) by Robertson stands as a case in point. Influenced by the speculative sociological and legal inquiries being conducted by the likes of Henry Home (1696), Adam Ferguson (1723-1816), Adam Smith (1723-90) and John Millar (1735-1801), Robertson divided human progress into stages based on different forms of subsistence in this work. And he applied the ‘climatically deterministic’ French discourse — originated by the French naturalist, Buffon (1707-88) — to reflect upon the supposed immaturity or degeneracy of the New World and its associated feebleness.¹⁰

In addition to the fresh intellectual forays being made in historical works, a growing number of historians were beginning to utilise the genre to introduce a larger socio-political outlook to their readers by taking a cosmopolitan stance in their writings: a position derived from an understanding that ‘all nations are endowed with valid

histories and identities which intersect with, and complete, each other": dictated by the recognition that individual states or nations are not, in themselves, intelligible units of historical study.\textsuperscript{11} Robertson’s \textit{History of Scotland} (1759) is of particular interest in this regard. As noted by Karen O’Brien, creating a European connection without compromising Scotland’s prestige and exacerbating political factions was a challenge that demanded much tact. Nevertheless, whilst adopting Andrew Fletcher’s tragic tone lamenting the loss of Scotland’s independence following the Union of the Crown in 1603, Robertson was able to celebrate the economic and political closeness of Scotland with England to depict the former as marching towards steady progress as part of the European ‘family’ of balancing states; thus, fitting Scotland into a cosmopolitan framework while providing enough emotional ‘space’ to include readers who may have sensed defeat in their history.\textsuperscript{12}

Voltaire too, in recent times, has received attention for being the ‘first historian to articulate in detail an Enlightenment narrative of the rise of Europe as it was hastened by the growing wealth and independence of the middle orders of society’.\textsuperscript{13} The preceding Renaissance notion of Europe as a shared classical heritage was enhanced by his broad approach that traced ‘the extinction, the rebirth and the progress of the human spirit’ as it was propelled by a burgeoning commercial activity.\textsuperscript{14} Such cosmopolitan outlook is most evident in the \textit{Essai sur les Mœurs et l’esprit des Nations} (1756), which began as an experiment to demonstrate the philosophical interest of history to his mistress, and eventually grew into a summary of world history from the time of Charlemagne to the beginning of Louis XIV’s reign. In this work, Voltaire linked together a number of national histories by a narrative thread that recognised an inherent drive to ‘civilisation’ — the noun \textit{civilization} was not in common use, but its verb, \textit{civiliser} was defined by the \textit{Dictionnaire de l’Académie française} (1687) as ‘to render civil, decent and, sociable…’, which is the desired meaning here — in different peoples.\textsuperscript{15} In other words, the \textit{Essai} illustrated the rise of European societies from the ruins of feudalism in terms of synthesis, civility and urbanisation.

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 1-2.
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 94-95, 109-10.
\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{14} Marcello Verga, “European civilization and the ‘emulation of the nations’”, \textit{History of European Ideas}, 34 (2008), 353-60 (p. 355).
Alongside the pan-European approach to historical writing, histories were perceived to be important on an individual level too, in their ability to convey morally enlightening lessons to the everyday ‘man’. Hume, in his essay, ‘Of the Study of History’, which appeared in the first edition of Essays, Moral and Political, in 1741, posited how histories are ‘well suited’ to ‘every one, but particularly to those who are debarred’ from ‘severer studies, by the tenderness of their complexion, and the weakness of their education,’ as they would assist in their ability to grow in wisdom:

I must add, that history is not only a valuable part of knowledge, but opens the door to many other parts, and affords materials to most of the sciences. And indeed, if we consider the shortness of human life, and our limited knowledge, even of what passes in our own time, we must be sensible that we should be for ever children in understanding, were it not for this invention, which extends our experience to all past ages, and to the most distant nations; making them contribute as much to our improvement in wisdom, as if they had actually lain under our observation.16

Similarly, Adam Smith (1723-1790) — with whom one wonders if Goldsmith ever had a chance to become acquainted — was in accord with the sentiments of Hume.17 On 12 January 1763, in a public lecture delivered by him in Glasgow, he conveyed his recognition of the need for historians to be concerned with ‘the affairs of the body of the people’, rather than the elite, by condemning Rapin’s tendency to enter ‘too much into the private affairs of the monarchs and the parties amongst the severall [sic] great men concern’d’. Also, in an earlier disquisition of 5 January 1763, he noted how historical writings should act as a guide for readers in their navigation through the

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17 It is tempting to believe that Goldsmith and Smith may have had an encounter sometime between 1773 and 1774, when the latter was spending much of his time in London; perhaps, in the British Coffee House on Cockspur Street, which both men are known to have frequented. Unfortunately, there is no concrete evidence to prove such an acquaintance. Ian Simpson Ross — in The Life of Adam Smith, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 267-68 — erroneously creates the impression that they had the ‘pleasure’ of conversing with each other as members of The Club, by misidentifying a critical remark made by David Garrick against Smith, as having been quipped by Goldsmith. In fact, as noted by Ross, Smith first attended this society’s soirée on 1 December 1775; several months after Goldsmith’s death on 4 April 1774.
travails of human existence, unlike ‘contrived’ stories; ‘the Sole view of which is to entertain’:

The design of historicall [sic] writing is not merely to entertain; (this perhaps is the intention of an epic poem) besides that it has in view the instruction of the reader. It sets before us the more interesting and important events of human life, points out the causes by which these events were brought about and by this means points out to us by what manner and method we may produce similar good effects or avoid Similar bad ones.18

As such, among the members of the intellectual community there was a strong sense of excitement and educative import underpinning historical undertakings during the Enlightenment. It is imaginable that Goldsmith was attracted to this field of writing, in part, due to its liveliness and sense of mission with which it was infused with. Indeed, his first, anonymously published English history of 1764 broke new ground in terms of its narrative format. O’Brien, whilst retaining a somewhat lukewarm attitude towards Goldsmith’s contributions as a historian, conceded that the conversational style of the Letters from a Nobleman — along with Thomas Lewis’ History of France (1786) and William Russell’s History of Modern Europe (1770-84) — was ‘adventurous’ and ‘experimental’ in its bid to draw younger readers.19 And it is telling how he had composed it in the style of a father lecturing his son. For an author as well-travelled and read and ambitious as Goldsmith, to compose histories must have appeared an extremely alluring proposition. Indeed, had history writing been largely an antiquarian endeavour, divorced from the larger Enlightenment trends and constrained by narrow political outlooks, it is questionable to what extent a ‘Philosophic Vagabond’ such as Goldsmith would have been interested in this field of study.

It is also likely that Goldsmith was drawn to history writing due to its commercial viability. In this period, there was an ever-growing demand for historical works. Rapin’s Histoire d’Angleterre (1723-25) stands as a salient example of such. This work was undertaken in the Hague and occupied Rapin until 1724, a year prior to

his death, when he was incapacitated by illness. Nicolas Tindal’s English translation of the text appeared between 1726 and 1731, and by 1751 Rapin had been translated thrice, continued twice, summarised, abridged and illustrated. And in 1729 a French translation of Tindal’s footnotes was published. As noted by R.C. Richardson, Rapin’s work was “the most fashionable history of its vintage, and was unrealistically hailed for a time as positively the only ‘impartial’ history.” Even later writers who were offended by the perceived political untowardness of the Histoire had to acknowledge its favourable reception. Among them was William Guthrie (1708-70), a Scottish journalist, who, in 1744, derided Rapin’s work in his own General History of England:

Rapin’s History appeared at a time when the principles on which he wrote were useful to a party, who therefore powerfully recommended it from the press of which they were then masters. To this, and to the ridiculous prepossession that a foreigner was best fitted to write the English history was owing the reception it met with from the public.

One of Goldsmith’s most important historical points of reference, Hume’s English histories enjoyed much popularity too. Having commenced his History of England under the House of Stuart in 1752, which was published in two volumes in 1754, Hume worked chronologically backward and completed further volumes in 1759 and 1762. These were then sold together from the following year as The History of England, from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688. Despite the initially sluggish sale of his first work, Hume’s histories were a commercial success. Andrew Millar, the London-based bookseller of Hume’s History, wrote to the philosopher on 26 November 1764, enlarging on their rapid sales: above two thousand five hundred complete sets of the quarto edition, and ‘upwards of 3000 of the Stewarts’ had been sold, along with near two thousand of the 8vo. edition.

Moreover, other than what we may traditionally consider to be histories, there was a thriving and expansive business in texts that loosely dealt with the past or described themselves as ‘histories’. In this list may be included biographies, memoirs and fictional narratives: works that ranged from niche studies appropriate for polite

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members of erudite clubs to short humorous magazine essays designed to appeal to all classes and both sexes. Almanacs must also be mentioned when considering the factor of class divide. These were popular works that were purchased by almost every social group, from the landed gentry and urban professionals to the farmer in the countryside. While they came under attack in the eighteenth century by the educated elites as disseminating superstition, Bernard Capp estimates that they remained popular among the lower classes. The majority of almanacs were a hodgepodge of ‘practical’ and sensational information that advised readers through the use of calendrical and astrological data. But they also often contained rudimentary historical facts, such as a list of monarchs since the Norman Conquest and a selection of dates and events from world history; what may have been, as suggested by Linda Colley, ‘the only history lessons the majority of Britons received’.

Within an atmosphere so favourably inclined towards histories, Goldsmith’s own works were well received, as may be gauged from the number of editions they went through in quick succession. The Letters from a Nobleman was reprinted twenty-five times in the first sixty years after its publication and was translated into French by Madam Brissot in 1786 with notes by her husband included. His Roman History went through fourteen editions by 1800 and was translated into French, German, Italian and Greek. Moreover, it retained its public presence until the middle of the nineteenth century, as is evidenced by the passing reference made to it in Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre (1847): ‘I had read Goldsmith’s History of Rome,’ Jane explained in accounting for her retaliatory outburst in which she had declared her abusive cousin, John, to be akin to ‘a murderer’, ‘a slave-driver’ of the tyrannous Roman emperors; parallels that were drawn in silence since reading the book and having formed her ‘opinion of Nero, Caligula, etc.’ Similarly, the History of England went through twelve editions in its original four-volume form in its first fifty years after publication, and its revised and expanded editions were sold widely to schools in England and America a hundred years

on. Lastly, the *Grecian History* saw twenty editions in fifty years, and an abridged version of it was translated into French, German, Italian, Spanish and Greek.\(^{27}\)

While the commercial success of Goldsmith’s histories did not afford him a life free from financial woe, he was able to garner a relatively substantial, combined income from them. The *Letters from a Nobleman*, along with a select number of other ‘hack’ works that he had been engaged in around 1763, procured him twenty-one pounds.\(^ {28}\) And he received two hundred and fifty guineas for the completion of the *Roman History*. Later he was paid five hundred pounds to compose the *History of England* and two hundred and fifty pounds for the *Grecian History*.\(^ {29}\)

There are probably several reasons underlying the strong interest in histories during the eighteenth century.\(^ {30}\) One factor is that the wars of this period, including the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-14), the Anglo-Spanish War (1727-29) and the Seven Years’ War (1756-1763), had contributed to the buoyancy of the historical market. It was not unusual for historians to cover recent and even contemporary events — Goldsmith continued his *Letters from a Nobleman* to the start of George III’s reign and the *History of England* to the death of George II — and, consequently, their works had the potential to fuel the spirit of patriotism. Gauging from the flurry of texts that appeared on the book market that offered insight into the late wars, including the *Martial Review; or, a General History of the Late Wars* (1763) and the *Present State of the British Empire in Europe, America, Africa and Asia* (1768) — projects which Goldsmith had been involved in — it is reasonable to assume that conflicts excited much interest and concern for histories.

The strong link between wars and histories may also be discerned from the establishment of the regius professorships in modern history at Cambridge and Oxford universities in 1724 by George I (1660-1727), following the War of the Spanish Succession and just a few years prior to the outbreak of the Anglo-Spanish War. As recognised by David McKitterick, these chairs were ‘designed with more complex ends


\(^{28}\) Ibid., pp. 148-51.


\(^{30}\) Unfortunately, there exists no modern study that provides a comprehensive list of history sales during the mid and late eighteenth century. However, Karen O’Brien notes that the demand for national histories ‘echoed loudly in the ears of booksellers’ by the 1750s and ‘particularly’ after the Seven Years’ War. See O’Brien’s ‘The History Market in Eighteenth-Century England’, p. 113.
in sight’ compared to other like posts and were ‘inspired as much by nationalist sentiments as by educational needs’.\textsuperscript{31} Indeed, the king’s initial communiqué concerning their establishment places emphasis on the need for the better teaching of history for the sake of producing ‘learned and able Men’ capable of serving the ‘Publick both in Church and State’ and to break free from the trend of employing ‘Persons of foreign Nations’ to educate and tutor Britain’s ‘Youth, both at Home and in their Travels’.\textsuperscript{32} Unlike other professorships, the regius chairs in history were intimately related to the world of diplomacy and questions of national identity and patriotism.

Importantly, even from the larger public’s perspective, ‘history was perceived to be bound up with national prestige’, more so than any other kinds of literature.\textsuperscript{33} Tellingly, when Hume’s histories were published, they were touted as having arrested the deplorable ebb that English historiography was perceived to have been languishing in. ‘Our writers had commonly so ill succeeded in history’, wrote a reviewer in 1761, ‘the Italians, and even the French had so long continued our acknowledged superiors, that it was almost feared that the British genius, which had so happily displayed itself in every other kind of writing, and gained the prize in most, yet could not enter in this.’ ‘The historical work Mr Hume has published’, he continued ‘discharged our country from this opprobrium’.\textsuperscript{34} Histories not only communicated the spirit of patriotism but was seen as another means to establish Britain’s superiority over her cultural contenders.

Another reason for the popularity of historical works lies in the fact that many were consciously designed to appeal towards the rapidly growing non-scholarly, middle-class readership. Britain in the eighteenth century was perceptibly transforming into a ‘nation of shopkeepers’, and aided by the lapsing of previous restrictions, such as the Licensing Act of 1662 and the loss of the Stationers’ Company of its monopoly on printing in the same year, print became incorporated into the wider social dynamic.\textsuperscript{35}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{32} \textit{The Historical Register}, October 1724, pp. 291-93.
\end{thebibliography}
Necessarily, even if they may not have been able to directly dabble in the world of macro-politics or scholarship — as noted by O’Brien, narrative history had traditionally ‘played an important role in the education of gentlemen and men of affairs’ — many authors touted the relevance of histories to the everyday ‘man’.36 In an essay of 1744, titled Nouvelles considerations sur l’histoire, Voltaire emphasised the value of histories to those approaching it as a ‘citizen’ and ‘philosopher’. Far from seeing it as a stuffy, antiquarian endeavour, he strongly championed the need for historical works to satisfy the ‘curiosity’ of the wider readership by revealing the larger socio-political context; a declaration that was put into practice later in his Essai:

Voilà déjà un des objets de la curiosité de quiconque veut lire l’histoire en citoyen et en philosophe. Il sera bien loin de s’en tenir à cette connaissance; il recherchera quel a été le vice radical et la vertu dominante d’une nation; pourquoi elle a été puissante ou faible sur la mer; comment et jusqu’à quell point elle s’est enrichie depuis un siècle; les registres des exportations peuvent l’apprendre. Il voudra savoir comment les arts, les manufactures, se sont établies; il suivra leur passage et leur retour d’un pays dans un autre. Les changements dans les mœurs et dans les lois seront enfin son grand objet… En vain je lis les annals de France; nos historiens se taisent tous sur ces details. Aucun n’a eu pour devise, Homo sum, humani nil a me alienum puto. Il faudrait donc, me semble, incorporer avec art ces connaissances utiles dans le tissu des événements. Je crois que c’est la seule manière d’écrire l’histoire modern en vrai politique et en vrai philosophe.37

Hume was much in accord with the guiding, historiographical spirit of Voltaire and appreciated the importance — as was recognised by Philip Hicks — of ‘writing for a large and immediate… readership’.38 Accordingly, he made use of ‘new’ subject matters rather than focusing on minute, political details that could serve only as a practical guide to a limited number of political insiders. Notably, he recognised the importance of discussing the arts, manners and economy to trace the conditions leading

to social change. Mark Phillips contrasts Hume’s work with the classical tradition by describing the latter as having been preoccupied by the study of public actions by political men, while Hume was a ‘pioneer in the study of political economy’ and other, hitherto, neglected subjects, who initiated a ‘philosophical’ approach to history that gave the genre ‘new depth and meaning’.  

It was this increasing recognition of the need to appeal to the non-specialist, general readership that opened the way for a particular kind of historian, of which Goldsmith was a number, to successfully emerge: that of the historical compiler. While early in the century, the word ‘history’ was still definable as ‘an account of things we have seen’ and the narrative historian was assumed to be a kind of eye witness, there was a growing sense of acceptance and appreciation for works that had been compiled from readily accessible sources by those who had the gift of writerly competence, rather than that of an impressive political or antiquarian resume. In a context where the historical readership was shifting towards — as was put by Hume — ‘the greatest part of ourselves, who have neither leisure nor inclination for such a laborious and disagreeable study’, value was placed upon writers who could render more concise information already known by the majority, rather than those able to add to the existing tomes of knowledge through original research.

Goldsmith was sensible of such sentiments, and even prior to engaging in his first English history, he composed the preface attached to the *Martial Review*, wherein he unabashedly presented the work as having involved a process of filtration. ‘The following is an attempt,’ he wrote, ‘to separate what is substantial and material, from what is circumstantial and useless, in history.’ Far from prioritising newness and contentiousness, he promoted the text as including only ‘matters of fact’; a deliberate move intended to distance it from the kind of history writing that was prevalent in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, which were marked by prolixity and fuelled by factious tediousness, being deeply mired in the politics of the Civil War and (1642-1651) and the Glorious Revolution (1688). Unlike the chroniclers of the preceding

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century, who were mostly Oxford churchmen pursuing an explicit High Church Tory, and even a non-juring programme, writing for their fellow, political elites, there was a conscious recognition that the modern ‘historian’ needed to submit himself — however insincere it may have been — as a sort of political ‘outsider’, who could produce an easily accessible work for the wider public.

According to our modern sensibilities, which have been strongly influenced by the historiographical outlook of Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886), who strongly advocated the need for original archival research and thorough source criticism, the seeming modesty of the historical compiler’s ethos may render it difficult to accept the likes of Goldsmith as having been ‘proper’ historians.\(^43\) Indeed, upon reading William Cooke’s account of Goldsmith’s manner of compiling the *Letters from a Nobleman*, we may be inclined to believe that such projects required little authorly commitment and attention:

His [Goldsmith’s] manner of compiling this History [*Letters from a Nobleman*] was as follows: — he first read in a morning, from Hume, Rapin, and sometimes Kennet, as much as he designed for one letter, marking down the passages referred to on a sheet of paper, with remarks. He then… spent the day generally convivially… and when he went up to bed took up his books and paper with him, where he generally wrote the chapter, or the best part of it, before he went to rest. This latter exercise cost him very little trouble, he said; for having all his materials ready for him, he wrote it with as much facility as a common letter.\(^44\)

However, the lack of archival research should not dissuade us from treating Goldsmith’s histories seriously. Not only were compilers of this time uninterested in the rigorous study of obscure documents and manuscripts, but even indisputably well-regarded historians, such as Hume, were averse to such. ‘My narration is rapid’, Hume wrote in 1754 regarding his English history: ‘I have proposed as my model the concise manner of the ancient historians than the “prolix”, tedious style of some modern compilers. I have inserted no original papers, and entered into no detail of minute,

\(^{43}\) For more information concerning Ranke’s historical methodology and practice, see Andreas Boldt’s ‘Ranke: objectivity and history’, *Rethinking History*, 18 (2014), 457-74.

\(^{44}\) William Cooke, ‘Table Talk’, *European Magazine and London Review*, 24 (1793), 91-95 (p. 94).
uninteresting facts.’ According to J.P. Kenyon, Hume ‘used the expected printed sources’ to write his histories and made little effort to examine manuscript collections ‘unless they were thrust under his nose’. Moreover, in a letter to the editor of Clarendon’s papers, Hume advised the publication of ‘only the more materials ones’ and assured him that historians ‘would not be displeased’ that he had spared ‘them a great deal of superfluous reading’. Incidentally, according to an anecdote published after his death, when someone ‘hinted that David had neglected an authority he ought to have consulted’, the author allegedly replied: ‘Why, mon, David read a vast deal before he set about a piece of his book; but his usual seat was the sofa, and he often wrote with his legs up; and it would have been unco’ fashious [a great bore] to have moved across the room when any little doubt appeared.’

Smollett too, who, unlike Hume, had taken the care to note his sources on the margins of his historical works, and thus displayed a sceptical approach towards his secondary materials, introduced his revised version of the Complete History of England (1757-58) in terms not far removed from the sentiments of his philosopher friend. As such, in its prefatory introduction, he explained that his purpose was to ‘compile an history, not to compose a dissertation’ by avoiding ‘all useless disquisitions, which serve only to swell the size of the volume, interrupt the thread of the narrative, and perplex the reader’. Rather than pretending to have ‘discovered any authentic records which have escaped the notice of other historians’, or to ‘have thrown such lights upon particular facts, as much alter the received opinions of mankind, touching the material circumstances of the narration’, he made clear that he was merely seeking to ‘retrench the superfluities of his predecessors, and to present the Public with a succinct, candid,

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48 As noted by Jeremy Lewis, the History was a ‘monumental task which took a terrible toll on Smollett’s health and his social life’. ‘I have just finished the third volume of the History, and am sick as ever an alderman was of turtle,’ Smollett told William Huggins in April 1757. And a month later he apologised to John Moore for not having replied sooner, but he had been tired by ‘the hurry and fatigue to which I have been exposed in bringing out my History of England’. See Lewis’ Tobias Smollett (London: Jonathan Cape, 2003), p. 139.
and complete History of [England], which will be more easy in purchase, more agreeable in the perusal, and less burthensome to the memory’. 49

The boundary lying in-between the ‘proper’ historian and compiler was, as such, hazy at best. And in a context where history writing was still firmly under the guardianship of the commercial press and was yet to come under the protective care of the academic community, compilations were able to successfully compete on the market alongside works, such as Voltaire’s Essai, which involved more thorough research. In addition to the those by Goldsmith, it is pertinent to remember that Smollett’s histories — self-professed compilations par excellence — were among the top-sellers during this time. 50 On September 1758, Smollett proudly informed Dr John Moore (1729-1802) that the weekly sale of the revised version of his Complete History of England had increased to over ten thousand. 51 And according to Robert Anderson this history in pamphlet form, along with its Continuation (1763) cleared a total of two-thousand pounds. 52 Moreover, Hume wrote to Millar on 6 April 1758, extending his sympathy towards this bookseller for having the sales of his first two volumes of the History of England affected by the ‘extraordinary run’ upon Smollett’s Complete History of England. 53 It is, perhaps, without exaggeration that one may claim that this was the golden age of historical compilations. Moreover, it is evident that Goldsmith’s methodological approach was in line with his contemporaries, thus suggesting the need to treat his histories with the sensitivity that has been granted to the works of more well-established Enlightenment luminaries.

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Despite the popularity of compiled histories during the mid and late-eighteenth century and Goldsmith’s success as a historical compiler and his acquiescence with the methodological practices of the period, in more recent times the public recollection of

Goldsmith as a historian has waned. Of the recent commemorative pieces dedicated to him in England and Ireland, no mention is made of his engagement in the field of historical writing. On a plaque fixed to a red-bricked building on Peckham Road, in the London Borough of Southwark, he is described as having been a ‘Flamboyant playwright’, and as the author of *She Stoops to Conquer*.54 Similarly, the refurbished gravestone of the author — located in Middle Temple — which was revealed in 2004, only acknowledges him as having been a poet, novelist and playwright, and as the creator of *The Deserted Village, The Vicar of Wakefield* and *She Stoops to Conquer*. And at the base of the refreshingly beautiful statue of Goldsmith that was sculpted by Éamonn O’Doherty (1939-2011), and, which was unveiled in 1999 before the town library of Ballymahon, County Longford, where it is still situated, the following inscription can be read, along with a passage from *The Traveller*:

> Born in Pallas in 1728, the great poet, dramatist and novelist lived in Lissoy in 1730, then in Ballymahon for three years, before emigrating to Edinburgh in 1752. In 1755 he went on a walking tour of Belgium, France, Switzerland and Italy. He settled in London in 1756 and embarked on his writing career. He died there on 1774.

Notably, it has not only been in the realm of popular remembrance that an appreciation of Goldsmith’s productivity as a historical compiler has diminished. Since the late-eighteenth century, the majority of biographers and modern Goldsmith scholars have tended to either disregard his histories in their studies or assert that they are materials of little import. Michael Griffin, in the *Enlightenment in Ruins* (2013), determined that they could not ‘always be taken at face value, or read as though they consistently reflected Goldsmith’s own political views’.55 And more recently, Norma Clarke, in the *Brothers of the Quill* (2016), engaged very little with Goldsmith’s historical outputs, and, instead, much like Griffin, focused largely upon his poetic and literary accomplishments. Indeed, only one passing reference to Goldsmith’s activity as

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54 Presumably the building to which the plaque is fixed stands upon the site where Dr Milner’s school once stood, where Goldsmith had spent his earlier years as a tutor.  
a ‘historian’ is made, wherein she noted how he had ‘drew heavily’ from Smollett’s work to ‘write his own history of England’.  

Against such a backdrop, it is the contention of this study that a re-examination of Goldsmith’s histories has been long overdue; that by showing the appropriate sensitivity to the historical context, and by taking into consideration a larger pool of information, it is possible to resuscitate their reputation as sources valuable in their own right and necessary to the better understanding of the author. Goldsmith was not only a literary genius, able — in the words of Johnson — to render anything he touched as ‘agreeable as a Persian tale’ but was a polymathic thinker who approached his role as a historical compiler with sincerity and seriousness. It will be demonstrated that the histories reveal him to have been a perceptive author who tactfully engaged with issues that troubled and intrigued many of his fellow writers and intellectuals. By acknowledging his status as such, it will be possible to create a more complex portrait of Goldsmith — just as Ashley Marshall has done for Jonathan Swift in her investigation into his historical works — and bring Goldsmithian studies ever closer to the wider field of Enlightenment scholarship.  

Towards this end, the first chapter will begin by outlining in greater detail the tendency that has been growing amongst critics, commentators, biographers and academics, since the latter half of the eighteenth century, to demote the Letters from a Nobleman, the Roman History, the History of England and the Grecian History as inconsequential works. It will be acknowledged how this downward trend was likely due, in part, to the shifting notions of literature as a category in the nineteenth century. In contrast, it will be noted how the value of Goldsmith’s poetic and literary compositions has been elevated by the recognition that they provide a useful portal into the author’s mindset concerning his socio-political inclinations and Irish sensitivities. Griffin’s work of 2013 will be then recognised as having drawn the strands of these two trends of thought together to explicitly propose that the key to Goldsmith lies in his more creative works. A challenge will be issued against this outlook, by pointing out that many of the assumptions underlying the dominant, dismissive attitudes towards the histories are contestable.

Following this defence of the value of Goldsmith’s histories, their contents will be investigated to unveil aspects of the author’s mindset and worldly attitudes. By comparing and contrasting the relevant passages with their source materials, it will be demonstrated that Goldsmith was not engaged in a monotonous and slavish activity of merely transferring words from one piece of paper to another but had conscientiously revised and moulded his lines to reflect his own proclivities and concerns.

Accordingly, in the second chapter, the *History of England* will be examined afresh, in order to discuss his socio-political outlook. Attention will be directed to this particular compilation, as there has been some confusion regarding whether it was composed under the influence of party biases. After taking into account the abuse Goldsmith faced upon its publication in the contemporary newspapers for allegedly harbouring untoward Tory and Jacobite sympathies, or feelings along such lines, it will be asserted that, while he did hold deep Tory proclivities and a strengthening sense of aversion towards the Whig party, he exercised much effort to restrain them, and instead, sought to write impartially upon the Whig and Tory divide, the Jacobites and George II. Unlike certain historians who had only paid lip-service to the standard claim to objectivity, Goldsmith was an author who had earnestly sought to write a balanced account of the past. However, his history was not without a socio-political ‘slant’. He intended to use the *History of England* as a platform to warn his readers, with greater consistency and firmness, of the dangers they yet faced as a nation, and to prescribe a solution to such perceived threats: that there was a dire need for an equitable distribution of wealth amongst the useful members of society.

In the third chapter, the *Letters from a Nobleman* and the *History of England* will be considered in a bid to reach a clearer understanding of Goldsmith’s stance towards Ireland and the Irish; a subject that has been fraught with controversy. To this extent, firstly, Goldsmith’s non-historical writings and engagements, along with anecdotal evidence, will be considered, by the means of which it will be shown that Goldsmith increasingly valued a sense of English identity. Following this, the attempts that were being made to better the historical image of Ireland during the eighteenth century by the likes of Charles O’Conor (1710-1791) and John Curry (1702/3-1780) will be referred to as a prerequisite to appreciating the significance of certain depictions and discussions of the country and Irishmen Goldsmith made in his two English histories. Then, it will be demonstrated how the *Letters from a Nobleman* and the
History of England reveal that while Goldsmith was unsupportive of O’Conor and Curry’s revisionist projects, and sought, in 1771, to present himself with greater vigour as a staunch British patriot, there was enough of an Irishman left in him that he could not help but betray in his later compilation a sense of concern and pride for his home country, and to forward Ireland’s cause to be treated as an equal partner within the British empire.

Lastly, in the fourth chapter, a topic that has received surprisingly little critical interest will be investigated by utilising all four of Goldsmith’s historical compilations: that of the author’s career-long religious sensibilities. During the eighteenth century, there was a split between those who challenged aspects of the religious belief system and those who resisted such innovations. Within this context, it will be argued that Goldsmith was ever situated in-between these polar opposites; that he was a writer who combined a deep and even an increasing sense of religiosity with grounded realism and open-mindedness. Then, his attitude towards Catholicism and the Catholics will be studied. It will be shown that his approach towards this religious group and its adherents was mixed. On the one hand, he was progressively more in line with the conventional, sectarian outlook. On the other hand, he never slipped into the extreme to become a Protestant bigot. Following this, in the third section, his approach towards Judaism and the Jews will be examined. It will be asserted that while he was never able to fully divorce himself from the prevalent anti-Semitic sentiments of the time, he was, nonetheless, always ready to denounce the acts of violence and mistreatment that the Jews had been subjected to historically. To conclude, it will be proposed that Goldsmith was fundamentally a worldly Christian and Protestant: that he was thinker who could not escape from the religious confines of his time but remained determined to appeal for calm and reasonableness, for the sake of social cohesion and strength.

And, in the final segment of this thesis, a general portrait of Goldsmith as a professional writer will be derived from the findings of the earlier chapters. By recognising the sensitivity and tact with which he approached socio-political, Irish and religious matters in his historical compilations, it will be asserted that he should be upheld as having stood as a grounded patriot: as one who never radically or abrasively veered from the conventional mode of thinking, but, nevertheless, grappled with the larger problems of society to encourage national stability and power. A far cry from the previously popular notion that he was primarily a muddling sentimentalist. Although
the primary aim of this thesis is to argue for the distinct value of the histories, a brief coda will also be included as to how, once proper account of Goldsmith’s histories as valuable materials is taken, they can indicate possible future avenues of research.
1. Once More unto the Breach: Goldsmith’s Reputation as ‘Historian’

Introduction

Oliver Goldsmith was born on 10 November 1728 at Pallas, near Ballymahon, in County Westmeath, Ireland; the second son and fifth child of Charles Goldsmith (1690-1747) and his wife, Ann (d. 1770). In 1730, his father became the rector of Kilkenny West, and, subsequently, moved along with his family to a house situated outside the neighbouring village of Lissoy. There he spent his formative years, and when he was about six, was placed under the care of the village schoolmaster, Thomas Byrne, a veteran who had served in Spain during the reign of Queen Anne. Following this, he attended a series of schools in Elphin, Athlone and Edgeworthstown, before being enrolled in Trinity College, Dublin, as a sizar, where he was placed under the supervision of Dr Theaker Wilder (1717-1778), the first Regius Professor of Greek. While his time in Dublin was tumultuous — his relationship with his tutor was strained, and, in 1747, he was ‘publicly admonished’ for his role in the riot that took place before the Black Dog (Newgate Prison) — he managed in February 1750 to graduate as a Bachelor of Arts. Following this, after several false starts towards a career as a clergyman and lawyer, he set out for Edinburgh in 1752 to study medicine, and eventually found himself touring the continent, before arriving in England on 1756. Upon establishing himself in London, he struggled as an apothecary’s assistant and tutor, before being introduced to Ralph Griffiths (1720?-1803), the proprietor of the *Monthly Review*, in the spring of 1757. From this point onwards, he laboured assiduously as an anonymous hack until he leapt into literary stardom with the publication of *The Traveller* in 1764. His industriousness did not cease, and until his death in 1774, he continued to produce numerous works in various fields of writing.

Of the many genres that he had engaged with, Goldsmith was especially productive in the business of compiling histories. Within a span of roughly ten years, he managed to produce two extended works of national history, the *Letters from a Nobleman* (1764) and the *History of England* (1771), along with his *Roman History* (1769) and the *Grecian History* (1774). These texts were designed to be readable,

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1 Goldsmith’s exact date and place of birth has been long contested, but there is good reason to believe that he was born on the 1728 at Pallas; the reason for which is laid out by James Prior in his *Life of Oliver Goldsmith, M.B.*, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1838), I, 14-15.
general narratives, comprised of familiar historical truths, rather than studies of an original, specialist nature. As such, in composing them, he resorted to reputable and readily accessible, published materials. For his first English history, he read Paul de Rapin-Thoyras’ *Histoire d’Angleterre* (1723-1725); Voltaire’s *Essai sur les Mœurs et l’esprit des Nations* (1756); Tobias Smollett’s *Complete History of England* (1757-1758) and its *Continuation* (1763); David Hume’s *History of England* (1754-1761); and Edmund Burke’s ‘The History of the Present War’, which was published in the first four volumes of the *Annual Register* in 1758, 1759, 1760 and 1761. And in working upon his later compilation of 1771, he not only revisited the texts of Smollett and Hume, but also reincorporated many lines from the *Letters from a Nobleman*. As for his history of Rome, he relied primarily upon Laurence Echard’s *Roman History* (1695); an immensely popular work that went through ten editions by 1734 and was twice issued in French. Then, in drawing up his history of Greece, he engaged heavily with Temple Stanyan’s *Grecian History*, which was first published in 1707 and was, for some decades, considered to be the standard work on the subject. Also, he made good use of Charles Rollin’s *Ancient History of the Egyptians, Carthaginians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Medes and Persians, Grecians and Macedonians* (1730-1738); especially for the section concerning the life, exploits and death of Alexander the Great (356-323 B.C.).

The result of Goldsmith’s careful studying of secondary sources was the creation of commercially successful histories. While he never publicly acknowledged the *Letters from a Nobleman* as being the product of his pen, it must have pleased him that its authorship was successively attributed to Lord Chesterfield (1694-1773), the Earl of Orerry (1729-1764) and Lord George Lyttelton (1709-1773). This work, along with his other histories, went through numerous editions and translations in quick succession and retained their presence on the market well into the nineteenth century. However, the popularity of Goldsmith’s histories and their dissemination in multiple languages, did not necessarily ensure their critical appraisal or acceptance into that exclusive fraternity of canonical works. Indeed, their reception and assessment by contemporaries and nineteenth-century commentators was varied, and the dominant

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attitude towards them by modern biographers and academics has since tended towards that of uninterest or dismissal.

In this chapter, the progressive steps towards this decline in the appreciation of these works will be traced in detail, and it will be shown how, in contrast, his poetic and literary compositions have come to overshadow them. Reflections upon the histories’ eventual dismissal will be touched upon too. Then, Michael Griffin’s study of 2013, the *Enlightenment in Ruins*, will be referred to as having drawn the inevitable conclusion from this trend of thought to explicitly propose the justness of viewing the historical compilations as contrastable from Goldsmith’s ‘more creative works’. Against this backdrop, an attempt will be made to defend and reassert the value of the histories. To this extent, it will be shown how much of the underlying presumptions concerning them are riddled with problems.

**Fading into obscurity**

In 1757, Hume expressed to his London publisher, William Strahan (1715-1785), his belief that histories were ‘the most popular kind of writing of any’. 5 Indeed, during the eighteenth century, in Britain, there was a demand by the steadily growing reading public for texts that dealt with the past or described themselves as ‘histories’. Among them, there was a healthy appetite for compilations that were intended for youths and adults, which dealt with the general history of the ancient, classical civilisations and that of England; written with an eye towards accessibility and comprehensiveness, rather than that of erudition and originality. There was such a demand for these works that even Hume, momentarily embattled, had described himself to William Robertson as standing ‘immediately under Dr Smollett’ — one of the most successful compilers of his time — near ‘the historical summit of Parnassus’.6 Accordingly, Goldsmith was moving into a realm of great opportunity when he began work on his national, Roman and Grecian histories.

Yet, from the beginning, there was a mixed reception towards Goldsmith’s histories. On the one hand, there were sympathetic accounts that ranged from praise to

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guarded approval. Contemporary critics of both the Critical and Monthly Review conceded that the Letters from a Nobleman was a tolerable introductory work, despite its flaws and limitations. With regards to the Roman History, the reviewer for the Critical Review acknowledged the work as being ‘the best and most complete abridgement of the kind for the use of gentlemen’. Later, this approval was transposed to the abridgement of the same work in the periodical’s April issue of 1773. A similarly encouraging, albeit brief, account of the work was also printed in the Town and Country Magazine, which described the history as ‘elegantly written and well digested.’ The History of England was also warmly received by a critic writing in the Critical Review, who declared not knowing any work in which ‘the English history is so usefully, so elegantly, and agreeably epitomised.’ And, while noting signs of a ‘hasty production’, a contributor to the same magazine admitted that the Grecian History was a ‘faithful and distinct account of transactions’ that was ‘written with no inconsiderable degree of perspicuity.’

Alternatively, following the release of The Traveller, there were other reviews that attacked Goldsmith’s histories in a manner that both explicitly and implicitly referred to his recognised status as a poet. A reviewer critiqued the Roman History in the Monthly Review as a work plagued by ‘fabulous facts’, erroneous reasoning, and a narrative that was ‘confused, contradictory, unintelligible.’ In conclusion, he expressed regret that ‘the Author of the Traveller, one of the best poems that has appeared since those of Mr. Pope, should not apply wholly to works of imagination.’ This sentiment was later recalled in a review of the Grecian History, in which the critic remarked upon his disappointment at seeing ‘a good poet degenerate into a bad compiler of historical epitomes.’ He even assured his readers of the ‘propriety’ of such a reflection by referring to Goldsmith’s own, supposed admission of the lowly regard with which he held the business of compiling, by referring to some lines found in his posthumously

8 ‘V. The Roman History… Pr. 12s. bound. Davies.’, Critical Review, June 1769, p. 439.
published poem, the *Retaliation* (1774).\(^{14}\) Similarly, the *History of England* was lambasted earlier in the *Monthly Review* as a work riddled with errors; a compilation that was claimed to reveal the author’s ‘want of penetration and knowledge’, despite being ‘a man of genius and taste, as his poetical compositions have demonstrated’.\(^{15}\) Furthermore, a brief assessment of the *Grecian History*, found in the *Westminster Magazine*, suggestively asserted that the work was undertaken ‘by the author to relieve a temporary exigence’.\(^{16}\)

Admittedly, the poor relationship that existed between Griffiths and Goldsmith, which was instigated in 1759 by a misunderstanding over some unpaid debts that the latter owed the former, may have affected the *Monthly Review*’s generally hostile approach towards Goldsmith’s histories. However, it is pertinent to recognise that even Goldsmith’s intimates and acquaintances were divided in their assessment of these works. Such is perfectly reflected in James Boswell’s account of an exchange that took place between himself and Samuel Johnson when the latter included history as a subject in which he considered Goldsmith to stand ‘in the first class.’ While an incredulous Boswell was of the opinion that Hume, William Robertson and Lord Lyttelton were superior historians, his interlocutor was adamant that such was not the case. While admitting that he had not read Hume’s *History of England*, Johnson asserted that ‘Goldsmith’s [Roman] History is better than the *verbiage* of Robertson, or the foppery of Dalrymple.’ The ability of Goldsmith to ‘put into his book as much as his book will hold’ and to write in a plain and pleasing style was contrasted with Robertson’s tendency to detain his reader ‘a great deal too long’ with ‘cumbrous detail’. Boswell was not convinced, and concluded the account by mentioning how “it is probable that Dr Johnson, who owned that he often ‘talked for victory’, rather urged plausible objections to Dr Robertson’s excellent historical works, in the ardour of contest, than expressed his real and decided opinion; for it is not easy to suppose, that he should so widely differ from the rest of the literary world.”\(^{17}\)


\(^{15}\) ‘ART. V *The History of England*… 8vo. 4 vols. 11. 1s. boards. Davies, Becket, &c. 1771.’, *ibid.*, December 1771, p. 439.


It is worthwhile noting here that the other friends of Goldsmith, who were, perhaps, not as aggressively opinionated as Boswell and Johnson, were individually at an impasse too, when it came to evaluating Goldsmith’s contributions as a historical compiler. Accordingly, Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792), with whom Goldsmith developed an especially close friendship, following their initial meeting in 1761, only hurriedly, and in passing, referred to the histories in the character sketch he drew up for Goldsmith sometime in 1776. While he generously included the *Letters from a Nobleman* and the *History of England* in the list of prose specimens that he considered to have been written in a ‘captivating’ and ‘lively’ style, it is evident that he felt greater comfort in lauding Goldsmith’s poetic achievements; in particular, that of *The Traveller*, which he waxed attention on as being a ‘well-polished gem’ that could have, by itself, entitled its creator ‘to a place in the Poets’ Corner.’\(^{18}\) Much in the same vein, it is observable that Thomas Davies (who was acquainted with Goldsmith on both a personal and professional basis) was somewhat ambivalent towards the histories; as may be discerned from his *Memoirs of Garrick* (1780). Although he favourably described the *Letters from a Nobleman* as ‘an elegant summary of British transactions’, and the *History of England* as ‘an excellent abridgement of Hume, and other copious historians’, he opined that these projects had been undertaken by Goldsmith at the instigation of the booksellers, rather than by his own initiative. Moreover, he explicitly referred to the *Grecian History* as having been worked upon by Goldsmith in order to relieve ‘his necessities’, after he had dissipated the money he had gained from *She Stoops of Conquer*.\(^{19}\)

For the remainder of the eighteenth century and that of the nineteenth, the appreciation of Goldsmith’s histories continued to hang in the balance. Much like the situation that prevailed during Goldsmith’s lifetime, certain writers were willing to give relatively favourable estimations of them, while others were inclined to be more disparaging. Amongst the former were the likes of Robert Anderson (1750-1830), a physician with literary interests, who described the *Letters from a Nobleman* in the tenth volume of the *Works of the British Poets* (1795) as a work that had ‘a very rapid sale,’ and which ‘continues to be esteemed one of the most useful introductions of that

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19 Thomas Davies, ‘Thomas Davies on Goldsmith’s life and art, in *Memoirs of the Life of David Garrick, Esq... in Two Volumes*’, in *ibid.*, pp. 191-98 (pp. 194-95, 196).
sort to the study of our history."^20 Similarly, John Watkins (1786-1831), in the *Characteristic Anecdotes of Men of Learning and Genius* (1808), lauded the same text as a ‘useful and pleasing little work’ that was ‘very well received and passed for a long time as the performance of Lord Lyttelton.’^21 And William Spalding, in his memoir of Goldsmith, which was attached to the *Poetical Works of Oliver Goldsmith* (1866), acknowledged it as being one of the poet’s ‘principal publication’, which was ‘small and pleasant’, and had achieved ‘popularity at once’. Also, he guardedly referred to the *Roman History* as being ‘agreeable’, albeit ‘superficial’.^22 Furthermore, Walter Scott (1771-1832), in his account of Goldsmith, found in the *Biographical and Critical Notes of Eminent Novelists* (1827), mentioned his ‘Abridgements of the History of Rome and England’ as outputs ‘eminently well calculated to introduce youth to the knowledge of their studies; for they exhibit the most interesting and striking events, without entering into controversy or dry detail.’^23

On the other hand, voices to the contrary, expressing unwillingness to fully assimilate the histories as part of Goldsmith’s oeuvre remained relevant. Thomas Percy (1728-1811), a writer and Church of Ireland bishop of Dromore, and an acquaintance of Goldsmith, was one such individual. In his extended biographical memoir of Goldsmith, which was the first of its kind and was published only in 1801, while he commended the compilations for their ‘elegant and enchanting style’, he was convinced that his friend should be remembered as a poet, first and foremost, as he was of the opinion that ‘nothing could exceed the patient and incessant revisal’ that had been bestowed upon his verse compositions. Subsequently, he referred to the *Letters from a Nobleman* as one of the works that was ‘scribbled with all possible dispatch’ for the sake of his ‘present subsistence’, while he had ‘bestowed his choicest hours’ upon “his admirable poem, ‘The Traveller,’” which ‘he meant should establish his fame’. Likewise, he described the *Roman History* and its abridgement, and the *History of England* as interim engagements that had been undertaken for his ‘present support at the instance of the booksellers,’ while he prepared “to take a more successful flight in

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his fine poem of ‘The Deserted Village’”. Moreover, although he conceded that these later, historical texts were ‘elegantly written, and highly calculated to attract and interest young readers,’ he attacked them for being ‘often superficial and inaccurate.’

Similarly, James Prior (1790-1869), a ship’s surgeon and biographer from Lisburn, County Antrim, consistently suggested and referred to Goldsmith’s histories as lesser engagements in his extensively researched, biographical account of the author, which was first published in 1837. While he noted that the *Letters from a Nobleman* was a popular work that adequately provided instructions from ‘a comprehensive view of the whole’ of history, he saw errors in names, dates and minor points, which ‘it would have required little trouble to correct’, as being indicative of the lack of ‘sufficient reference to larger preceding works’ and the ‘haste’ with which it was composed. Also, he exclaimed against the *Roman History* as having been a project designed to be more a ‘source of profit, than of fame’; that, in contrast to his ‘works of genius’, it was a production ‘of less original character’ that only required the stringing together of materials at hand. Along the same line, he passingly referred to its abridgement as having been ‘intended merely for schools, and therefore executed only as a matter of trade, not of inclination.’ Furthermore, he criticised — albeit, in a delicate manner — the *History of England* for being, as he perceived it to be, the product of a recycling spree, wherein Goldsmith had reused numerous passages from his earlier English history of 1764. Doing so, Prior opined, saved its creator much ‘labour’. He even went so far to express relief that this compositional aspect of the text had passed ‘without observation’; that Goldsmith was ‘not reduced to the necessity of making public the avowal that such materials though seemingly borrowed were really his own.’

The reasons underlying the relatively lukewarm attitude with which Percy and Prior approached Goldsmith’s histories is difficult to discern. However, it is probable that it had much to do with the shifting perceptions regarding literature as a category. As noted by Barbara Benedict, forms of writing that had ‘become newly popular’ since the turn of the eighteenth century — as opposed to the ‘traditional genres’ of ‘plays,
histories, sermons, and poetry’ — ‘grew into maturity by its end, including newspapers, almanacs, jest books, a host of ephemeral printed forms from broadside songs to recipe books, and, most significantly, long prose fictions and miscellanies of topical poems.’\textsuperscript{27} Importantly, among them the novel was especially favoured by several notable authors, including Jane Austen, who promoted it as a production in which the ‘most thorough knowledge of human nature’ and ‘the liveliest effusions of wit and humour’ are ‘conveyed to the world in the best chosen language’.\textsuperscript{28} Against the backdrop of an ever growing appreciation for the usefulness of literary works in providing moral guidance, philosophical reflections and entertainment, it is possible that Percy and Prior were inclined to perceive Goldsmith’s compilations with less interest. Just as Austen had derided against the abilities of the ‘nine-hundredth abridger of the History of England’, they may have seen the histories as lacking in the creative genius and wit immediately evident in his poems, theatrical works and novel.\textsuperscript{29} 

To a large extent, it can be imagined that the two authoritative, nineteenth-century biographical texts on Goldsmith by Percy and Prior — along with the growing appreciation, within the field of history-writing, for original, scholarly research — deeply affected the mindset of those interested in the author to follow. Upon entering the twentieth century, not only do we encounter very little direct engagement with Goldsmith’s histories, but it is discernible that the majority of serious biographers were quite satisfied to dismiss them as marginal works. Accordingly, A. Lytton Sells, in his lengthy study of Goldsmith, which was first published in 1974, wrote of how these compilations were the creations of a ‘hack-writer’, with only an ‘ephemeral value’; a point which he drove home incessantly by reminding his readers again, in a later part of the book, that the histories were ‘no more than well-written potboilers.’\textsuperscript{30} Likewise, John Ginger, in his enquiry into Goldsmith’s life and writings, which was printed in 1977, asserted that the compiling of the \textit{History of England} had been a labour of convenience and financial necessity, that was worked upon as a means to avoid the strains of producing a new poetic masterpiece:

\textsuperscript{27} Barbara M. Benedict, ‘Readers, writers, reviewers, and the professionalization of literature’ in \textit{The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1740-1830}, ed. by Thomas Keymer and John Mee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 3-23 (pp. 12-13).
\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{30} Sells, \textit{Oliver Goldsmith}, pp. 365, 368.
In May 1770 there was more than one apparently good reason for taking leave of poetry. In the first place, its writing absorbed a great deal of his [Goldsmith] time and energy, and it was becoming more and more necessary for him to make money fast. With an eye on the large advances he could now command he had already postponed work on his study of natural history in order to embark on the History of England commissioned by Thomas Davies…31

Importantly, the lack of interest with which such biographers confronted Goldsmith’s historical writings was also shared by scholars from various fields of study during the same period. Munro MacLennan, in his rather unique, if not somewhat odd, approach towards the author, in which he speculated upon his potential colour blindness, derided them by quipping as to how the knowledge they contained ‘could not be other than secondhand’.32 Thomas Peardon too, in his influential work on the transition of English history writing from the late-eighteenth to the early-nineteenth century, tersely wrote of how Goldsmith was ‘still less of a historian’, as his ‘volumes were intended as compressed accounts for children’ that were ‘undistinguished except for style’.33 More recently, Karen O’Brien, in her examination of the narrative histories of the Enlightenment, which primarily focuses on the texts of Voltaire, Hume, Edward Gibbon (1737-1794), Robertson and David Ramsay (1749-1815) and their cosmopolitan approach, referred to Goldsmith fleetingly on only two occasions. In the first instance, she recognised him as having been among those daringly imaginative ‘writers of history’, who had ‘went so far as to employ the epistolary form traditionally associated with the novel in their historical works’. But what little ‘praise’ she yielded to him is overshadowed by the second remark she made, wherein he is noted as having been yet another embellisher of Hume: ‘Hume’s pathetic rendition of the martyrdom of Charles I was much imitated in the eighteenth century, not least by the more overtly sentimental Tory historian Oliver Goldsmith.’34 Incidentally, in her later essay of 2001, O’Brien described Goldsmith’s histories in a lacklustre fashion by noting them as

having been ‘watered-down philosophical’ outputs, and heavily implied that they were nothing more than ‘hackneyed or plagiarized’ works.\(^{35}\)

However, of all the studies of and references made to Goldsmith during the twentieth century, it is, perhaps, Ralph M. Wardle’s extended, scholarly work of 1957 on the author, which most clearly signals the extent to which the histories have come to be dominantly perceived as texts of little consequence. Although one can detect a greater open-mindedness towards these compilations than can found in the biographies of his predecessors, it is without doubt that he too was unable to consider them as materials of much value. Among Goldsmith’s other early engagements, the *Letters from a Nobleman* is implied to have ‘added nothing to his stature as a writer’, and its composition is described as having been ‘distinctly cavalier’. Similarly, in discussing the *History of England*, Wardle interpreted the preface attached to it as being indicative of Goldsmith’s own awareness of its questionable quality. And in introducing the *Roman History*, he only half-heartedly acknowledged it as a ‘smooth, fast-moving survey of the subject’, and, instead, remarked that since it was ‘so objectively written’, it ‘has little biographical interest.’ Also, he lambasted the *Grecian History* as being merely “another ‘compilation’”, which was likely unable to ‘satisfy the demands’ of Goldsmith’s ‘creative energies.’ Additionally, he suggested the possibility that Goldsmith had only given ‘half his mind to the task’ by referring to an anecdote concerning a conversation that had supposedly taken place between him and Gibbon: “…when Edward Gibbon happened into his [Goldsmith] rooms one day while he was writing, and Goldsmith asked him ‘the name of the Indian king who gave Alexander so much trouble,’ Gibbon supposedly replied, ‘Montezuma’; and Goldsmith would have written it into his text if Gibbon had not stopped him.”\(^{36}\)

As such, it is appreciable that, over time, Goldsmith’s histories have come to be increasingly shunned and pushed into the background. In contrast to this trend, the estimation of Goldsmith’s literary, poetic and theatrical works has gone from strength to strength. In particular, *The Citizen of the World* (1762), *The Traveller* (1764), *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), *The Deserted Village* (1770) and *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) have received much attention by modern academics as sources of intellectual


relevance, in addition to being creative masterpieces. One way in which these compositions have been turned to good use has been in challenging the influential notion that Goldsmith was, first and foremost, a sentimental writer. This understanding of him has had its proponents ever since the release of his first successful poem in 1764.

In reviewing *The Traveller* in 1765, the critic of the *Monthly Review* determined that ‘though our Author [Goldsmith] makes no great figure in political Philosophy, he does not fail to entertain us with his poetical descriptions’. Much in the same vein, an anonymous contributor to John Exshaw’s Dublin magazine provided a character sketch of Goldsmith, wherein he determined that the poet’s province lay in artistic ‘speculation’, and not in ‘grave researches and deep disquisitions’; for which reason, incidentally, he saw fit to remark that Goldsmith ‘ought not to have attempted to write history.’

And later, William Mudford (1782-1848), in his essay of 1804, opined that Goldsmith’s true greatness lay in his poems, which he asserted had the ability of ‘seizing upon the feelings of his readers.’

Against this perception of the author, Goldsmith’s artistic endeavours have proven to be most serviceable, to date, in re-asserting him as having been a politically and socially sensitive writer; as an active commentator on and mirror to events occurring within his milieu, and not merely as a skilled and emotional stylist. Howard Bell was able to contribute towards this resuscitation by claiming that in composing *The Deserted Village*, Goldsmith had a ‘very specific condition in mind’, and that it was ‘a document inspired by… a development which we call the commercial revolution’.

Later, Alfred Lutz furthered the work done by Bell, by demonstrating that the poem was the ‘clearest example of Goldsmith’s political work that had been progressively erased by the narrowing of the critical purview’; that it was, in fact, a radical piece that attacked the assumption underlying the eighteenth-century debate on parliamentary enclosures, in which writers on both sides of the argument tacitly accepted that the labouring masses could get by on unchanging, basic needs. Much in the same vein,

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37 *The Traveller; or a Prospect of Society, a Poem…* By Oliver Goldsmith, M.B. 4to. 1 s. 6 d. Newbery.’, *Monthly Review*, January 1765. p. 50.
38 ‘Short Character of Dr. Goldsmith.’, *Gentleman’s and London Magazine*, March 1773, pp. 170-73.
40 Howard J. Bell, Jr., ‘The Deserted Village and Goldsmith’s Social Doctrines’, *PMLA*, 59 (1944), 747-72 (pp. 748-49).
Tim Fulford pointed out that the work should be seen as an ‘argument’ that ‘blamed the landowning classes for letting their love of money overcome their traditional duty to those who lived on their estates’. And recently, Dustin Griffin did much to enhance and refine Goldsmith’s status as a ‘political writer and as a self-conscious patriot’ by revealing *The Deserted Village*, along with *The Traveller*, as having been spirited by an ‘ambition to speak out to an audience of his fellow Britons on matters of public moment’; to warn them of the lurking dangers of an imperial economy.

Other than *The Deserted Village*, Goldsmith’s other literary works too have been fruitful in yielding much in the way of encouraging readers to go beyond the antiquated acceptance that — as has been put by Richard Helgerson — the author was a ‘muddling sentimentalist’ with little thought towards socio-political matters.

Donald Davie, in his study of *The Traveller*, saw the poem as betraying Goldsmith’s position as a ‘fervent’ apologist for a monarchical form of government that could stand above all factional interests. And Tao Zhijian argued against the notion of an apolitical Goldsmith by reframing *The Citizen of the World* as a journalistic endeavour that ‘inevitably addressed the topical, political issues that appealed to coffee-house readers of London newspapers and magazines’. He saw the figure of Lien Chi Altangi as Goldsmith in disguise to express his political stance as a Tory loyalist opposing the Tory war policy for the sake of the empire’s well-being. Similarly, James Watt saw the same work as having provided a platform upon which its writer could extoll his belief in the ‘need to overcome the false consciousness of an unreflecting patriotism’; in other words, to adopt a more cosmopolitan outlook.

Also, Christopher Brooks identified *The Citizen of the World* as a calculated and reactionary text born from Goldsmith’s ‘awareness of social rank and of the desire of many people to break those ranks’ and to warn of the threat that this posed to ‘the reality of the individual’ and to

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‘the traditions of England itself’. Furthermore, Frank Donoghue demonstrated how *The Vicar of Wakefield* and *She Stoops to Conquer* were outlets that allowed Goldsmith to ‘brilliantly’ explore ‘taste as a volatile component of class instability.’

Along with aiding in the re-drawing of Goldsmith as a social and political commentator, his renowned literary outputs have also been instrumental in introducing the notion that his status as an Irishman had crucial implications upon his activity as an author. Previously, in the eighteenth century, very little consideration was given to this aspect of his background. Indeed, there were occasions in which readers assumed that the author was English. Such was the case of a review of *The Traveller* published in the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, where the critic saw in the description of England evidence of the author’s ‘warm love for his country’. On the rare occasion in which his Irishness was referred to, it was often merely done so, in order to account for his oddities in behaviour and disposition. As such, Boswell, in defending Goldsmith from the charge of being a fool, admitted that the poet had ‘no doubt a more than common share of that hurry of ideas which we often find in his countrymen, which sometimes produces a laughable confusion in expressing them.’ And Hester Lynch Piozzi (1741-1821), an acquaintance of Goldsmith, and an admirer of Johnson, complained in her diary of how Goldsmith had wandered into her apartment — but not her ‘Bed Chamber’, she was keen to point out — upon a visit, where he had allegedly examined ‘every Box upon the Toylet [sic], every Paper upon the Card Rack, every thing in short with an Impudence truly Irish.’

Upon entering the nineteenth century, greater efforts were made to seriously consider Goldsmith’s Irish ties; an undertaking largely brought on by the biographers’ recognition that many of Goldsmith’s canonical works contain details that pertain to his childhood years in Ireland. Percy was especially influential in promoting such an outlook, as he disseminated a corrected and abridged account of the author’s early life and character as told by his elder sister, Catharine Hodson, wherein it was asserted that

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50 ‘Extract from the TRAVELLER, or a Prospect of Society, by OLIVER GOLDSMITH, B.M.’, *Gentleman’s Magazine*, December 1764, p. 594.
select characters found in the *Deserted Village* and *The Citizen of the World* were faithful representations of their father, and that the plot of *She Stoops to Conquer* was based upon a misadventure her brother supposedly had on his way to school in County Longford.\(^{53}\) Perhaps, influenced by Catharine’s recollection, Washington Irving (1783-1859), in his biographical work on Goldsmith, which was first published on 1850, wrote that the poet ‘drew many of those pictures, rural and domestic, whimsical and touching, which abound throughout his works’ from his youthful experiences.\(^ {54}\) Along the same lines, David Masson (1822-1907), in a memoir of the poet that was prefixed to the Globe edition of the *Miscellaneous Works of Oliver Goldsmith* (1868), described Goldsmith’s two major poems, his theatrical productions, *The Vicar of Wakefield* and *The Citizen of the World* as ‘phantasies of what may be called reminiscence’. Moreover, he determined that it was Goldsmith’s ability to utilise his past in such a ‘charming’ fashion, to hang them ‘so sweetly in an ideal air’, which ‘proved what an artist he was, and was better than much that is commonly called invention.’\(^ {55}\)

Yet, despite the newfound appreciation amongst such writers of Goldsmith’s penchant for biographical injections, there still existed a healthy dose of scepticism regarding the extent to which his Irish background influenced him as an author. Accordingly, Masson, after waxing upon the author’s ability to interweave ‘reminiscence’ into his works, quipped that while ‘Goldsmith’s heart and genius were Irish’, in the ‘form and matter of his writings he was purposely English.’\(^ {56}\) Even James Joyce (1882-1941), in writing of Oscar Wilde in 1909, likened Goldsmith, along with other ‘Irish writers of comedy’, as having been a ‘court jester to the English’.\(^ {57}\) Also, in an earlier lecture given in 1907, on the political and cultural history of Ireland, Goldsmith was included in the coterie of ‘Irish writers who adopted the English language in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and almost forgot their native land’.\(^ {58}\) Furthermore, as noted by Griffin, W.B. Yeats (1865-1939) too initially considered Goldsmith as having been ‘too immersed in English matters and manners’.\(^ {59}\)

\(^{56}\) Ibid.
It should be remarked here, however, that both Joyce and Yeats were not wholly disparaging of Goldsmith as an Irish poet. The former, somewhat proudly and otherwise fatefully accepted that writers such as Goldsmith justly belong to the legacy of Ireland and reflected that only by embracing this could a new Ireland that is ‘whole, and complete, and definitive’ be realised.\(^60\) And the latter revised his stance on Goldsmith later, to uphold him as a ‘beacon of Irish Anglican wisdom’; an image that suited the increasing sense of dismay he felt ‘at what he saw as a prehensile, urban (and Catholic) turn in post-revolutionary Ireland’.\(^61\)

In recent times, the sense of reserve towards depicting Goldsmith as an Irish author has remained relatively intact. In introducing her compilation of Goldsmith’s letters, Katherine Balderston referred to the possibility that the author’s interest in returning to Ireland had waned as his career in London matured.\(^62\) Similarly, Wardle wrote of how Goldsmith ‘had outgrown Ireland and the sort of society he had known there.’\(^63\) Also, Alexander Jeffares depicted Goldsmith as ‘a solitary guest in England’ who could not think of Ireland as an imagined retreat following the death of his brother, Henry, in 1768; ‘the man he had loved better than most men’. The pervading sense of loneliness was seen to have spilled over into the text of *The Deserted Village*.\(^64\) Moreover, Seamus Deane saw Goldsmith’s ‘account of the passage from provincial pastoralism to urban frivolity and materialism’, as depicted in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, *The Deserted Village* and his essay of 1762, *The Revolution of Low Life*, to be ‘an amateur attempt to explain away the Irish-English tension which was at the heart of his experience.’\(^65\)

And lately, W.J. McCormack, in his essay of 2010, has cautioned against making a too ready association between Auburn of *The Deserted Village* with any particular Irish locale. To do so, in his opinion, was to align oneself dangerously with the train of ardent and romantic patriots, and to contribute to the narrowing of critical

\(^60\) Joyce, ‘Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages’, p. 174.
\(^63\) Wardle, *Oliver Goldsmith*, p. 87.
\(^64\) A. Norman Jeffares, ‘Goldsmith the good natured man’, *Hermanthena*, 119 (1975), 5-19 (pp. 18-19).
thought, wherein the poem would be erroneously parochialized, at the expense of being able to see certain descriptions as being potentially referential to many other places.66

Nevertheless, despite the enduring wariness of placing Goldsmith within an identifiable tradition of Irish writing, there have been some inroads made towards establishing him as an author who had harboured a discernibly Irish way of viewing the world; in a large part made feasible by reassessing his poetic endeavours. As such, Robert Seitz, through his reappraisal of *The Traveller* and *The Deserted Village* in 1937, was able to maintain that by the time Goldsmith had ‘arrived in England his mind and character had received almost unconsciously the stamp of the Irish die’. Whilst initially beset by a ‘sense of inferiority induced by a comparison between his own shortcomings and the moral assets of the English middle class’, he asserted that the poems evidence that the author was later able to assimilate these virtues with the ‘more attractive qualities of the Irish’ to create a utopic, hypothetical community of people around which Goldsmith built his social and political philosophy.67 Similarly, Declan Kiberd considered Goldsmith to be ‘more effortlessly national than many who painted their Irishness on from the outside.’ Towards this end, *The Deserted Village* is discussed as containing reflections of Ireland and paralleling the Irish poetic model where nostalgia and protest were combined.68 And John Lucas, in 1990, argued that Goldsmith had exploited his ‘double vision, that of an Anglo-Irish writer’ in composing *The Traveller* to ‘open up questions about the kind of patriotism’ which was ‘rooted in Tory monarchism’.69 Furthermore, Griffin discerned from his reading of *The Traveller* and *The Deserted Village* Goldsmith’s situation as an Irishman “who never quite felt at ‘home’ in his adopted England”; as a ‘half a patriot’ who represented a ‘branch of the loyal but doubting Opposition’.70

It is pertinent to add here that, much in the same vein, Norma Clarke, in her extended work on Goldsmith of 2016, *Brothers of the Quill*, has lately furthered and deepened our understanding of the author’s Irishness by, in part, reflecting upon how

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his relationship with his later patron, Robert Nugent, Lord Clare (1709-1788), may have influenced his poetical outlook. Clare, a politician and a literary enthusiast, was born in County Westmeath to an old, Roman Catholic gentry family, and with his conversion to the Protestant faith, became embroiled in British political life. Throughout his colourful career as an English politician, he was committed to bettering Ireland’s standing within the British empire and strove incessantly to relieve his home country of the impediments that stifled its trading potential. As noted by Clarke, it was possibly this concern that initially drew him to Goldsmith, whose successful work of 1764, The Traveller, may have been interpreted by the former as an expression of Irish colonial indignation. In time, the two men developed an intimate friendship, as may be discerned from Goldsmith’s posthumously published poem, The Haunch of Venison (1776), which humorously narrated the fate of Clare’s gift of venison that was sent to the poet from Gosfield Park. With this context in mind, Clarke saw fit to re-present The Deserted Village as a poem reflective of Goldsmith’s assimilation of Nugent’s thoughts — that it was a subtle protest against the English for their obstruction of Ireland’s economic circulation; an interpretation that was similarly propounded by Griffin earlier, who placed it within the constellation of ‘political agreement and disagreement about land, land ownership, emigration and the relationship of Ireland to England.’

Accordingly, it is observable that unlike his histories, Goldsmith’s literary compositions have remained very much in the spotlight. Not only has their status as works of artistic genius been preserved, but through the frequent revisiting of them by academics to mine for Goldsmithian nuggets, they have been quietly elevated to greater heights as pieces of significant intellectual relevance. Against such a backdrop, there existed a teleological inevitability that the histories would be demoted as texts of lesser importance compared to his poetic, novelistic and theatrical engagements. This outlook was first propounded by Roger Lonsdale, who, in his essay of 1978, opined that the book-length histories of Goldsmith, along with his other ‘literary, and scientific compilations of his later years’, had been merely ‘profitable enterprises’ that could not have been engaged in ‘with any deep satisfaction.’ In contrast to them, he estimated that Goldsmith had likely viewed The Traveller and The Deserted Village as the ‘only true

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71 Clarke, Brothers of the Quill, pp. 312, 331-35 & Griffin, Enlightenment in Ruins, pp. 14, 113-45.
manifestations of his literary integrity and talent’, and had, consequently, intended them alone to carry his renown as an author to the ‘literary world.’

However, it was Griffin’s recent, rigorous study on Goldsmith that has taken this notion from the realm of pure speculation towards that of intellectual credibility. By referring to the popular demands that were placed upon professional writers during the eighteenth century within the burgeoning sphere of commercial publishing, Griffin has presented a tentative case to think of the histories as sources from which it is difficult to discern Goldsmith’s own personal stance on pressing issues. Accordingly, his histories are conveyed as often reproducing the ‘political and/or prejudicial stances of authors from whom they derive’ and as having been written under the dictates of ‘popular culture’, whereby — according to a definition provided by Robert Bataille — they are viewed as being unequal to ‘the creator-centered bias of high art’, but necessarily served ‘the needs and purposes of its audiences’. ‘Goldsmith did not have’, Griffin wrote, ‘the expertise or the breadth of reference to emplot his histories in such a way as to consolidate his political argument.’ ‘To locate a political stance in the histories’, he continued, ‘the reader must isolate those (infrequent) editorial digression which rhyme with the repeatedly expressed political sentiments of the other works.’ In contrast, The Traveller and The Deserted Village are presented as being the ‘key to Goldsmith’s politics’, as they are assessed as having been written — in the words of Lonsdale — with ‘painstaking care and with no immediate financial motive’.

Thus, it is demonstrable how, over time, Goldsmith’s histories have been progressively side-lined as spiritless, plagiaristic and purely economic outputs, while the appreciation of his ‘more creative works’ have grown in strength as sources of scholarly import that could reveal deep insights into the author. Importantly, these studies have used the latter texts in a manner suggestive of their relatively unobstructed link with the author; a privileged relationship that has hardly been extended to the histories. Perhaps, in parts, driven by the growing competitiveness of novels and other literary forms from the nineteenth century onwards; the influence of the earlier biographies on Goldsmith by Percy and Prior; and the advancements that have been made in the field of historical study and methodology, which has rendered ‘obsolete’

73 Griffin, Enlightenment in Ruins, pp. 22-27.
and ‘antiquated’ many of the compiled histories of this period, Goldsmith’s own works in this field of writing has reached its natural endpoint lately.74

Sallying from the gates

Within an academic landscape that has come to be dominated by Goldsmith’s ‘more creative works’, it may appear to be a lost cause to attempt to return the historical compilations into the critical limelight. However, it will be proposed that the time is now ripe to reconsider them as materials of legitimate scholarly interest that holds much promise towards the deepening of our understanding of Goldsmith. To this extent, firstly, the limited number of studies that have taken up the histories as a subject of interest will be mentioned as being suggestive of their great potential to reveal important insights into Goldsmith. Following this, a challenge will be issued against certain enduring and widespread notions underlying the dismissive tone of the histories’ many detractors. Specifically, the idea that Goldsmith treated his extended, historical outputs merely as sources of convenient income, and that he, himself, considered them to be compositions of low or questionable quality will be dismantled as oversimplified interpretations of a complex situation. Also, Griffin’s estimation that it is possible to regard Goldsmith’s poetical masterpieces as standing above and aloof from the sphere of popular demand, unlike the author’s ‘ostensibly objective and categorical discourses’ will be re-evaluated.

Against the backdrop of a growingly dominant trend amongst Goldsmith enthusiasts and commentators to either disregard or to demote Goldsmith’s historical compilations, there has been a minority group of scholars who have engaged critically, albeit in a limited fashion, with these texts to produce results that hintingly conflict with the ingrained presumption that they provide little in the way of accessing the inner thoughts and attitudes of the author. One such writer was Seitz. In his study of 1933, wherein he discussed Goldsmith’s use of Burke’s ‘The History of the Present War’ in

74 Tentatively, it is also possible that the difficulty involved in discovering Goldsmithian nuggets in the histories has dissuaded many from attempting such a project. Richard Jones, in his recent overview of the research done on Smollett, acknowledged that ‘little critical attention’ has been paid to Smollett’s historical writings, suggesting that this may be due to the fact that the manner in which they were later combined with Hume’s History of England had ‘obscured most of what was important about Smollett’s achievement.’ Much in the same vein, the fluidity with which Goldsmith compiled from his sources creates a significant challenge for Goldsmith scholars. See Jones’ ‘Tobias Smollett and the Work of Writing’, Literature Compass, 15 (2018), pp. 1-10 (pp. 5-6).
drawing up the contemporary segment of the *Letters from a Nobleman*, he pointed out how Goldsmith had ‘either modified to conform with his own preconceptions or else ignored entirely’ the words of Burke to produce a narrative that was ‘almost always engagingly personal.’ And by comparing and contrasting lines from these two works, Seitz has forwarded possible aspects of Goldsmith’s early political dispositions; including a tepid attitude towards George II and a tendency to favour Toryism. Moreover, he has been able to identify ‘something yet more deeply seated in Goldsmith’s mind’ that ‘cried for and found expression’ in his history of 1764: that of his troubled conscience as an Irishman. He pointed to an ‘unauthorised’ inclusion of a remark made in a passage that was largely derived from a reading of Smollett’s history, in which a sympathetic reference was made to an Irish commander of the British forces in India during the Seven Years’ War, and the omission of Hume’s disparaging remark upon the Irish in another as being indicative of such.

Similarly, Graham Gargett, in his paper of 2001, explored how Goldsmith had masterfully adapted Voltaire’s writings in a fashion that ‘did not mechanically serve up items merely because they were interesting and accessible to him.’ He subsequently interpreted Goldsmith’s alleged reproduction of Voltaire’s anti-Irish comments in his two histories of England as evidencing that ‘any nationalist, Catholic, genes in his character were singularly inactive.’ Unlike the efforts made by certain critics and modern scholars to present Goldsmith ‘as an author who in some ways might have been quite at home in the Irish nationalist tradition’, Gargett evaluated him as a Protestant Irishman who, “despite his interest in ‘native’ Irish culture, clearly considered himself to be ‘English’”. An earlier study by Ronald Crane and James Warner too had examined Goldsmith’s use of Voltaire’s work in relation to his histories. In particular, they focused upon the importance that the *Essai* had upon the composition of the *Letters from a Nobleman*. While they somewhat reservedly described the latter as being a ‘lucid and engaging, if not very profound, narrative of English history’, they still acknowledged it as a text deserving attention, partly due to its potential to further illuminate the ‘detailed reactions of Goldsmith’s mind to the thought and style of Voltaire’. For our purposes, it is relevant to point out that they saw in the *Letters from a Nobleman* evidence of the extent to which Voltaire’s ‘scornful attitude towards the

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76 Graham Gargett, ‘Plagiarism, Translation and the Problem of Identity: Oliver Goldsmith and Voltaire’, *Eighteenth-Century Ireland/Iris an dá chultúr*, 16 (2001), 83-103 (pp. 94-95).
medieval clergy’; ‘distrust of republican institutions’; sympathy for the ‘aspirations of the middle classes’; and “hatred of wars, conquests, and all ‘arts of increasing human calamity’” had coloured Goldsmith’s own outlook.77

Another author who closely studied the manner in which Goldsmith had referred to his source materials in composing his English history and, thus, looked upon it as a valuable text, was Laura Kennelly. In her work of 1991, she examined the use he had made of Hume’s history for the writing of the *History of England*. Describing Goldsmith as a ‘good editor’, she argued that in addition to having made his history readable — by the means of cutting Hume’s philosophical speculations and simplifying his political analysis and incorporating stylistic changes — the author had also bolstered his own social and political agenda, which involved supporting ‘the Glorious Revolution, domestic tranquillity, and religious stability’. Kennelly demonstrated how, through key omissions and subtle alterations, Goldsmith had emphasised Charles I’s failures, while portraying Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) as a complex character who was not a mere regicide. It is also noted that unlike Hume’s history, Goldsmith’s compilation presents Puritanism as ‘a new, cleansing phenomenon which blossomed under wise Elizabeth’s reign’, while also being permeated with an anti-Catholic prejudice. Furthermore, the difference in perspective between the two historians concerning the demise of Charles I is included, with Goldsmith being recognised as having sought to find ‘the best of all possible interpretation for regicide’. Thus, it is concluded that while ‘Goldsmith furnished his *History* with vital matters selected from Hume, he skilfully edited and abridged Hume’s massive work and carefully omitted material he judged dangerous, thus making the *History* conform to his authorial prejudices instead of Hume’s.’78

An attempt at resuscitating the appreciation of Goldsmith’s historical compilations as works revelatory of the author’s mindset has also been tried by David McCracken, who, in his paper of 1979, compared several writings by Goldsmith to present them as part of a coterie of texts manifesting his belief in ‘the natural revolution of things’. Having identified in *The Citizen of the World* a proposal that humanity moves through periods of enlightenment and barbarism, McCracken argued how this

notion of historical cycles was assumed by Goldsmith to be indisputable and provided the foundation for his English and Roman histories. Accordingly, the description of the rise from savagery, to the eventual decline into effeminacy by the Britons and Saxons found in Goldsmith’s account for the early period of English history in the *Letters from a Nobleman* was interpreted as being one example indicative of Goldsmith’s understanding that there existed ‘shorter cycles’ in history. Moreover, he pointed out that the whole of English history was considered by Goldsmith to be ‘one long cycle’; allegedly evidenced by his presentation of England as undergoing a process of corruption following the Elizabethan period, which was depicted as a time of great English achievements. Similarly, he identified in the *Roman History* the expression of Goldsmith’s ‘central’ idea of ‘commerce and luxury sowing the seeds of decline in a country of apparent wealth, power, and splendor’. Consequently, he asserted that ‘in examinations of Goldsmith’s thought and mind they [the histories] ought to be considered an important part of his œuvre.’79

Finally, mention must be made of another of Seitz’s paper, which was published in 1938, as it is the only serious comparative work that has been done, to date, between the *Letters from a Nobleman* and the *History of England*. Evidently secure in the belief that these two texts hold scholarly value, he juxtaposed the relevant passages from them to draw a picture of Goldsmith’s shifting views towards the three social strata of society: that of monarchy, aristocracy and the people. In contrast to the earlier English history, Seitz argued that the later, four-volume history of England reveals a Goldsmith who was less supportive of a paternal, monarchical system. He discussed how the *History of England* contains fewer number of dissertations on the advantages of monarchy over other forms of government and that it evidences a greater restraint in discussing the subject. Also, he noted that both James I and George II receive a more severe treatment in 1771. Concerning Goldsmith’s later perception of the aristocracy — which was, according to Seitz, represented in Goldsmith’s mind by the Whig party — the study discerns that the author was increasingly hostile towards the Whigs and was ‘definitely more of a conventional Tory partisan’. Subtle alterations and additions in the *History of England* are interpreted as being indicative of Goldsmith’s concern to ‘discredit the Whigs as champions of liberty, and, on the other hand, to establish both

the loyalty of the Tories to the Revolution settlement and their superior worth to the people.’ Lastly, Seitz saw Goldsmith as being ‘decidedly less a champion of the people in 1771 than he had been in 1764.’ He pointed out that in the *History of England*, Goldsmith had curbed ‘his enthusiasm even for the aspirations of his favorite agrarian class toward liberty.’ Among several examples provided, telling omissions in the discussion of Wat Tyler’s revolt (1381) and the added reference to the rebel leader as a ‘demagogue’ are cited as evidence.80

As such, though limited in number and scope, there have been studies that have taken up Goldsmith’s histories as materials deserving of serious attention. And in doing so, their authors have proffered the possibility to consider the dominant notion that these compilations have limited value as portals into Goldsmith’s mind as having been too hasty an assessment. Nevertheless, these works, in themselves, do not provide a conclusive defence of the histories, as they fail to forward a robust counter-attack against the entrenched assumptions underlying the enduringly dismissive outlook towards them. Indeed, hardly a mention is made in the papers of Seitz, Gargett, Crane, Warner and Kennelly of the fact that their objects of interest has been progressively devalued amongst the members of the larger Goldsmithian community. Even McCracken, who has been the most forthrightly vocal in asserting the need to acknowledge the histories as being a legitimate part of Goldsmith’s oeuvre, only presented a plea towards this end and did not hazard to become embroiled in contesting the core notions sustaining the hierarchical line-up of the author’s works.

One of the most crippling presumption concerning the value of Goldsmith’s histories has been the notion that Goldsmith had wrote these texts for the sake of subsistence. This has been a popular supposition that has been around ever since the publication of the histories. As has already been noted, an anonymous reviewer, writing into the *Westminster Magazine*, and Davies believed that Goldsmith had engaged in composing the *Grecian History* in order to relieve his ‘necessities’ and a ‘temporary exigence’; Percy assessed the *Letters from the Nobleman*, the *Roman History* and the *History of England* to have been undertaken for the sake of the author’s ‘present subsistence’ and ‘present support’; and, more recently, Lonsdale and Griffin have strongly suggested that Goldsmith’s compilations, including that of his histories, were

spiritless enterprises of profit. To this select set of examples should be included another; that of a remark made by Robert Day (1746-1841), an Irish politician and judge from County Kerry, who had the opportunity to meet and converse with Goldsmith in London while the former was still a young man. While the factual details found in his recollection are suspect — his claims do not match the publication dates of Goldsmith’s two classical histories — it is relevant to note that he too considered Goldsmith’s Roman and Grecian histories to have been auxiliary projects intended to re-fill his purse:

Just arrived as I [Day] then was from College, full freighted with Academic gleanings… [Goldsmith] did not disdain to receive from me some opinions and hints toward his Greek and Roman histories, light and superficial works, not composed for fame, but compiled for the more urgent purpose of recruiting his exhausted finances. So in truth was his Animated Nature. His purse replenished by labours of this kind, the season of relaxation and pleasure took its turn in attending the Theatres, Ranelagh, Vauxhall, and other scenes of gaiety and amusement, which he continued to frequent as long as his supply held out. He was fond of exhibiting his muscular little person in the gayest apparel of the day, to which was added a bag wig and sword.81

To a limited extent, that Goldsmith was ‘writing for bread’ when compiling his histories is undeniable, as he found himself in need of funds throughout his literary career. Around the time that he composed and published the Letters from a Nobleman, he had yet to achieve public, literary stardom. While he was relatively free of financial worries — being under the direct care of John Newbery (bap. 1713, d. 1767), who ensured that his board at Canonbury House in Islington was paid for and his needs met — he was falling short of meeting the amount withdrawn from his publisher. The twenty-one pounds that he received on 11 October 1763 for the Letters from a Nobleman, combined with the fees garnered from his other writerly engagements of the time, was not enough to offset his dues, and he still owed over fifty pounds to Newbery.82 As such, the thirty guineas that he received on 8 August 1764 for altering the same history for use in The Geography and History of England must have been a

82 Wardle, Oliver Goldsmith, pp. 148-51.
welcomed respite from his accumulating debts. Following the success of The Traveller, Goldsmith’s increasingly lavish lifestyle continued to strain his finances. Under this circumstance, the histories provided a source of income that was by no means negligible. According to Prior, Goldsmith reached an agreement with Davies about the end of 1767 or the beginning of 1768 to complete the Roman History for two hundred and fifty guineas. Following its completion, Goldsmith agreed on 13 June 1769 to write the History of England for five-hundred pounds. On 15 September 1770, he signed an agreement to abridge his Roman history for fifty guineas. Later, on 5 January 1771, he sold one-half share of property in the History of England to Thomas Cadell for two hundred and fifty pounds. Finally, on 22 June 1773, he acknowledged having received two hundred and fifty pounds for writing and compiling the Grecian History from Griffin.

While the accumulated income Goldsmith had derived from his historical works was substantial, it is, nevertheless, misleading to subsequently determine that they had been compiled for the sole or primary purpose of subsistence. Despite the elementary, factual mistakes found within these texts and the humorous anecdote involving Goldsmith’s supposedly unquestioning acceptance of Gibbon’s assertion that it was ‘Montezuma’ whom Alexander had fought in India, it is evident that Goldsmith was keen to properly fulfil his role as a historical compiler and was not merely hurrying through them for the sake of profit. In the prefaces of his two English histories and the Roman History, he described his task as that of revitalising the writerly style of compiling histories, which he considered to be in a deplorable state, due to the fact that — as he wrote in the History of England — ‘the business of abridging the works of others has hitherto fallen to the lot of very dull men; and the art of blotting, which an eminent critic calls the most difficult of all others, has been usually practised by those who found themselves unable to write.’ His sincerity and commitment to composing lively and readable histories is discernible from not only the many novelistic flourishes he interjected into his works — the inclusion of the romantic tale of ‘fair Rosamond’

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85 New York, New York Public Library, MS Berg Collection, Deed from Oliver Goldsmith to Thomas Cadell, 5 January 1771.
86 Prior, Life of Oliver Goldsmith, II, 432.
(1150-1176) in his two English histories; the retelling of the tragic demise of Virginia (465-449 B.C.) in the *Roman History*; and the reference made to the ‘fable of the wolves and dogs’ in the *Grecian History* stand as salient examples of such — but also from the careful revisions he made in the following editions of his English and Roman histories to improve their literary quality. Moreover, a further instance of his dedication to his task may be gleaned from his letter of either 1773 or 1774 to Cadell, wherein he expressed interest in studying Frances Brooke’s translation of Claude-François-Xavier Millot’s *Élémens de l’Histoire d’Angleterre depuis la conquête des Romains jusqu’au règne de George II* (1769) for the purpose of using it as an aid in his correction of the *History of England*.88

In addition to the seriousness with which Goldsmith had engaged in his historical compilations, the presupposition that financial reasons were the significant motivators to their composition also disregards an important aspect of his authorly orientation: that he was a profoundly historically minded thinker. From an early point of his writerly career, Goldsmith was inclined to see the world through the lens of history and appreciated the past as a means to assess present ills. This outlook is apparent in many of his texts — including, of course, his extended histories — with an especially suggestive example of such being found in the tenth letter of *The Citizen of the World*, which was first published on 14 February 1760. In this epistolary tale, Goldsmith had his protagonist, the Chinese philosopher, Lien Chi Altangi, show interest in the ruins of once magnificent cities that he passed by in his journey from Peking to Moscow, and had him weave a timeless, moral reflection from this experience:

After I [Lien Chi Altangi] had crossed the great wall, the first object that presented were the remains of desolated cities, and all the magnificence of venerable ruin. There were to be seen temples of beautiful structure, statues wrought by the hand of a master, and around a country of luxuriant plenty; but not a single inhabitant to reap the bounties of nature. These were prospects that might humble the pride of kings, and repress human vanity. I ask’d my guide the cause of such desolation. These countries, says he, were once the dominions of a Tartar prince; and these ruins the seat of arts, elegance, and ease. This prince waged an

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unsuccessful war with one of the emperors of China; he was conquered, his cities plundered, and all his subjects carried into captivity. Such are the effects of ambition of kings! Ten Dervises, says, the Indian proverb, shall sleep in peace upon a single carpet, while two kings shall quarrel though they have kingdoms to divide them. Sure, my friend, the cruelty and the pride of man have made more desarts [sic] than nature ever made! She is kind, but man is ungrateful!  

Furthermore, it is pertinent to keep in mind that Goldsmith was a keen reader of histories. As a critic writing for the *Monthly* and *Critical Review* for the period of 1757 and 1759 to 1760 respectively, he reviewed numerous historical works, including that of Smollett’s *A Complete History of England* in June 1757 and Voltaire’s *Essai* in August 1757. And, in 1763, he examined and wrote, on behalf of Newbery, a preface to William Guthrie’s *A General History of the World* (1764). Also, upon his death, it was revealed that Goldsmith had kept a great number of books that dealt with the past in his possession. In a list of items that were to be auctioned off on 12 July 1774, many histories of England, the classical cultures and the Americas in English, French, Italian, Latin, Greek and other languages, and the writings of numerous ancients are accounted for. Importantly, not all of these works provided significant and direct contributions to his writerly outputs as a ‘historian’, journalist and essayist; thus, suggesting that he was taken to consuming historical texts for his own personal pleasure, as much as he was for professional purposes. Accordingly, when it is considered that Goldsmith harboured an inclination for historical contemplation and an enduring fondness for absorbing histories, it is difficult to imagine that his own forays into this field of knowledge, however modest, would have been taken lightly by him, or as a mere means to replenish his coffer.

Indeed, it is discernible from his letter of 10 January 1770 to his younger brother, Maurice, that Goldsmith likely believed that his appointment to the post of historian for the Royal Academy on December 1769, by which time he had already completed the *Letters from a Nobleman* and the *Roman History*, which was published on 18 May 1769, was one that was well-deserved; that he had made a worthwhile contribution to the genre of historical writing. Despite complaining that the bestowal of

90 See the appendix attached to Prior’s *Life of Oliver Goldsmith*, II, 579-86.
this honorary post did not entail any kind of monetary reward or wages, there is nothing to indicate that he was doubtful of his suitability to this role. Rather, one may detect a sense of brazen pride in his having been nominated at the pleasure of the king, and it is patently clear that he had downplayed his achievement only in a bid to dissuade his kin from relying on him financially:

As to myself, I believe I could get both you [Maurice] and my poor brother-in-law something like that which you desire, but I am determined never to ask for little things, nor exhaust any little interest I may have, until I can serve you, him, and myself more effectually. As yet no opportunity has offered, but I believe you are pretty well convinced that I will not be remiss when it arrives. The King [George III] has lately been pleas’d [sic] to make me Professor of ancient history in a Royal Academy of Painting, which he has just establishd [sic], but there is no salary anex’d and I took it rather as a compliment to the institution than any benefit to myself. Honours to one in my situation are something like ruffles to a man that wants a shirt.91

Along with the conjecture that Goldsmith had engaged in his histories largely for the sake of profit, the notion asserted by certain commentators and scholars that he, himself, was conscious of the lesser quality of these works is a particularly troublesome stumbling block for our purposes. As has been touched upon above, such was proposed by the contemporary critic reviewing the Grecian History in the Monthly Review, and by Wardle in his assessment of the History of England. To refresh our memories, their remarks will be summarised here again: the former wrote that Goldsmith ‘seems to have candidly acquiesced’ in the propriety of a judgement passed in an earlier review, in which it had been suggested that the author had degenerated into ‘a bad compiler of historical epitomes’, by mentioning the supposedly damning ‘glance’ cast by him at his ‘compiling employment, in his RETALIATION’.92 And the latter commented that Goldsmith was ‘under no illusion’ about the finished grade of the History of England; the proof for which Wardle appealed to the allegedly self-effacing stance taken in the preface of the work.93 While these points are valuable for having concretely referred to

93 Wardle, Oliver Goldsmith, p. 217.
a supposition that has been implicitly present in much of the discussions regarding Goldsmith’s historical compilations, they fail to grasp his varied approach to literary matters, and the subtlety with which he presented his writerly persona. In other words, the critic for the *Monthly Review* did not recognise Goldsmith’s diverse attitudes towards the activity of compiling, and Wardle overlooked the expression of confidence and audacity layered into the supposedly self-deprecating presentation of the *History of England*; matters which will be fully unpacked below.

As was noted by the reviewer of the *Grecian History*, writing in the *Monthly Review*, Goldsmith does appear to have been critical of his compilations in the *Retaliation*. In the lines where he mused over the person of John Douglas (1721-1807), a ‘sound Critic in detecting several literary mistakes (or rather forgeries)’ of his fellow Scotsmen — according to a footnote found in the third edition of the poem — he humorously breathed a sigh of relief at the fictional demise of this ‘scourge of impostors, the terror of quacks’ by writing that he should ‘compile’ in safety now.94 Notably, through the span of his writerly career, Goldsmith had several occasions to reflect poorly upon the writerly style of compiling in general. In his first book, *An Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning Europe* (1759), Goldsmith lamented how authors were forced to have recourse to the booksellers, in the absence of patronage by the Great, wherein they were bound to produce ‘tedious compilations, and periodical magazines’; writings that were ‘prejudicial to taste’.95 And later, in his nineteenth Chinese Letter, which was first published in the *Public Ledger* on 20 March 1760, he had Lien Chi Altangi discuss the factious state of learning in England, where the ‘wise are but few’, and were overwhelmed by the ‘compilers, and the book answerers of every month’. The latter, after having ‘cut up some respectable name’, it is explained, are found ‘frequently reproaching each other with stupidity and dullness’, as do the ‘wolves of the Russian forest, who prey upon venison, or horse-flesh when they can get it’ but lie in wait to devour each other in instances of necessity. Accordingly, such vulgar writers ‘make a hearty meal’, he noted, ‘when they have ‘new books to cut up’, but ‘if this resource should unhappily fail, then it is that critics eat up critics, and compilers rob from compilations.’96

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Moreover, in at least two early texts, Goldsmith made known his specific sense of wariness towards histories that had been compiled. In them, he shared the general concern of the time regarding the possibility of such works as having deviated from or diluted the truth. In his review of Smollett’s Complete History of England, he explained how ideally ‘the eye-witness alone should take upon him to transmit facts to posterity’, as ‘in proportion as History removes from the first witnesses, it may recede also from the truth, — as, by passing thro’ the prejudices, or the mistakes of subsequent Compilers, it will be apt to imbibe what tincture they may chance to give it.’ This point is immediately reiterated in discussing the materials necessary in writing a national history, with a particular, critical glance cast at compilers: ‘The fundamental materials for the general history of an country are the public records, ancient monuments, and original Historians of that country; and in proportion as they are slighted by the Compiler, these venerable Originals themselves may fall into neglect, and, possibly, in the end, even into irretrievable oblivion’. ⁹⁷ Similarly, in the first letter of the Letters from a Nobleman, Goldsmith had the lecturing nobleman advise his son to ‘consult the original historians in every relation’, as ‘Abridgers, compilers, commentators, and critics, are in general only fit to fill the mind with unnecessary anecdotes, or lead its researches astray.’ ⁹⁸

Incidentally, in The Vicar of Wakefield too, there is a passage that suggestively mocks historical compilers, along with political commentators, as uninspired dullards. Upon his arrival in London, George Primrose is shown the ropes of the city by his cousin, who advises him to become a hack writer upon the assurance that there are plenty who write upon the subjects of history and politics with little tact, but still receive praise:

Yet come, continued he, I see you [George] are a lad of spirit and some learning, what do you think of commencing author, like me? You have read in books, no doubt, of men of genius starving at the trade: At present I’ll shew you forty very dull fellows about town that live by it in opulence. All honest joggtrot [sic] men, who go on smoothly and dully, and write history and politics, and are praised; men, Sir, who, had they

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⁹⁷ Oliver Goldsmith, ‘A Compleat History of England… By T. Smollet, M.D. 4to. 4vols. 3l. 3s. Rivington and Fletcher,’ in CW, I, 44-50 (pp. 44-45).
been bred coblers [sic], would all their lives have only mended shoes, but never made them.\textsuperscript{99}

However, it cannot be assumed based upon these points that Goldsmith was indisposed towards his own historical writings. As a perceptive and versatile critic of the state in which the Republic of Letters was in, he was prepared to concede the utility of compilations, despite harbouring doubts as to their value in expanding the boundaries of knowledge. In his review of Richard Brookes’ work on natural history, which was published in the \textit{Monthly Review} on October 1763, Goldsmith remarked that to ‘speak without metaphor’, the author ‘may be considered as a useful Compiler’. In contrast to the labours of learned men which were ‘exhausted in the investigation of obscurity, and in attempts to make new discoveries’, Brookes was considered to be part of ‘another class of Scholars’ who were employed in registering the improvements made by the former to convey them ‘to mankind with greater perspicuity or conciseness.’ Not only was he commended for ‘having judiciously lopped away those exuberances which generally grow upon the efforts of inventive genius’, but was held in the highest esteem for having done so in good taste: ‘Thus far therefore this sensible compiler, tho’ furnished with talents little superior to the rest of mankind, merits our applause; that applause which we have often been obliged to withhold from the efforts of unchastised genius.’\textsuperscript{100} Much in the same spirit, though with greater restraint, in \textit{An Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe}, the perceived migration of the ‘generality of readers’ from the scholar to the compiler is explained as being the effect of the latter offering them ‘a more safe and speedy conveyance’ of knowledge, unlike the former, who had carried their studies to realms ‘too minute or too speculative to instruct or amuse.’\textsuperscript{101}

This appreciation of the need to offer works of quality to the general reader, who was not seeking expert knowledge, but a foundational footing that would provide relief or advancement to his everyday life, formed the backbone to Goldsmith’s historical compilations. In the \textit{Letters from a Nobleman}, Goldsmith had the father promise to his son that he would ‘separate all that can contribute to nothing, either for amusement or use’, since a ‘more thorough knowledge of English history ‘might

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\item\textsuperscript{99} Oliver Goldsmith, \textit{The Vicar of Wakefield: A Tale}, in \textit{CW}, IV, 107-08.
\item\textsuperscript{100} Oliver Goldsmith, ‘\textit{A new and accurate System of Natural History… By R. Brookes, M.D. Author of the General Practice of Physic. 12mo. 6 Vols. 18s. Newbery.}’, in \textit{CW}, I, 136-42.
\item\textsuperscript{101} Goldsmith, \textit{Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe}, p. 306.
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\end{footnotesize}
disqualify the mind for other branches of science, equally demanding your care.’

Similarly, in the *Roman History*, Goldsmith reflected upon how too much ‘time may be given even to laudable pursuits’ to ‘allure the student from the more necessary branches of learning, and… entirely engross his industry.’ With this in mind, he presented his compilation as that that ‘may be sufficient for all, but such as make history the peculiar business of their lives’. A trace of this sentiment may be found in the preface to the *History of England* as well, in which he advertised the work as having been ‘designed for the benefit of those who intend to lay a foundation for future study, or desire to refresh their memories upon the old, or who think a moderate share of history sufficient for the purposes of life’. As such, he explained of how ‘recourse has been had only to those authors which are best known, and those facts only have been selected, which are allowed on all hands to be true’, forgoing ‘the petty ambition of being thought a reader of forgotten books’; his ‘aim being not to add to our present stock of history, but to contract it.’

Thus, far from considering his historical compilations as being comparable to the parasitic and tedious works of vulgar and vain compilers, Goldsmith saw them — however modest they may have been as intellectual endeavours — as valuable contributions to a book market that was growing ever more bounded to the common reader.

In other words, it is likely that the seemingly deprecatory glance he had cast on his activity as a compiler in the *Retaliation* was only meant to be a tongue in cheek remark. Indeed, it is necessary to remind ourselves that the general tenor of the poem is one of joviality and humorous bantering. Also, it is pertinent to realise that Goldsmith was an author who was committed to the notion that the ideal person was one who was apt and modestly inclined to be interested in diverse spheres of knowledge and was firmly entrenched in serving the needs of man. As such, it is conceivable that his forays into the field of historical compiling were serious endeavours intended, in part, to function as a means to aid his readers toward achieving the status of a polymathic traveller — not that of a narrow specialist — whose character requirements he had outlined in Letter CVIII (27 February 1761) of the *Citizen of the World*:

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To send out a traveller [to Asia], properly qualified for these purposes [to make useful discoveries], might be an object of national concern… The only difficulty would remain in choosing a proper person for so arduous an enterprise. He should be a man of a philosophical turn, one apt to deduce consequences of general utility from particular occurrences, neither swollen with pride, nor hardened by prejudice, neither wedded to one particular system, nor instructed only in one particular science; neither wholly a botanist, nor quite an antiquarian; his mind should be tinctured with miscellaneous knowledge, and his manners humanized by an intercourse with men. He should be, in some measure, an enthusiast to the design; fond of travelling, from a rapid imagination, and an innate love of change; furnished with a body capable of sustaining every fatigue, and a heart not easily terrified at danger.  

Akin to the erroneous suggestion that Goldsmith was dismissive of his histories as mere compilations is Wardle’s assertion that the author was openly critical of the quality of the History of England. At first glance, a note of humility may be heard resonating at the start of the work’s preface. In discussing the difficulty of the nature of his project, in which Goldsmith realised he was expected to ‘satisfy the different expectations of mankind’, he wrote of how the ‘greatest number of advantages with the fewest inconveniencies, is all that can be attained in an abridgement, the very name of which implies imperfection.’ Consequently, he expressed that it would satisfy his wishes, ‘if the present work be found a plain and unaffected narrative of facts, with just ornament enough to keep attention awake, and with reflection barely sufficient to set the reader upon thinking.’ ‘Very moderate abilities were equal to such an undertaking’, he continued, ‘and it is hoped the performance will satisfy such as take up books to be informed or amused, without much considering who the writer is, or envying him any success he may have had in a former compilation [the Roman History].’

Upon closer examination, however, it is evident that overriding this thin display of humility is an authorial stance brimming with self-assurance. In addition to the telling nod that is made to the Roman History, the preface concludes — in stark contrast to the demure tone heard in the beginning — with Goldsmith presenting himself as a

learned guide capable of critiquing the much-respected *History of England* by Hume, which he identified as one of his prime sources for the compilation at hand. While showing deference to this work by admitting that wherever he was ‘obliged’ to abridge it, he had done so with ‘reluctance’, as he ‘scarce cut out a line that did not contain a beauty’, and by adding the disclaimer that he ‘must warmly subscribe to the learning, elegance, and depth of Mr. Hume’s history’, he committed a relatively lengthy exposition on how he was not able to ‘entirely acquiesce in his [Hume’s] principles.’ In an account that sits awkwardly with the alleged desire stated earlier for the reader not to take much notice of who the compiler is, Goldsmith presented his personal opinions regarding the perceived errors in matters of religion and politics found in Hume’s work with an air of imperturbable confidence; an authoritative style reminiscent of his book reviews.\(^{107}\)

It is difficult to imagine that a self-effacing author who looked upon his work with embarrassment would dare establish himself within its very pages as a critic justly able to evaluate an eminent literary figure such as Hume. This is especially so in the case of Goldsmith, who had described Hume’s history in a separate text of 1759, ‘A Resverie’, as having been ‘approved at the temple of fame’.\(^ {108}\) Rather, it is likely that the combined attitudes of reserve and assertiveness found in the *History of England* was part of an intricate presentation of himself as a humble, yet able writer. Early in his career, Goldsmith recognised the significance of combining these two character traits to foster an alluring public persona. As was contemplated in his introductory note to the first issue of The Bee, published on 6 October 1759, he worried that to ‘modestly decline all merit’ would lead to the ‘hasty reader’ taking him at his word, while to ‘presume to promise an epitome of all good things that were ever said or written’ — as do the ‘labourers in the Magazine trade’ — would risk those reader whom he ‘most desire to please’ to forsake him.\(^ {109}\) It is possible that such concerns guided his pen in the preface of his English history of 1771: that whilst he was keen to assure his readers of his competence, he feared an excessive advertising of its merits would lead to his appearance as a duplicitous hack seeking to sell promises rather than to truly educate and amuse his readership. As such, it is discernible that not only was he keen to have

\(^{107}\) Ibid., pp. vi-viii.
\(^{109}\) Ibid., pp. 353-58, 448.
his four-volume history of England be taken seriously, but also that he was, in actuality, supremely confident of his role as a ‘historian’.

A corresponding sense of confidence in his role as a historical compiler, combined with a thin display of modesty as a means to favourably portray his work may also be detected in Goldsmith’s other histories. In the Letters from a Nobleman, Goldsmith generously committed the first two letters to philosophical disquisitions, in which he lectured with an air of assuredness on the value and practices of historical study, whilst ‘confessing’ to his readers that his supplementary letters were of an ‘inferior hand’ compared to those supposedly written by his lordship. Likewise, in the Roman History, Goldsmith boldly asserted the correctness of his undertaking to ‘supply a concise, plain, and unaffected narrative’ of the rise and decline of the Roman empire by maintaining that those ‘who think more soberly, will agree, that in so extensive a field as that of the transactions of Rome, more judgement may be shewn, by selecting what is important, than by adding what is obscure’; and, yet, earlier in the preface, he described himself as refraining from ‘pressing forward among the ambitious’ to fall back ‘among the hindmost ranks, with conscious inferiority’, content at the thought of only making such a book ‘as could not fail of being serviceable’. And, lastly, in the Grecian History, while there is a tone of humility and a candid acquiescence to his limited ability to sift and separate facts from mythical fictions, it is noticeable how Goldsmith still composed his narrative with flowing boldness and nerve. Indeed, even Prior had to concede that the work was written with an ‘elegance of style, and clearness of narration’; of how ‘its ease will cheat us into the belief until the trial be made, that we could tell the same story equally well.’

Accordingly, it is appreciable that two of the most damning presumptions undermining the value of Goldsmith’s histories, that they were worked upon solely or primarily for the ‘sake of bread’ and that they were gazed upon dismissively by the author, are contestable points. Additionally, the notion that Goldsmith’s canonical works, including The Traveller and The Deserted Village, can be distinguished from the histories based upon the argument that the former were composed free from the worry and sensitivity to commercial concerns is equally open for re-interpretation.

110 Goldsmith, Roman History, I, pp. i-ii, iv.
111 Oliver Goldsmith, Grecian History, I, 3.
112 Prior, Life of Oliver Goldsmith, II, 432.
As noted earlier, Griffin, in the introductory chapter to the *Enlightenment in Ruins*, presented a case for considering Goldsmith’s historical compilations as being contrastable to his ‘more creative works’, upon the basis that the former was composed free from the demands and whims of the commercial, publishing scene, unlike the former. *Prima facie*, this does not appear to be a problematic assertion. With regards to *The Deserted Village*, there exists an intriguing anecdote that recounts how Goldsmith, when told by a friend that his having received a hundred guineas for this ‘short performance’ was overly generous, had acquiesced that ‘it was more perhaps than the honest man could afford,’ and had, subsequently, returned the sum that had been paid to him by his publisher.\(^{113}\) However, one must not allow this tale of the poet’s show of independence, nor any other evidence that may be mustered in kind to overshadow the fact that he was working within a writerly environment that was becoming dominated by savvy booksellers needing to turn a profit. Within such a context, it is difficult to believe that Goldsmith would have engaged in any project without some consideration for its saleability and popular reception. This is especially so, when one remembers how he had attained at first-hand an appreciation for the importance of pleasing the wider reading public, early on in his career, whilst authoring and editing *The Bee* in 1759. Perhaps, driven by youthful enthusiasm, he had, at first, sought only to attract likeminded readers. But, by the time the fourth number of this periodical was released, he had come to realise his error, and of the need to cast his net wider to improve its sales: ‘Yet, considering things in a prudential light, perhaps I was mistaken in designing my paper as an agreeable relaxation to the studious, or an help to conversation among the gay; instead of addressing it to such, I should have written down to the taste and apprehension of the many, and sought for reputation on the broad road.’\(^{114}\)

That this lesson he had learned in his earlier years had likely stayed with him for the rest of his life and even coloured, to a certain extent, his activity as a poet can be gleaned from a recollection of Goldsmith left by William White (1748-1836), a Protestant Episcopal bishop of Pennsylvania, who had the occasion to meet with Goldsmith soon after his arrival in London sometime in 1770. White remembered a conversation he had with Goldsmith, wherein his interlocutor had cavalierly alluded to *The Deserted Village* as having been a convenient source of income. It would be unwise

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\(^{113}\) Ibid., p. 280.  
to make too much of this remark by Goldsmith, but it serves our purpose here in showing that even his great poetical masterpiece was not fully removed from the worries of business. As this account has been relatively forgotten, it will be reprinted here in full, as found in a biography on White published after his death:

This reminds me [White] of another literary character, a friend of Johnson, Dr. Goldsmith. We lodged for some time near to one another, in the Brick Court of the Temple. I had it intimated to him by an acquaintance of both that I wished for the pleasure of making him a visit. It ensued, and in our conversation it took a turn which incited in me a painful sensation from the circumstance that a man of such a genius should write for bread. His ‘Deserted Village’ came under notice, and some remarks were made by us on the principle of it — the decay of the peasantry. He said that were he to write a pamphlet on the subject, he could prove the point incontrovertibly. On his being asked why he did not set his mind to this, his answer was: ‘It is not worth my while. A good poem will bring me a hundred guineas, but the pamphlet would bring me nothing.’ This was a short time before my leaving of England, and I saw the doctor no more.115

Thus, far from being negligible or lesser works, Goldsmith’s histories harbour much potential as sources of intellectual import. In contrast to the enduring trend of thought that has directly or obliquely referred to these works as having been composed in a lacklustre or timid fashion, it is perceivable that Goldsmith was a motivated, interested and confident historical compiler. That he was bound and restricted by the ‘rules’ and whims of commerce cannot be denied. However, it is pertinent to keep in mind that even his more creative works were not exempt from such demands. Perhaps, the greatest attribute of Goldsmith as a writer was his ability to never fully surrender himself to or lose hope facing the wave of commercialisation, and, instead, still find a way to approach his tasks as a historical compiler with spirit.

Conclusion

Much effort and space has been allocated to identifying the threats posed to Goldsmith’s histories and presenting a general defence of them here, as the sense of hostility and indifference towards them has become so well established that to have ignored them would have risked compromising the finer points to be made later. Indeed, it is easy to imagine that what little work that has been done on these materials by the likes of Seitz, Gargett, Crane, Warner, Kennelly and McCracken have failed to catch on, in part, as they did not directly address and attempt to break down the seemingly insurmountable critical wall that has been cemented and left to harden over the decades. It is hoped that enough of this barrier has been chipped away in this chapter so that the reader may now be more at ease to treat the historical compilations as sources of legitimate scholarly interest. While Goldsmith’s histories may no longer be considered as materials of import in terms of their historical content, they hold much in the way of informing us of his critical outlook. As such, a closer look into the histories will be made in the following chapters — by the means of comparing relevant passages with their source materials and fleshing out the historical contexts — to explore how they may deepen our understanding of Goldsmith’s attitudes and mindset concerning politics, Ireland and religion.

Introduction

In the preceding chapter, several obstinate notions regarding Oliver Goldsmith’s historical compilations have been challenged, and the potential value of these works has been asserted. In the following three chapters, attention will be focused on how they can provide a deeper insight into certain aspects of the author’s mindset and worldly attitudes. Here, the History of England (1771) will be examined afresh, in order to discuss his socio-political stance. Attention will be focused on it, as, within the backdrop of a general trend by modern scholars and biographers to dismiss or pay scant attention to his histories, there has been a limited and patchy interest shown towards it; questioning whether it was composed under the influence of party politics. On the one hand, Katherine Balderston, in her compilation of Goldsmith’s letters, noted in a footnote that its preface was ‘distinctly more partisan on the Tory side’.1 Similarly, Karen O’Brien saw passages in the work as evidencing Goldsmith’s status as an ‘overtly sentimental Tory historian’.2 Moreover, Alfred Seitz, as part of his 1938 comparative study of the History of England with the Letters from a Nobleman (1764), determined that select differences between them were indicative of the later Goldsmith being ‘definitely more of a conventional Tory partisan’.3 On the other hand, Ralph Wardle opined to the contrary: whilst not disclosing any reasons, he wrote that Goldsmith in 1771 was not a ‘party man’.4 Likewise, Washington Irving had made a passing assessment in which he claimed that the History of England was ‘written without party feeling’, despite the author being ‘charged with being unfriendly to liberty, disposed to elevate monarchy above its proper sphere; a tool of ministers; one who would betray his country for a pension’.5

Amid such conflicting interpretations and views, this chapter will begin by reassessing Goldsmith’s approach towards partisan politics as may be discovered in the History of England. Firstly, it will be shown that, while he held deep Tory proclivities

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1 Balderston, Collected Letters, p. 105, f.n. 4.
2 O’Brien, Narratives of the Enlightenment, p. 64.
3 Seitz, ‘Some of Goldsmith’s Second Thoughts on English History’, pp. 281-83.
4 Wardle, Oliver Goldsmith, p. 220.
5 Irving, Oliver Goldsmith, p. 272.
and a strengthening sense of aversion towards the Whig party, he exerted much effort to restrain these biases, and sought to sail in-between the political rocks of Scylla and Charybdis. Following this, the second section will account for the energy he invested in maintaining this middling stance. It will be posited that he had done so out of concern for his authorial reputation and in accordance with his innermost principles. Finally, in the third segment, it will be asserted that Goldsmith intended the History of England to be read as a didactic tale, by the means of which his readers would be cautioned against the unreliability of foreign treaties and the enervating effects of excessive empire building and the immoderate taste for luxury and commerce. Notably, it will be revealed that these points of concern had been fermenting and maturing in his mind since compiling the Letters from a Nobleman, and he presented his case with greater consistency and firmness. Moreover, it will be demonstrated that he had not neglected to assert with increasing clarity and effectiveness the solution to such ills, which he believed lay in the equitable distribution of wealth amongst the useful members of society. To conclude, it will be recognised that Goldsmith was a disciplined and broad-minded patriot, who was progressively serious in confronting the socio-political issues of Britain.

**History writing and partisanship**

By the early eighteenth century, it was widely recognised throughout Europe that the political landscape of Britain was unique. Paul de Rapin-Thoyras, in his Dissertation sur les whigs et les tories, which was first published in 1717 with the intention to explain England’s constitution to non-English readers, wrote that the ‘Government of England is of a particular kind, of which there is not the like at present in all of the world.’ In its form, it could not be considered as being ‘purely Monarchical’, since ‘the Nobility and the People have a share in the Legislative Power jointly with the King, nor can the King impose any tax, without the people’s consent.’

However, it could neither be thought of as being ‘Republican’, since ‘there is a King, who exercises the sovereign authority, who disposes, as he pleases, of all places and

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6 As noted by M.G. Sullivan, not only was Rapin’s Dissertation translated into German, Dutch, Danish, Spanish and English, but it became a ‘standard, if whig-slanted, elucidation of a post-revolution construction of the national past.’ See Sullivan’s, ‘Rapin de Thoyras [Rapin], Paul de (1661-1725)’, in DNB (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/23145>, accessed 17 September 2018.
dignities ecclesiastical, civil, or military; and can make peace or war, without consulting his Subjects.’ After acknowledging that it would be ‘vain to pretend to describe this Government, by the usual names of Monarchy, Aristocracy, Democracy’, he determined that it was a ‘mixed Government’ wherein the ‘prerogatives of the Sovereign, and the privileges of the Nobles and People, are so tempered together, that they mutually support one another’ and ‘obstruct attempts of one or both the others to render themselves independent’.

In tracing the historical development of this distinct form of government, Rapin identified the emergence of another salient feature of British politics: that of parties. He explained that following a period of uninterrupted possession by the English subjects of the privileges laid out in the Magna Carta, James I took the ‘dangerous course’ of endeavouring to extend his prerogative over and against that of Parliament. While death curbed such ambition, under his successor, Charles I, the ‘project to render the King absolute, and independent of the Laws was vigorously pushed and advanced by all methods.’ This initiated a contest, in which Charles was made to perceive that despite the interval of fifteen years, it was not possible ‘to efface out of the minds of the English, the memory of their Parliaments, which they look upon as the strongest support of their Liberties.’ Nevertheless, the king was not without supporters: the overreaching of the House of Commons in the management of state affairs, and plans of ‘changing the Episcopal Government of the Church, into Presbyterian’ led to the gathering of adherents around the crown. Consequently, it was then ‘that two Parties appeared in the Kingdom, one for the King, and one for the Parliament’. Those of the former ‘at first had the name of Cavaliers, which was afterwards changed into that of Tories’, and the latter were known as Roundheads before having ‘received the name of Whigs’.  

This party system, Rapin perceptively added, ‘which began to divide England in the time of Charles I’ still ‘divide it to this day.’ While observing that the moderate Whigs and Tories both claim that ‘they have no other aim, than the preservation of the Government as established many ages’, it ‘is however but too true,’ he added, ‘that their different inclination frequently obliges them to divide, though it is to be presumed, their

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7 In Samuel Johnson’s Dictionary, it is explained that the term, ‘Tory’, was likely derived from ‘an Irish word signifying a savage’, and that of ‘Whig’ as having its roots in the designation given to horse drivers in Scotland. See Johnson’s definition for ‘TORY’ and ‘WHIG’ found in A Dictionary of the English Language, 2nd edn., 2 vols (London: W. Strahan, 1755-56), II, unpaginated.
intentions are equally good, and that they differ only in the means they employ.’ ‘The one perhaps are too jealous of the increase of the royal Prerogative,’ he reflected, ‘and the others fear it not enough.’ Moreover, in concluding his essay, he recognised that while there ‘are thousands of good Englishmen, without doubt, who grieve to see their country thus rent with divisions, and would gladly embrace all expedients to put a stop to them’, the situation was such that it was ‘not easy to observe a just neutrality’: ‘how can a man be neuter between two parties,’ he questioned, ‘each of whom represent their adversaries as designing those evils which are most apt to fill men with fears, I mean, the destruction of the religion they profess, and the dissolution of a Government, which alone, in their opinion, can render subjects happy?’

The divisive nature of British political life identified by Rapin remained broadly applicable during Goldsmith’s time, and indeed, afterwards, which posed a challenge to historians when they came to describe ‘modern’ historical figures and events, as it was unlikely that they could satisfy every prejudice or conviction. ‘Of all the literary enterprises which an author can undertake,’ wrote a reviewer in his evaluation of Tobias Smollett’s history of England in the Critical Review of January 1758, ‘that of writing the modern history of England is, we apprehend, the most dangerous and difficult’: ‘In a nation divided, as we are, into two inveterate factions, it is impossible to specify any domestic occurrence that deserves a place in history, without running the risque of giving offence to one party, and very often of disobliging both, by a candid investigation of truth.’ ‘For this reason,’ he explained, ‘almost every British historian since the reformation has expressly [sic] written as a partisan of some particular faction, which he has endeavoured to justify in every article of its conduct; well knowing, that should his work be condemned by one set of people, it would be warmly supported and glorified by the other.’ He added that it was thus that ‘we find Clarendon and Ludlow alternately extolled and vilified by the tories and whigs: thus we trace the Jacobite in Carte, and the Calvinist in Rapin.’

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9 ‘ARTICLE I. A Complete history of England,… Volume the fourth, consisting of eighty sheets, given gratis to the purchasers of the three former volumes. Rivington and Fletcher.’, Critical Review, January 1758, pp. 1-17 (p. 1).
While the reviewer’s subsequent attempt to colour Smollett’s history as an unprecedented exercise of neutrality may be suspected as having involved some ‘puffing’ on behalf of his ‘friend and colleague’, he was, nevertheless, unmistakable in his recognition of the risk historians ran of exciting resentment from politically sensitive writers. Eminent literary figures, including David Hume, were especially vulnerable to the prevailing enthusiasm in the newspapers for discovering partisans occupying the ‘wrong’ end of the political balance. In the General Evening Post of 29-31 January 1771, a contributor, who signed himself off as ‘An ENGLISH WHIG’, conveyed his pleasure at having read ‘a sensible writer’s remarks on Dr. Robertson’s last history of the times of the Emperor Charles the Fifth, as they are detections of his attempts to steal opinions into the public mind in favour of despotic power in the sovereign, as Mr. David Hume had done before him’. He concluded the piece by expressing a wish that ‘all real friends to the English constitution will be prepared to administer antidotes’ to any ‘poison’ the future histories of England, Scotland, and of Britain may contain. Much in the same spirit, the writer of an ironic, open letter to Hume in the Public Advertiser of 12 September 1771 lamented how an earlier introduction of the latter’s history may have prevented “the Growth of those horrible Opinions (alas! Too prevalent) ‘that Kings are not only responsible, but punishable for their Delinquency towards their People; that Charles the First met with no harder Fate than he deserved; that his two Sons ought in Justice to have made the same Exit.’” Additionally, he speculated how it may have ‘check’d those furious Principles, which ended in driving from the Throne of his Ancestors (to the indelible Disgrace of these Nations) a Prince replete with every royal Virtue.’

Upon the release of his History of England, Goldsmith too was subject to public criticisms that accused him of writing under the devious influence of partisan prejudices. In the newspapers, he was attacked by a number of contributors as a Tory

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10 The London newspapers were steadily adopting partisan standpoints on domestic political matters from the latter half of the eighteenth century; in part encouraged by the excitement caused by the Wilkes affair. See Bob Harris’ Politics and the Rise of the Press: Britain and France, 1620-1800 (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 41-42.
12 ‘To DAVID HUME, Esq’, Public Advertiser, 12 September 1771.
13 Goldsmith did not experience such a reception with the publication of the Letters from a Nobleman, which generated relatively little response outside the Monthly Review and the Critical Review, likely due to it being an anonymous work intended for a younger audience. The only inkling of a critical reflection upon the earlier English history’s relationship with partisan matters may be found in the latter periodical, wherein the reviewer noted that Goldsmith’s ‘doctrine concerning the Whigs’ — by which he was
writer. In the *London Evening Post* of 19-21 December 1771, a writer, who identified himself as ‘ANTI-BUTE’, included in his scathing review of Joseph Cradock’s *Zobeide* a malicious description of Goldsmith — who had written its prologue — as a ‘Tory historian’, whose history he pronounced ‘to be one of the most vile and infamous histories ever seen in this country.’ He continued by likening Goldsmith to the author of the play’s epilogue, Arthur Murphy (1727-1805), whom he earlier referred to as a ‘party scribbler’, and described both as having ‘the same principles, the same partialities, the same prejudices, and the same falsities.’\(^{14}\) He concluded by assuring his readers that the play, while being an ‘indifferent’ production, will ‘from the assistance given it by these Tory friends’ be favourably received by the king, who ‘will order it to be performed next week, for his amusement: and the manager will, as usual, on that night, previously fill the House with his trusty creatures, to huzza the best of Kings in and out.’\(^{15}\)

Likewise, a ‘Charles’ in the *Middlesex Journal or Chronicle of Liberty* of 7 November 1771 accused Goldsmith’s *History of England* as exhibiting an inclination ‘to flatter the Tory party, vindicate high-church principles, and to represent the friends of the constitution and the house of Hanover in an unfavourable light.’ He emphasised these points by admitting that ‘a very impartial history of this country was not to be expected from Dr. Goldsmith’, who he believed “would not think himself affronted in being called a professed Tory, any more than his friend Dr. Samuel Johnson; who is said, whenever he hears a man mentioned as a remarkable fool, to cry out ‘I hope to God he is a Whig.’” ‘That party-zeal must be violent, indeed,’ he added, ‘that can induce a man of taste and genius to introduce politics into poetry’. Specifically, he interpreted a phrase from *The Traveller* (1764), in which Goldsmith’s brother was called upon to ‘curse’ with him ‘that fatal hour’ when ‘first ambition struck at regal power’, to be an execration against ‘our emancipation from feudal, aristocratical vassalage; ‘the opposition of the immortal Hampden, Pym, Milton, Russel, Sydney, and Locke, to the House of Stuart, and the principles of despotism’; and ‘the

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\(^{14}\) Arthur Murphy was an Irish playwright and actor who had edited the pro-Bute journal, the *Auditor* (1762-1763). For further information on his dabbling in political journalism, see Howard Hunter Dunbar’s *The Dramatic Career of Arthur Murphy* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1946), pp. 34-37 & John Pike Emery’s *Arthur Murphy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1946), pp. 83-84.

Revolution, the supporters of the Hanover succession; and all the assertors of those unalienable privileges inherent in the name of Briton’. By asserting that Goldsmith’s alleged sallying for the Tory cause in *The Traveller* was ‘in some measure performed’ in his history, he saw fit to confirm “Mrs Macaulay’s remark, that ‘Poets have in all ages been declared foes to the rights of humanity.’”

In addition to being censured as a Tory scribbler, Goldsmith was also condemned as a Jacobite. Such was the case in an open letter addressed to him, which was published in both the *Middlesex Journal or Chronicle of Liberty* and the *Craftsman or Say’s Weekly Journal* in early September of 1771. The author of this vindictive epistle, who wrote under the sobriquet of ‘BRUNSWICK’, opened his address by suggesting that Goldsmith had penned his *History of England* from either ‘Tory principles, or mercenary views’, to assert ‘falsehoods in order to deceive posterity, and assist the advocates of tyranny in blackening the reputation of men who have struggled for liberty, and acted from an high sense of their duty, in opposition to arbitrary measures’. Following a lengthy protest against what he perceived to be a scandalous attempt to ‘caste a shade’ upon the character and achievements of the late George II, he concluded by declaring that he had ‘no doubt’ that Goldsmith shared the opinions and principles of Smollett, whom he asserted was ‘known to be as rank a Jacobite as any in Scotland’. Moreover, he assured his readers that the ‘weak endeavours’ to ‘blacken the memory of our late most excellent, glorious Sovereign’ by ‘Mr Smollet, Mr. Goldsmith; and a million of other Jacobite historians’ will only serve to make the remembrance of that king ‘shine forth with additional lustre — and endear it to Britons while their breasts are capable of gratitude, are animated by a love for liberty, and glow with a pious zeal for the welfare and glory of their country.’

In other instances, while Goldsmith was not referred to explicitly as a malign Tory or Jacobite historian, he was criticised on comparable terms for his purported support of tyranny and the suppression of freedom. A contributor, who identified himself as ‘J.T.’, in the *Public Advertiser* of 14 August 1771, complained of how ‘almost all the new Histories of England which have lately appeared, have been written by Men influenced by Principles too favourable to the unjust Claims of arbitrary

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16 ‘CHARLES’, ‘To the PRINTER.’, *Middlesex Journal or Chronicle of Liberty*, 7 November 1771.  
Princes, and unfriendly to the Liberties of the People.’ ‘Among others,’ he noted, ‘the History of England just published by Dr. Goldsmith, will be found upon Examination, to come under this Description.’ In part, he was offended by the supposed partiality shown by the author towards Charles I, whose shortcomings of character and conduct as a monarch, he felt, had been varnished over. Moreover, he was irked by the alleged lenity with which the conduct of Wentworth, the Earl of Strafford (1593-1641) had been represented. Unlike Goldsmith, he was unwilling to accept that Strafford’s ‘good Character in private Life’ could ‘make up’ for his ‘having pretended himself a Friend to the Rights of the People’, to later ‘support, not merely the Prerogative, but the most unjust Claims of arbitrary Power’. He continued by referring to Strafford’s supposed endeavour ‘to establish a despotic Government in Ireland’, and concluded by questioning “the Integrity and Impartiality of that Historian, who, notwithstanding so much Evidence against Strafford, can assert of him, as Dr. Goldsmith does, that ‘there appears very little just Cause of Blame in him!’”

Similarly, ‘An HISTORIOGRAPHER’ wrote into both The Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser and the Middlesex Journal or Chronicle of Liberty in early September 1771 to charge Goldsmith for having endeavoured ‘to injure the cause of Freedom, in a land of Liberty, and to sanctify the most infamous violations of the Law and Constitution, as well in stopping, as in stretching the hand of Justice, in order, in some instances to protect and save murderers, in their attempts to pervert the first and most sacred institutions of this country; and in others, to crush those who dare even to complain, or insinuate that they are injured and oppressed.’ He was specifically incensed by what he perceived to be a villainous misrepresentation in the fourth volume of the History of England of Lord Chief Justice Holt’s proceedings against the Jacobite conspirators, Sir John Friend (d. 1696) and Sir William Parkyns (1649?-1696). Goldsmith, he felt, was unduly harsh against Holt (1642-1710), whom he extolled as having been ‘universally admired in nobly asserting and as intrepidly vindicating the rights and liberties of the people’. Subsequently, he demanded that ‘Doctor Goldsmith, the Historian,’ by the ‘supreme Majesty of the people’, to forthwith expunge his ‘false, traitorous, and seditious libel; and also publicly acknowledge and declare his contrition

18 ‘J.T.’, ‘To the Printer of the Public Advertiser.’, Public Advertiser, 14 August 1771.
for having so shamefully abused the confidence of the public, and imposed on the political understanding of mankind.'

These charges could not be ignored, and a belated defence was drawn up by a vitriolic writer, who may have been, according to James Prior, the publisher of the History of England in the Public Advertiser of 23 January 1772. In it, he began by blasting the ‘numerous Criticks of Dr. Goldsmith’s History’ as being ‘poor lifeless Beings, destitute of Address or Language.’ He included an account of ‘One Gentleman’, who while confessing that ‘he never read a Line of the Book,’ considered the history to be ‘an execrable Tory-History, because it was written by Dr. Goldsmith.’ This, he disparaged as another ‘feeble’ effort of ‘impotent Folly’ that was comparable ‘to the Spear sent from the nerveless Arm of the aged Priam, against the warlike and vigorous Son of Achilles’. However, he acknowledged that the accusation against the author for supposedly misrepresenting the character of Lord Chief Justice Holt was ‘worth refuting’. After ‘boldly’ venturing to ‘establish the Historian’s Opinion’ by referring to Holt’s allegedly unbecoming conduct in the ‘Trial of Charlton, King and Hayes, who were imprisoned for the same Treason charged on Friend and Perkins,’ he added an intriguing remark, wherein he attributed Holt’s shortcomings to ‘having observed and felt during the Reigns of Charles and James, the bad Effects of despotic Power’. Perhaps, this was a tacit attempt to shield Goldsmith from the possibility of being accused as a nonjuring Jacobite or a rank Tory.

Goldsmith too sought to defend himself against the virulent response towards his history. In a letter of 7 September 1771 to Bennet Langton, he complained of having been ‘a good deal abused in the newspapers for betraying the liberties of the people’ in publishing it. ‘God knows’, he continued, ‘I had no thoughts for or against liberty in my head.’ Instead, he claimed that his ‘whole aim’ was ‘to make up a book of a decent size that as Squire Richard [Richard Burke] says would do no harm to nobody.’ Moreover, he protested being set down as ‘an arrant Tory and consequently no honest man’, and

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21 ‘To the Printer of the Public Advertiser.’, Public Advertiser, 23 January 1772.
22 Balderston suggests that ‘Squire Richard’ is a reference to Richard Burke, the brother of Edmund. Griffin and O’Shaughnessy posit that it may also have been a playful nickname for a mutual acquaintance, inspired by the character of Squire Richard, a character in Colley Cibber’s The Provok’d Husband (1728). See Letters, p. 100, f.n. 9.
appealed to Langton on the contrary: ‘When you come to look at any part of it you’ll say that I am a soure Whig.’

However, the validity of Goldsmith’s plea towards his non-partisan stance in the *History of England* is somewhat dubious. This is so, as upon at least four counts, one may discern a tendency towards an outlook of a deep, Tory persuasion.

Firstly, it is observable that Goldsmith, in 1771, harboured an enduring concern to sympathetically present the exercise of regal power. This may be inferred from the manner in which he portrayed the problematic activities of certain kings, in which he detracted from his external sources to re-insert assessments that he had made in his earlier English history that were more tempered in their description. Such was the case of his representation of James I’s bid to impose extensive powers over a people who were increasingly aware of their privileges. While having read Hume’s account to write this larger section, Goldsmith diverged from his characterisation of the king, in which he was portrayed critically as having deluded opinions of his own regal person, to, instead, utilise a more sympathetic account, derived from the *Letters from a Nobleman*, to reveal James as having merely conducted himself according to historical precedence, ‘unmindful’ of the alteration of the manners among the people, who had ‘got an idea of the inherent privileges of mankind’. Similarly, in describing Charles I’s ordering of a benevolence to finance his naval expedition against Spain in 1625, Goldsmith disregarded Smollett's account of the incident, to include a disquisition — again extrapolated from the *Letters from a Nobleman* — that considered the king’s act under more favourable terms. Subsequently, Smollett’s discussion of the heavy-handed measures taken to facilitate the raising of the money was not included in Goldsmith’s text. In its place, Goldsmith wrote of how Charles had issued an order ‘that none should be asked for money but such as were able to spare it’, and noted that such an act was ‘authorised by many precedents’.

Secondly, it is immediately evident that the later Goldsmith was still inclined to perceive the execution of Charles I, which took place in 1649, as having been a deplorable act of treachery. Just as he had done so in the *Letters from a Nobleman*, in

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conveying the impeachment of the Earl of Strafford in 1641, he critically portended the demise of the king by writing of how the people, ‘taught’ by the death of Strafford to ‘trample upon the rights of humanity,’ had ‘soon after resolved to shed blood that was still more precious.’ Moreover, in reflecting upon the beheading of the king, he voiced disapproval for this calamitous event by re-using a quip that he had made earlier to lament how many kings, before Charles, had ‘expired by treasons or assassinations; but never since the times of Agis the Lacedemonian was there any other sacrificed by his subjects with all the formalities of justice.’ Intriguingly, in the History of England, he even went so far as to faithfully transcribe Smollett’s touching and sympathetic rendering of the monarch’s demise to lambast those complicit in Charles’ inglorious end with greater vitriol than he had done so in 1764:

Then he [Charles] laid his neck on the block, and stretching out his hands as a signal, one of the executioners severed his head from his body at a blow, while the other, holding it up, exclaimed ‘This is the head of a traitor.’ The spectators testified their horror at that sad spectacle in sighs, tears, and lamentations; the tide of their duty and affection began to return, and each blamed himself either with active disloyalty to his king, or a passive compliance with his destroyers. The very pulpits that used to resound with insolence and sedition, were now bedewed with tears of unfeigned repentance; and all united in their detestation of those dark hypocrites, who, to satisfy their own enmity, involved a whole nation in the guilt of treason.\(^{27}\)

Thirdly, it is perceivable that the later Goldsmith was increasingly hostile towards Parliament for having, allegedly, overextended its authority during the reign of Charles I. That this was so can be gathered from at least two instances in the History of England, wherein he made fresh additions to his narrative to render more explicit his sense of disapprobation. Firstly, in collecting his thoughts upon the increasingly tense political situation of Britain, following the execution of Strafford, he noted how the Commons, ‘having been once put into motion,’ had ‘soon passed the line, and knew not where to stop.’ ‘Had they been contented with resting here,’ he added, ‘after abridging all those privileges of monarchy which were capable of injuring the subject, and leaving

it all those prerogatives that could benefit, they would have been considered as the great
benefactors of mankind, and would have left the constitution pretty nearly on the same
footing on which we enjoy it at present.’ Secondly, in recounting the conclusion of the
English Civil War (1642-1651) with the capturing of the king, he expressed a similar
sentiment by referring to Parliament as a force that had, by the use of the army,
‘extended their overgrown authority.’ 28

Lastly, as recognised by Seitz, select differences in the History of England from
the Letters from a Nobleman suggest that the later Goldsmith harboured a stronger
sense of aversion towards the Whigs and a more favourable attitude towards the Tories.
In his earlier English history, Goldsmith had expressed his misgiving for the perceived
dictatorial tendencies of the former party by including a personal reflection that charged
the Whigs under George I for seeking ‘with all possible diligence’ to abridge the royal
prerogative while binding the ‘lower orders of people with new and severe laws’, which
‘they called liberty.’ 29 In the History of England, Goldsmith not only replicated this
assessment, but altered his expression to place an additional onus on the Whigs for the
oppression of the people, which he had previously proportioned to both the Whig party
and the court. Also, Goldsmith inserted a supplementary critical remark against the
Whigs in his later English history when describing their attempt to ban gatherings of
twelve or more people during the reign of the same monarch, in which it was
considered ‘very remarkable’ that ‘all the severe and most restrictive laws were enacted
by that party that are continually stunning mankind with a cry of freedom.’ 30

In contrast to his deepening wariness toward the Whigs, it is observable that the
later Goldsmith was increasingly inclined to consider the Tory party as a relatively
benign political force. In describing George I’s arrival to England, he inserted a
personal assessment not found in the Letters from a Nobleman, in which it was asserted
that the new monarch was ‘tutored’ by the Whigs to look upon the Tories ‘with an evil
eye’, despite the ‘only fault’ of the latter being their desire to be ‘governed rather by the
authority of a king, than a junto of their fellow-subjects who assumed his power.’
Following this passage, in conveying the outbreak of the first Jacobite uprising in 1715,
he deviated from his earlier English history and Smollett’s account of the event to

characterise the Tory rebels, who had supported the Jacobites in their insurrection, as ‘men attached to the protestant religion, and of moderate principles in government.’ Also, in an earlier segment that described the impending troubles faced by William III in his early years as the king of England, Goldsmith added an original line that noted how the English court was mortified to find out that the ‘Tories were more faithful than even the Whigs, who had placed king William on the throne.’ Furthermore, in his concluding summary of the reign of Queen Anne, Goldsmith included a passing reference not found in his sources that recognised how it was under the Tories that ‘none suffered on the scaffold for treason’.  

Yet, notwithstanding these deep Tory proclivities, it is not possible to subsequently determine that the later Goldsmith was an outright party scribbler. This is so, as, in the History of England, it is evident that he had exerted much caution to restrain his political sentiments, to avoid infusing an untowardly partisan streak into his work. As such, despite having sympathetically portrayed the exercise of royal power by James I and Charles I by borrowing passages from the Letters from a Nobleman, it is noticeable how he did not neglect to extrapolate from it and insert into his English history of 1771 remarks that demonstrated his ability to examine the issue from a relatively neutral position. Thus, as with his earlier English history, Goldsmith was careful to describe the tension between regal prerogative and parliamentarian rights during the reign of James in equitable terms: ‘Numberless… were the disputes between the king and his parliament during his whole reign; one attempting to keep the privileges of the crown entire, the other aiming at abridging the dangerous part of the prerogative; the one labouring to preserve customs established for time immemorial, the other equally assiduous in defending the inherent privileges of humanity.’ Similarly, the later Goldsmith did not fully vindicate Charles from the charge of wrongdoing in demanding a benevolence to realise his war against Spain, by describing the tax as a ‘rigour’ and concluding that ‘no precedents whatsoever could give sanction to injustice.’

Importantly, the later Goldsmith made explicit that his support for monarchy was not driven by any partisan sentiments but stemmed from his concern to see the liberties of the people preserved. As such, he inserted a line of argument comparable to

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31 Ibid., pp. 73, 191, 200-01, 214-15.
32 Ibid., III, 160-61, 195.
that he had previous incorporated in Letter III of the second volume of his earlier English history, in which he defended his view that in a ‘comparison between a republic and a limited monarchy, the balance entirely inclines to the latter,’ as ‘a real republic never yet existed, except in speculation; and that liberty which demagogues promise to their followers, is generally only sought after for themselves.’ ‘The aim in general of popular leaders,’ he elaborated, ‘is rather to depress the great than exalt the humble; and in such governments, the lower ranks of people are too commonly the most abject slaves.’ In conclusion, he asserted that in a republic, ‘the number of tyrants are capable of supporting each other in their injustice; while in a monarchy there is one object, who, if he offends is easily punishable, and ought to be brought to justice.’ Moreover, he took great pains to ensure that he would not be misunderstood upon this point by including in the preface of the History of England a disclaimer, which assured his readers that his desire to see monarchs be ‘allowed to enjoy the power of controlling the encroachments of the great at home’ did not derive from an adherence to the ‘empty notion of divine or hereditary right’; a political philosophy that would have immediately condemned him as a rank Tory or Jacobite.33

Also, while Goldsmith continued to perceive the execution of Charles I to be a lamentable act, this did not preclude him from including in the History of England a slightly modified version of an original line that he had inserted in the Letters from a Nobleman, which recognised the beheading of the king to be part of a vital series of misfortunes that eventually brought constitutional stability. ‘Many were the miseries sustained by the nation in bringing this monarch to the block,’ he wrote, ‘and more were yet to be endured previous to the settlement of the constitution’. ‘[Y]et’, he continued, ‘these struggles in the end were productive of domestic happiness and security,’ wherein ‘the laws became more precise, the monarch’s privileges better ascertained, and the subjects duty better delineated’. All ‘became more peaceable,’ he concluded, ‘as if a previous fermentation in the constitution was necessary for its subsequent refinement.’34 While Goldsmith could not support regicide in principle, he was keen to not be perceived as a mouthpiece for the House of Stuart either.

As for Goldsmith’s growing wariness towards Parliament for having endeavoured to grasp more power during the problematic reign of Charles I, such

34 Ibid., III, 315-16.
sentiments were balanced out by the additional inclusions he made in the *History of England*, which denounced the extent to which they were culpable, in at least two occasions, of pandering to regal pretensions. Accordingly, in describing the acquiescence of Parliament to the demands of Henry VIII following his war in France, he committed more lines than he had done so previously, and deviated from Hume’s account of the event, to lambast their timidity. ‘But of all his subjects’, he wrote, ‘none seemed more abandoned and basely servile than the parliament, which it might have been reasonably supposed would rather be the protectors of the people, than the slaves of the crown.’ ‘Upon his return from his expensive French expedition,’ he continued, ‘after professions of the greatest submission and profound acknowledgement, they granted him a subsidy equal to his demands, and added to it a gift, which will make their memory odious to the most distant posterity.’

35 Much in the same spirit, he inserted a fresh remark when describing the growing confidence of James II in his bid to impose a tyrannical rule over the kingdom, in which he quipped that it was ‘happy for the nation’ that the king had dissolved a Parliament that had buckled under the pressure of his will, as it was ‘perhaps impossible to pick out another house of commons, that could be more ready to acquiesce in the measures of the crown.’

36 Otherwise, it is recognisable that despite the later Goldsmith’s increasing tendency to look favourably upon the Tories he was still prepared to pass supplementary, critical remarks upon this party. Such was the case in his description of the generous military package the Tory-dominated parliament supplied to Queen Anne during the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1714). In it, he added a personal meditation not found in either the *Letters from a Nobleman* or Smollett’s history — which he primarily relied upon in drawing up this segment — that deplored how it was ‘never considered’ that ‘these great efforts’ were ‘little necessary… either to the happiness, or protection of the people.’ Similarly, while he noted in both histories that the newly instated Tory administration under the reign of the same monarch was compelled by the desire to mortify the Whigs and to free the nation from a ruinous war on the continent, he inserted an additional assessment in his later English history that

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placed emphasis on the disgraceful nature of their interest to embarrass their opponents by referring to such intentions as being driven by ‘evil’.  

Indeed, it is evident that in composing the *History of England*, Goldsmith was keen to establish himself as an equitable writer who was capable of steering between the many political oppositions that existed. Accordingly, in at least two passages where the Whig and Tory parties are directly juxtaposed, it is observable that the later Goldsmith invested much effort to be balanced in their portrayal. Firstly, in his reflection upon the inclinations of each party prior to his description of the effort undertaken by the Tory ministers to realise the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), Goldsmith diverged from his earlier account to convey a comparison of greater complexity in the *History of England*. While the *Letters from a Nobleman* had distinguished the Whigs from the Tories by simply considering the former as being driven by a desire for war and the latter with that of peace, in the later English history he noted that war was ‘in general, more adapted to the temper and the courage of the Whigs than the Tories.’ Admittedly, while he betrayed his tendency to favour the Tories by describing them as cultivators of the arts and peace content with prosperity in contrast to the Whiggish proclivity to ‘delight in struggle’, he nevertheless characterised the former as being ‘submissive, temperate’ and ‘weak’. Secondly, in the description of the Whig’s loss of power to the Tories during the reign of Queen Anne in the *History of England*, Goldsmith associated the ‘spirit of Toryism’ with the espousal of ‘the most servile tenets’; a reference that is missing in his earlier English history. Perhaps, he considered this addition as providing an equitable counter balance to his portrayal of the Whigs as being motivated by a ‘republican spirit of liberty’.  

Likewise, in his treatment of the two Jacobite rebellions, it is noticeable how Goldsmith had masterfully fused the expected anti-Jacobite rhetoric with mitigating remarks to lend an overall sense of even-handedness. As such, while he included in the *History of England* new, critical remarks against the uprisings — he considered the first rebellion to have been projected by ‘imbecility’ and supported by ‘rashness’, and the second to have ‘served to encrease the hatred of the people still more’ against Charles Edward Stuart, who had received French support in his ambitions, ‘as it shewed that he was willing to be made a king, even by the open enemies of his country’ — he

maintained his position of finding both sides culpable of wrongdoing. As such, he re-conveyed a slightly modified line of thought that he had adopted earlier in the *Letters from a Nobleman*, in discussing the aftermath of the 1715 uprising, by noting that in ‘running through the revolution of human transactions, it is a melancholy consideration that in all contentions, we generally find little to applaud on either side.’ Similarly, in concluding his account of the 1745 uprising, he re-used lines from his earlier English history, in which he explicitly condemned the cruelty exercised by the government forces against the rebels, whilst not neglecting to recognise the deplorable nature of the insurgency:

> How guilty soever an enemy may be, it is the duty of a brave soldier to remember that he is only to fight an opposer, and not a suppliant. The victory was in every respect decisive, and humanity to the conquered would have rendered it glorious.\(^{39}\)

Finally, it is recognisable that Goldsmith was careful to present to his readers an objective summary of the character of George II, regardless of his increasing sense of dislike for him — probably driven, in part, by his failure to receive a royal pension from him and his successor. Accordingly, while he added more lines of criticism against this monarch in the *History of England*, to describe him as an ‘unlearned’ monarch who had ‘despised learning in others’ and stunted the flourishing of genius, whilst practicing a frugality that ‘bordered upon avarice’ among other ‘meaner vices’, he, nevertheless, followed his earlier model of quoting an alternate perspective in which a favourable view of his character was also espoused by noting he was ‘through the whole of his life… appeared rather to live for the cultivation of useful virtues than splendid ones’, satisfied at ‘being good’, whilst leaving for others to achieve ‘unenvied greatness.’ Moreover, he concluded this account by reiterating the impossibility of determining which of these two perspectives may be considered to be truthful:

> Which of these two characters are true, or whether they may not in part be both so, I will not pretend to decide. If his favourers are numerous, so are those who oppose them; let posterity, therefore, decide the contest.\(^{40}\)

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Thus, the remarks made upon the *History of England*, by both the virulent newspaper critics, who denounced it as a work tainted by a partisan spirit, and Goldsmith himself, who posited a sardonic plea to neutrality in his letter to Langton, does not properly, or sincerely, identify Goldsmith’s position within the spectrum of factional politics. On the one hand, it is not possible to simply condemn Goldsmith as having been a mouthpiece for the Tory or Jacobite party. On the other hand, neither can one perceive him as having been a writer who was able to stand aloof from the political divisions of his day. Instead, the *History of England* reveals that Goldsmith held an enduringly, and even deepening, personal penchant towards a Tory-like vision of history, whilst endeavouring to maintain a disinterested position. Of the two political faces of Goldsmith, however, it is the latter which deserves greater attention. To appropriate the words of Rapin, it was ‘not easy to observe a just neutrality’ during this period with each party representing their adversary ‘as designing those evils which are most apt to fill men with fears’. Under such circumstances, the extent to which Goldsmith must have invested energy towards offering a relatively balanced portrayal of the Tory and Whig opposition, the Jacobite rebels and George II is appreciable.

**Authorial persona and principle**

The effort exerted by Goldsmith, in composing the *History of England*, to establish himself as a nonpartisan thinker cannot be understated. During the eighteenth century, there was an established understanding amongst the writerly community that engaging in factional disputation was an unbecoming form of sociability and writing. Joseph Addison (1672-1719), in the fifty-seventh number of the *Spectator*, declaimed against the ‘Party Rage’ that had, allegedly, lately crept into the conversations of women, and considered it to be a ‘Male Vice’ that rendered the disputant an ‘odious and despicable Figure’. Also, in an earlier publication, he expressed disapproval against that ‘dreadful Spirit of Division’ for injuring morality and affecting knowledge and learning. Concerning the latter point, he voiced disapproval of how men, ‘formerly became eminent in learned Societies by their Parts and Acquisitions,’ now sought to

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42 See Philip Carter’s *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660-1800* (Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2001) for further details on what constituted the appropriate form of political expression during this period.
distinguish themselves by the Warmth and Violence with which they espouse their respective Parties.’ ‘Books’, he continued, ‘are valued upon the like Considerations: An Abusive, Scurrilous Style passes for Satyr, and a dull Scheme of Party Notions is called fine Writing.’ In conclusion, he expressed his desire for people to no longer ‘regard our Fellow Subjects as Whigs or Tories,’ but ‘make the Man of Merit our Friend, and the Villain our Enemy.’

Despite many later writers paying tribute to the Addisonian call for political calm, the influence of party was not, by any means, on the wane. Rather, it still held much of its former virulence. Consequently, it was not uncommon for historians of the period to pay lip service to the virtue of impartiality whilst aligning themselves to a faction. Salient examples of such may be found in the historical works of John Oldmixon (1673-1742) and Catharine Macaulay (1731-91). While both writers insisted upon their supposed neutrality, they provided a vehemently Whiggish interpretation of English history in their works. As such, despite declaiming in the History of England (1729-39) against the accusation that he had ‘been hired by a Party to write’ his previous historical works, Oldmixon approached his histories as ‘extensions of his earlier political propaganda’ and wrote to ‘glorify his Whig heroes and their Puritan-Parliamentarian forefathers and to denounce their adversaries’. Similarly, whilst presenting herself in the introduction of her History of England from the Accession of James I to that of the Brunswick Line (1763-83) as a champion of ‘truth’, Macaulay launched into a ferocious anti-Tory diatribe that revealed her deeply Parliamentarian outlook on English political history.

Even Smollett, who was not as feverishly and explicitly partisan as Oldmixon or Macaulay as a historian, could not help but dedicate the History of England to William Pitt (1708-78), whom he greatly admired and supported then for his repeated denunciations, when out of office, against the governmental policy of ‘subsidizing Continental powers in the interests of Hanover.’ While Smollett emphasised that he

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43 Joseph Addison, Spectator, 5 May 1711 & 24 July 1711.
was addressing Pitt as a ‘patriot’ and not as a ‘minister’, it is evident that he was aware of the great risk he was taking in doing so. In what could only have been an attempt to shield himself from the charge of partisanship and mercenary opportunism, he wrote of how he was drawn to Pitt’s ‘permanent qualities’; ‘qualities that exist independent of favour or of faction’.47

When considering the continuing relevance of party sentiments in the field of historical writing, the significance of Goldsmith’s relatively even-handed approach to contentious issues in the History of England is evermore appreciable. Incidentally, unlike Smollett, Goldsmith did not take up the opportunity to dedicate this work to any influential political figure. Indeed, there is no dedication attached to it, thus rendering Goldsmith’s introductory claim to neutrality slightly more convincing than that of Smollett’s.

Goldsmith’s sensitivity to writing objectively may be attributed, in part, to his concern to distance himself from the charge of being a scurrilous party scribbler. Amongst authors of the time, there was — at least — an outward tendency to associate demonstrations of party allegiance with short-sightedness and self-promotion of the most pernicious kind; an outlook that is recognisable in Smollett’s The Life and Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves, wherein the electoral contest between a Tory and Whig candidate is mockingly depicted with the former, Sir Valentine Quickset, being described by the protagonist, Launcelot, as a ‘blind slave of party’ and the latter, a Mr Isaac Vanderpelft, being a worshipper of ‘no God but mammon’.48 It is relevant to recognise that by 1771, Goldsmith was a respectable poet and a Professor of Antient History at the Royal Academy. More importantly, he was publicly accountable for the History of England, unlike his earlier, anonymously published work of 1764. In other words, he was in a position where he had to take greater care to avoid damaging his persona as a polite member of London’s literary elite; a status that he had craved for since his years as a Grub Street ‘hack’, as is discernible in his letter of 31 August 1758 to Daniel Hodson, wherein he expressed his ardent hope of obtaining respectability; even at the expense, he intimated, of leaving London to work as a surgeon in ‘one of the factories on the coast of Coromandel’:

I confess it again my Dear Dan that nothing but the wildest ambition could prevail on me to leave the enjoyment of that refined conversation which I sometimes am admitted to partake in for uncertain fortune and paltry shew. You can’t conceive how I am sometimes divided, to leave all that is dear gives me pain, but when I consider that it is possible I may acquire a gentle independence for life, when I think of that dignity which Philosophy claims to raise it above contempt and ridicule, when I think thus, I eagerly long to embrace every opportunity of separating myself from the vulgar, as much in my circumstances as I am in my sentiments already.\textsuperscript{49}

However, it would be unjust to wholly attribute the energy that the later Goldsmith had invested towards presenting a relatively balanced account of English history solely to his concern for his writerly reputation. Goldsmith was by no means a timid author. Such may be gathered from an anecdote recounted by Boswell, concerning a conversation that took place between Goldsmith and Johnson, in the company of Martinelli of Florence, in 1773. According to Boswell, Goldsmith had come to a head with Johnson, who cautioned Martinelli not to continue his history of England to the present day, as he would have to ‘tell of almost all living great what they do not wish told.’ To this sage word of advice, Goldsmith had rebelled with bravado:

JOHNSON. ‘Why, Sir, in the first place, he who tells a hundred lies has disarmed the force of his lies. But besides; a man had rather have a hundred lies told of him, than one truth which he does not wish should be told.’ GOLDSMITH. ‘For my part, I’d tell the truth, and shame the devil.’ JOHNSON. ‘Yes, Sir; but the devil will be angry. I wish to shame the devil as much as you do; but I should choose to be out of the reach of his claws.’ GOLDSMITH. ‘His claws can do you no harm, when you have the shield of truth.’\textsuperscript{50}

Consequently, another dimension that must be considered is the fact that Goldsmith held a genuine — perhaps, even a naïve — distaste for party politics. Sometime prior to working upon the \textit{History of England}, Goldsmith was allegedly

\textsuperscript{50} Boswell, \textit{Life of Samuel Johnson}, I, 444.
approach by James Scott (1733-1814), the author of the ‘Anti-Sejanus’ letters (1756), with the proposal that should he write in defence of Lord North’s ministry, he would be offered a handsome stipend. Despite his shortage of cash, Goldsmith declined the offer: ‘I can earn as much’, he said, ‘as will supply my wants without writing for any party; the assistance therefore you [Scott] offer, is unnecessary to me’.51

This rebuttal of Scott’s suggestion may be attributed to Goldsmith’s association of parties with selfishness and folly from an early point of his career. In Letter CXII of The Citizen of the World, which was published in 1761, he described a fictional festivity held by prospective members of Parliament in a manner not unlike that employed by Smollett in The Life and Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves. Just as Launcelot had confronted an excitable and mindless crowd, Lien Chi Altangi mused over the voracious appetites of the people who had gathered to support a particular faction. Also, much in line with the portrayal of Quickset and Vanderpelft, the Chinese philosopher noted how the candidates were motivated by narrow and frivolous concerns:

One candidate, for instance, treats with gin, a spirit of their own manufacture; another always drinks brandy imported from abroad. Brandy is a wholesome liquor; gin is a liquor wholly their own. This then furnishes an obvious case of quarrel, Whether it be most reasonable to get drunk with gin, or get drunk with brandy? The mob meet upon the debate; fight themselves sober; and then draw off to get drunk again, and charge for another encounter.52

Also, in comparing select passages from the History of England with the Letters from a Nobleman, one can appreciate the extent to which Goldsmith was enduringly committed to the Addisonian notion that party writing was a base form of employment. In 1771, he did not neglect to include a tempered version of an original reflection that he had inserted in his earlier English history, wherein he lambasted political writers working under the pay of politicians during Britain’s war with Spain, which was re-instigated in 1739, as mercenary hacks:

The war with Spain had now continued for several years, and was attended with but indifferent fortune. Some unsuccessful expeditions had

51 Prior, Life of Oliver Goldsmith, II, 278.
been carried on in the West-Indies, under admiral Vernon, commodore
Knowles, and others; and the failure of these was still more aggravated
by the political writers of the day; a class of beings that had risen up
during this and the preceding administration, at first employed against
Walpole, and afterwards taken into pay by him. Dull, and without
principle, they made themselves agreeable to the public by impudence
and abuse, embarrassed every operation, and embittered every
misfortune.\(^53\)

In so far as Goldsmith was concerned, party allegiance was incompatible with
the pursuit of 'truth'. And he saw it as the source of much past national embarrassments
and failures. In describing the state of British political life during a phase of peace that
had been afforded in the reign of George II in the *History of England*, he returned to his
earlier English history of 1764 to deride the debates that had raged between the Court
and Country parties as having involved matters of little consequence. 'A calm
disinterested reader, is now surprised at the heat with which many subjects at that time,
of little importance in themselves were discussed', he wrote. 'He now smiles at these
denunciations of slavery and of ruin, which were entailed upon posterity, and which
posterity did not feel.' Moreover, in recounting the successes of the English against the
French forces during the reign of Queen Anne, he arrested his reading of Smollett's
history to, instead, extrapolate a line of thinking he had developed in the *Letters from a
Nobleman*, wherein he blamed the contention between the Whig and Tory party as
being responsible for the lack of a decisive victory against Louis XIV. What Louis’
armies and politics could not effect was 'brought about by party in England’, he
lamented: the ‘dissention between the Whigs and Tories in England saved France, that
was now tottering on the brink of ruin.'\(^54\)

Evidently, Goldsmith had no desire to become a political pundit tasked with
selling lies and turbulent emotions. Rather, he was increasingly keen to promote the
virtues of a calmer and disinterested form of patriotism. This can be deduced from at
least two passages found in the *History of England*, wherein he composed favourable
estimations of Lord Viscount Falkland (1610-1643) and Admiral Robert Blake (1598-
1657). With regards to the former, in addition to having neglected to include in the

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History of England an opinion that he had inserted in his earlier English history, in which he quipped that it must be a happy end to fall in the service of the king, he made original, supplementary remarks, wherein he noted that Falkland had ‘boldly’ withstood the monarch’s pretensions prior to joining his camp, and was ‘anxious for his country alone’ and that he ‘dreaded the too prosperous success of his own party, as much as that of the enemy’. Similarly, in summarising the character of the latter, he deviated significantly from the Letters from a Nobleman, in which he had merely made a passing reference of the ‘famous’ admiral as the capturer of Jamaica. Instead, he added his own touch to Hume’s commendatory passage, to describe Blake as a ‘gallant man’, whose ‘aim was to serve his country, not to establish a tyrant’, despite being a ‘zealous republican in principle’. Notably, he transposed from his external source the admiral’s rallying call to his sailors, in which he reminded them that it was their duty to fight for their country, regardless of ‘whatever hands the government may fall’.

Additionally, the later Goldsmith was increasingly dedicated to compelling his readers to overcome the pernicious influence of factionalism by appealing to their natural inclination for sympathy. In describing the fate of the 1715 Jacobite rebels, he deviated from Smollett’s history to insert a personal supplication that he had not included in the Letters from a Nobleman, in which he called for the individuals who had joined the rebellion for virtuous reasons, albeit unjustified in their acts, to be remembered in a compassionate light:

…[Brigadier William] Mackintosh and several other prisoners, broke from Newgate, after having mastered the keeper and turnkey, and disarmed the centinels. The court proceeded to the trial of those that remained; four or five were hanged, drawn, and quartered, at Tyburn. Among these, William Paul, a clergy man, attracted peculiar pity: he professed himself a true and sincere member of the church of England, but not that scismatical church, whose bishops had abandoned their king, and shamefully given up their ecclesiastical privileges. How strong soever the taint of faction may be in any man’s bosom, if he has any goodness in him, he cannot help feeling the strongest pity for those brave

men who are willing, however erroneously, to sacrifice their lives to their principles.\textsuperscript{56}

Similarly, in conveying the Young Pretender’s dire situation following his defeat at the Battle of Culloden in 16 April 1746, the later Goldsmith did not neglect to include in the \textit{History of England} a slightly modified version of a line that he had inserted in the \textit{Letters from a Nobleman}, in which he had tacitly instructed his readers to feel pity for the ‘good-natured’, albeit misled, adventurer. As such, just as he had noted that ‘while reason would repress humanity’, a sympathetic person would ‘plead in favour of the wretched’, in the \textit{History of England} he wrote of how the hearts of the people ought to ‘plead for mercy’ despite reason urging for ‘punishment’ against the ‘good and brave’ prince whose distresses atoned for his ‘former guilt’. Moreover, in an attempt, perhaps, to sway those harbouring a deeply set prejudice against the Jacobite cause to transcend such sentiments, he dedicated a passage derived from Smollett’s narrative to pathetically portray Charles’s haggard appearance before being transported to safety across the Channel, which he had not incorporated in his earlier text, despite having examined this source then too:

He [Charles Edward Stuart] was clad in a short coat of black frize, thread bare, over which was a common Highland Plaid, girt round him by a belt, from whence depended a pistol and a dagger. He had not been shifted for many weeks; his eye was hollow, his visage wan, and his constitution greatly impaired by famine and fatigue.\textsuperscript{57}

Much in the same spirit, Goldsmith, in 1771, exerted a greater effort to evoke a sense of sorrow for Charles I, whom he considered as a man possessed of many virtues, despite his faults, which stemmed from the ‘error of his education’. In describing the captured king being led from Hurst Castle to Windsor, he deviated significantly from his earlier account of the event to portray the king’s person and situation with greater pathos:

Colonel Harrison, the son of a butcher, was commanded to conduct the king [Charles I] from Hurst castle to Windsor, and from thence to London. His afflicted subjects, who ran to have a sight of their

sovereign, were greatly affected at the change that appeared in his face and person. He had allowed his beard to grow; his hair was become venerably grey, rather by the pressure of anxiety than the hand of time; while the rest of his apparel bore the marks of misfortune and decay. Thus he stood a solitary figure of majesty in distress, which even his adversaries could not behold without reverence and compassion… The duke of Hamilton, who was reserved for the same punishment with his master, having leave to take a last farewell as he departed from Windsor, threw himself at the king’s feet crying out, ‘My dear master.’ The unhappy monarch raised him up, and embracing him tenderly, replied, while the tears ran down his cheeks, ‘I have indeed been a dear master to you.’

Thus, Goldsmith’s drive to maintain a position of relative impartiality, in drawing up the History of England, was strongly influenced by the prevailing writerly etiquette and sentiments of the time. Not only was he aware of the dangers involved in pressing too abrasively one’s own personal political proclivities, but it is appreciable that he held a principled distaste for partisan writing and increasingly valued the virtues of disinterested service, loyalty and sentimental openness. Regardless of his growing, personal Tory-like outlook, he recognised and upheld the need abide by the conventions of polite writing to ‘give a slight picture’ of that part ‘which posterity would wish to know’, then what might serve to ‘satisfy the curiosity of contending factions.’

A cautionary tale

That Goldsmith was guided by a strong sense of etiquette and integrity when composing the History of England reveals the extent to which he was an active compiler with a clear notion of his duties and was not merely a party puppet or a desperate hack. Against this backdrop, it becomes questionable what the ultimate design of his project was. Here, it will be posited that it had largely to do with the matter of educating his readership on the pressing dangers that they faced as an entire nation; that it was intended to be a cautionary tale that would lead his audience,

regardless of whatever factional loyalty they may harbour, towards socio-political improvement.

As has been already noted, amongst notable, contemporary writers in the eighteenth century, including Hume, Voltaire and Adam Smith, there was a deeply-set understanding that one of the primary duties of the historian was to instruct the growing body of learned readers towards enlightened maturity. From an early point in his career, Goldsmith too was in accord with this notion. That this was so is discernible from the preface he wrote anonymously for William Guthrie’s *A General History of the World* (1764); a task which he likely completed sometime before 11 October 1763, when he was paid three guineas by John Newbery for it.60 Here, in the opening lines, he presented a general exposition upon how histories were of benefit, as they were able to provide the most efficient means by which to grow in ‘wisdom’:

EXPERIENCE every day convinces us, that no part of learning affords so much wisdom upon such easy terms as history. Our advances in most other studies are slow and disgusting, acquired with effort, and retained with difficulty; but in a well written history, every step we proceed only serves to encrease our ardour: we profit by the experience of others without sharing their toils or misfortunes; and in this part of knowledge in a more particular manner study is but relaxation.61

Notably, Goldsmith was committed to putting into practice his acknowledged duty of the historian in composing the *Letters from a Nobleman*. Not only did he begin by providing a lengthy exposition upon the merit of reading histories in terms similar to that expressed by him in the preface to Guthrie’s *A General History of the World*, but he also had the figure of the nobleman make poignant, critical reflections upon issues of contemporary relevance. In particular, he was keen to caution his readers against the imperialistic trajectory that Britain was following. Subsequently, he concluded this work with a paragraph that attacked the nation’s ongoing status as an expansive power:

But no country should build upon remote strength; true power must always subsist at home. When the branches of a large empire become

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more powerful than the original stem, instead of assisting it’s [sic] growth, they only overload and exhaust it nourishment. The discontents, therefore, which many have expressed at the conclusion of the late peace, that we did not insist upon harder terms, and increase our possessions, were ill founded, since it is probable we are already possessed of more than government can manage. There is ever a certain extent of empire which politics are able to wield; beyond this her magnificence is but empty pomp, and her size but corpulence.\textsuperscript{62}

While he was no longer wearing the mask of a lecturing nobleman in the \textit{History of England}, it is evident that Goldsmith intended for this work to be read as a cautionary tale too. By taking select passages from his earlier English history, and complementing it with fresh remarks, he suggestively warned his readers of the dangerous situation they were in. One menace that he sought to reveal was the possibility for another war — for which there was a need to maintain a level of preparedness. Such is discernible from three reflections he included in this text, which remarked upon the unreliability of treaties. Firstly, in describing the temporary respite in fighting that was afforded by the Convention of Klosterzeven (1757) during the Seven Year’s War, he deviated from Smollett’s narrative to include an assessment that he had made earlier in the \textit{Letters from a Nobleman}, by which he portrayed formal ties between nations as amounting to nothing more than ornamental measures of convenience:

Soon after the capitulation of Closter Seven had been signed between the duke of Cumberland, and the duke of Richelieu, both sides began to complain that the treaty was not strictly observed. The Hanoverians exclaimed against the rapacity of the French general, and the brutality of his soldiers. The French retorted the charge against them, accused them of insolence and insurrection, and resolved to bind them strictly to the terms of their agreement, sensible of their own superiority. Treaties between nations are seldom observed any longer than interest or fear

hold the union; and among nations that take every advantage, political faith is a term without meaning.  

Secondly, in conveying the foreign policy followed by the government of George I, Goldsmith committed a personal line, not found in the *Letters from a Nobleman*, in which he considered treaties to be flimsy agreements not conducive to securing a nation’s security. As such, he lambasted the ‘politicians of the age’ for supposing that ‘paper chains’ derived from ‘treaties, subsidies, and political combinations’ would be ‘sufficient to secure the permanence of dominion’. Notably, he followed this point by including a modified assessment that he had made earlier, by the means of which he subtly alluded to the need for Britain to remain self-reliant on the larger political stage by nurturing its internal strength:

But internal regulations were not what the ministry at that time attended to. The chief object of their attention was to gratify the sovereign with a continual round of foreign treaties and alliances. It was natural for a king born and bred in Germany, where all sovereignty [sic] is possessed upon such precarious tenures, to introduce the same spirit into the British constitution, however independent it might be as to the rest of Europe. This reign, therefore, was begun by treaties, and the latter part of it was burthened with them.  

Thirdly, in recounting the events leading up to the outbreak of the War of Jenkins’ Ear (1739-1748), Goldsmith digressed from his earlier exposition upon the growing tensions between Britain and Spain — occasioned by the Spanish harassment of British merchants — to insert an original observation, wherein he noted how Robert Walpole had ‘vainly expected from negociations’ a redress upon the ills committed, which was ‘only to be obtained by arms.’ Moreover, he concluded this segment by making an explicit reference to the fragility of foreign agreements in a situation where there was an absence of an overarching authorial figure to enforce them:

At last, however, the complaints of the English merchants were loud enough to interest the house of commons; their letters and memorials were produced, and their grievances enforced by council at the bar of the

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house… Soon after letters of reprisal were granted against the Spaniards, and this being on both sides considered as an actual commencement of hostilities, both diligently set forward their armaments by sea and land… At that time France and England were combined against Spain; at present, France and Spain were untied against England; such little hopes can statesmen place upon the firmest treaties, where there is no superior power to compel the observance.  

Indeed, Goldsmith’s conviction upon the unreliability of national pacts was of the extent that, in the History of England, he strongly suggested — as he had done in the Letters from a Nobleman — that Britain should guard itself against losing its military vitality. Accordingly, in describing the passing of the Game Preservation Act of 1753, he faithfully reincorporated his previous assessment of it as having effected, in part, a deplorable consequence, wherein the ordinary citizens were deprived of their ability to exercise useful skills that could be employed in wars:

An act equally unpopular with the two former [the Marriage Act and ‘Jew Bill’ of 1753] and was now also passed, which contained regulations for the better preservation of the game. By this, none but men already possessed of a stated fortune were allowed a privilege of carrying a gun, or destroying game, though even upon the grounds which he himself rented and paid for. This law was but of very little service to the community; it totally damped all that martial ardour among the lower orders of mankind, by preventing their handling those arms, which might one day be necessary to defend their country. It also defeated its own end of preserving game; for the farmers, abridged of the power of seizing game, never permitted it to come to maturity.  

In addition to wanting to caution the reading public from falling into a state of complacency afforded by a tenuous peace, the later Goldsmith was also keen — as he had been especially concerned to do so in 1764 — to warn them against Britain’s continuing, expansionist tendencies. As such, he included in the History of England

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67 See chapter IX of Jeremy Black’s Debating Foreign Policy in Eighteenth-Century Britain (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 167-96, for further information concerning the public and political attitudes towards Britain’s imperial outlook during this period.
reflections wherein he conveyed, in no uncertain terms, that the beginnings of the recent endeavours into North America were designs of a disadvantageous nature. In his description of the government’s attempt to settle Nova Scotia from 1748, following the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, he reincorporated into his narrative a slightly trimmed-down version of an assessment that he had utilised in the *Letters from a Nobleman*, to denounce the scheme as having been an ingloriously misguided effort:

A scheme, which the nation was taught to believe would be extremely advantageous, had been entered upon some time before. This was the encouraging those who had been discharged the army or navy, to become settlers in a new colony in North America, in the province of Nova Scotia. To this retreat was thought the waste of an exuberant nation might well be drained off; and those bold spirits kept in employment at a distance, who might be dangerous, if suffered to continue in idleness at home. Nova Scotia was a place where men might be imprisoned, but not maintained; it was cold, barren, and incapable of successful cultivation. The new colony, therefore, was maintained there with some expense to the government in the beginning; and such as were permitted, soon went southward to the milder climates, where they were invited by an untenanted and fertile soil. Thus did the nation ungratefully send off her hardy veterans to perish on inhospitable shores, and this they were taught to believe would extend their dominion.68

Furthermore, in the lines following this passage, Goldsmith continued to condemn Britain’s foray into the New World as having been a troublesome and unjust adventure that was more of a headache than a benefit to the nation. In narrating the multiple instances of tensions that had flared up between Britain and France over their colonies, leading up to the Seven Years’ War, he inserted a remark, found in neither the *Letters from a Nobleman* nor Smollett’s *Continuation of the Complete History of England* (1763), in which he contemplated how such clashes were inevitable, considering that both nations had ‘no right to the countries in dispute’. Also, he alluded to these overseas acquisitions as parasitic entities by incorporating a modified passage from his earlier English history that disapprovingly referred to them as unwilling

defenders of their own territories, which required the protective cover of their mother country:

The successes, therefore, of the French in the beginning were flattering and uninterrupted. There had been for some time frequent skirmishes between their troops, and those of the government of England. They had fought with general Lawrence to the North, and colonel Washington in the South, and come off most commonly victorious… The ministry, however, in England began now a very vigorous exertion in defence of those colonies, who refused to defend themselves.⁶⁹

Significantly, Goldsmith’s concern to dampen the readers’ ardour for Britain to stretch her might to the far-flung regions of the world was such that he even altered his outlook on the character and exploit of Admiral Edward Vernon (1684-1757), who had rendered a significant service to the nation during the War of Jenkins’ Ear by asserting her power in the Caribbean Basin. While in the Letters from a Nobleman, he had lauded Vernon as a ‘rough and honest soldier, untainted with corruption or the effeminacy of the times’, in the History of England he portrayed him in a deflated manner as having been ‘a man of more courage than experience, of more confidence than skill’. Also, rather than simply recounting this admiral’s unanticipatedly successful taking of Porto Bello, as he had done earlier, he added a new line, by the means of which he critically evaluated the victory as having been glorious, rather than useful:

He [Vernon] had asserted in the house of Commons that Porto Belo, a fort and harbour in South America, could easily be destroyed, and that he himself would undertake to reduce it with six ships only. A project which appeared so wild and impossible, was ridiculed by the ministry; but as he still insisted upon the proposal, they complied with his request, hoping that his want of success might repress the confidence of his party. In this, however, they were disappointed; for with six ships only, he attacked and demolished all the fortifications of the place, and came away victorious, with scarce the loss of a man. This victory was

magnified at home in all the strains of panegyric, and the triumph was far superior to the value of the conquest [my italics].

It should be explained here, however, that the later Goldsmith was not against foreign acquisitions per se but was committed to dissuading his fellow citizens from supporting Britain’s excessive policy of overseas expansion. His primary fear was of the nation becoming stretched thin. Under the condition that the territory in question had a real advantage to offer, he had no issue with it being brought under British control. Accordingly, in his description of the taking of Gibraltar by George Rooke (1650-1709) in 1704, he not only replicated his earlier assessment that recognised the island as being of great strategic value, but also denounced Parliament for not having realised its significance to the national interest:

When the news of this conquest [Gibraltar] was brought to England, it was for some time in debate whether it was a capture worth thanking the admiral [Rooke] for. It was at last considered as unworthy of public gratitude; and while the duke of Marlborough was extolled for useless services, Sir George Rooke was left to neglect, and soon displaced from his command, for having so essentially served his country. A striking instance that, even in the most enlightened age, popular applause is most usually misplaced. Gibraltar has ever since remained in the possession of the English, and continues of the utmost use in refitting that part of the navy destined to annoy an enemy, or protect our trade in the Mediterranean. Here the English have a repository capable of containing all things necessary for the repairing of fleets, or the equipment of armies.

Finally, Goldsmith, in 1771, was also determined to waken the people to the threat they faced in their pursuance of luxury and commerce. In part, he wanted them to recognise that these two prongs of socio-economic activity could have an enfeebling effect upon the national, military spirit. That this was so, can be gathered from the account he gave of the travails that the Dutch Republic had faced during the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748). Just as he had done in the Letters from a Nobleman,

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he firmly attributed the rapid succession of losses that the Dutch suffered at the hands of the French following the Battle of Fontenoy (1745), to the former’s long association with trade and their dabbling in riches:

In the mean time, while England was thus in commotion at home [due to the Second Jacobite Rebellion], the flames of war still continued to rage upon the continent with increasing violence. The French arms were crowned with repeated success; and almost the whole Netherlands were reduced under their dominion. The Dutch in their usual manner negociated, supplicated, and evaded the war; but they found themselves ever day stripped of some of those strong towns which formed a barrier to their dominions, and which they had been put in possession of by the victories of Marlborough. They now lay almost defenceless, and ready to receive the terms of their conquerors; their national bravery being quite suffocated in the spirit of traffic and luxury.72

In addition to the risk of losing one’s fighting ability, Goldsmith was desirous of conveying how luxury and commerce could have a deeper effect of promoting intemperance and meanness, respectively, too. As such, he inserted a line — derived from his earlier English history — in the passage dealing with the scandalous affair of the Charitable Corporation; the fraudulent sale of the Earl of Derwentwater’s estate in 1723; and John Ward of Hackney’s unscrupulous business dealings, which castigated these events by remarking how ‘luxury had given birth to prodigality’. And, in a later segment, he noted how commerce was ever conducive towards feelings of rapacious ill-will; for which reason, he explained, the temporary peace that existed between Britain and France in the East Indies, prior to the Siege of Calcutta (1756) had been disturbed:

This cessation, which promised such lasting tranquillity, was, nevertheless, but of short duration. Compacts made between trading companies can never be of long continuance, when advantage is opposed to good faith. In a few months both sides renewed their operations, no longer under the name of auxiliaries, but as rivals in arms, in government, and in commerce. What the motives to this infraction were,

are not sufficiently known; but wherever there is trade, there is avarice; and that is a passion that breaks the bounds of equity.\textsuperscript{73}

Notably, Goldsmith’s concern to have his readers realise the potential for luxury and commerce to produce moral instability and avariciousness was such that, in the chapter detailing the internal situation of England following the First Jacobite Rebellion, he inserted a fulsome account of Thomas Parker’s impeachment upon bribery charges in 1725 — a matter he had not bothered to discuss in the \textit{Letters from a Nobleman} — and ended it with a personal remark, wherein he explicitly blamed luxury and commerce for having introduced such a lamentable state of corruption:

The commons taking the affair into conderation \textit{sic}, and finding many abuses had crept into that court, which either impeded justice, or rendered it venal, they resolved to impeach Thomas, earl of Macclesfield, at the bar of the house of lords, for high crimes and misdemeanors. This was one of the most laborious and best contested trials in the annals of England. A bill was previously brought in to indemnify the masters in chancery from the penalties of the law, upon discovering what considerations they had paid for their admission to their respective offices. The trial lasted twenty days. The earl proved that such sums had been usually received by former lord chancellors, and reason told that such receipts were contrary to strict justice… In this manner, the corruption, venality, and avarice of the times, had encreased with the riches and luxury of the nation. Commerce introduced fraud, and wealth introduced prodigality.\textsuperscript{74}

It is necessary to specify here, however, that — as with the case of his attitude towards the issue of foreign acquisitions — Goldsmith was not against commerce and luxury as such but yearned to sound the alarm against an immoderate interest in their procurement. Under certain conditions, he was prepared to concede that they could aid in the advancement of liberty and civility; a concession that partly echoes the eleventh letter of the \textit{Citizen of the World}, wherein Lien Chi Altangi proclaimed how luxury, as


it ‘increases our wants, increases our capacity for happiness’. Subsequently, in illustrating Henry VII’s final acts of government in the *History of England*, Goldsmith expanded upon a remark that he had made in the *Letters from a Nobleman* to favourably reflect upon how a general shift was taking place, in which the nobles were becoming less hawkish with their growing taste for fineries, and the people increasingly self-reliant through trade:

But while he thus employed his power in lowering the influence of the nobles and clergy, he was using every art to extend the privileges of the people… Thus the common people, no longer maintained in vicious idleness by their superiors, were obliged to become industrious for their support. The nobility, instead of vying with each other in the number and boldness of their retainers, acquired by degrees a more civilized species of emulation; and endeavoured to excel in the splendour and elegance of their equipages, houses, and tables. In fact, the king’s greatest efforts were directed to promote trade and commerce, because this naturally introduced a spirit of liberty among the people, and disengaged them from all dependence, except upon the laws and the king.

Accordingly, it is observable that Goldsmith, while no longer writing under the guise of a pontificating nobleman, still intended to fulfil the role of a pedagogue in the *History of England*: he was keen to impart to his readers the necessity for them to relinquish their hold on the sanguine hope of a long-lasting peace, and to stand ready for conflict; and to reject the allures of excessive empire building and the immersion into the world of unbridled luxury and commerce. Importantly, that he had utilised new and modified lines of thought to compliment the reflections he had made in the *Letters from a Nobleman* indicates that these strands of cautionary, political convictions had been gradually fermenting and maturing in his mind during the interim period of 1764 to 1771. When Goldsmith’s two English histories are compared, it is appreciable how the later work carries a stronger resonance of a tempered, yet firmer resolve to systematically and consistently convey the need for the nation to avoid certain pitfalls.

75 Goldsmith, *Citizen of the World*, 50-53. Many writers, including Prior, have remarked upon Goldsmith’s seemingly inconsistent stance towards luxury. A defence of Goldsmith’s consistency may be found in Bell’s ‘The Deserted Village and Goldsmith’s Social Doctrines’.
to become a militarily and morally robust, tight-knit society; ever ready to repel foreign and domestic threats.

Along with the later Goldsmith’s increasingly mature outlook on and steady manner of conveying the socio-political dangers that loomed over contemporary Britain, it is noticeable that he was also progressively committed to presenting in a more precise fashion how a state of potency could be achieved. The key, he asserted with greater clarity, lay in the equitable distribution of wealth amongst the useful members of society. As such, in his recounting of the preparations that were made by the British in the nascent stages of the War of Jenkins’ Ear, he elaborated on an earlier remark made in the *Letters from a Nobleman* to lay stronger emphasis upon the importance of having an easy flow of money that would, subsequently, motivate different, capable persons to commit to the overall well-being of the nation:

As the war began thus successfully, it inspired the commons to prosecute it with all imaginable vigour… In a nation like this, arts and luxury, commerce and war, at certain intervals must ever be serviceable. This vicissitude turns the current of wealth from one determined channel, and gives it a diffusive spread over the face of the country; it is at one time diverted to the laborious and frugal, at another to the brave, active, and enterprising. Thus all orders of mankind find encouragement, and the nation becomes composed of individuals, who have art to acquire property, and who have courage to defend it.\(^77\)

Not only is this passage much more robust than its earlier counterpart in extolling the national benefit of having a freer movement of riches amongst the courageous and industrious, but it also conveys with greater efficiency the same notion that he had attempted to communicate in the section of the *Letters from a Nobleman*, wherein he had portended the harm that would befall Britain with their recent successes against the French in Canada due to its potential to exacerbate the disparity of wealth amongst its populace. While similar concerns are detectable here, the narrative flow is cumbersomely long and diffuse. In contrast to the pitchy directness of his later style, the

reader is presented with what amounts to a two-page long diatribe against various social ills and problems.\textsuperscript{78}

Indeed, the later Goldsmith’s commitment to delivering his corrective — albeit broad — economic proposal with greater efficacy was such that he even made subtle modifications to select passages that he had lifted, nearly wholesale, from the \textit{Letters from a Nobleman} to render them more in tune with it. This was the case with his description concerning the passing of the Marriage Act of 1753. While in his earlier English history, he had provided an assessment of it in such a way that one could interpret his aim as having been to champion the cause of the poor, in the \textit{History of England}, he made explicit — by altering a single line — that his primary concern lay in its potential to harm the larger body of the nation by funnelling wealth into the pockets of a few:

The people were scarce recovered from the resentment produced by this measure [the imprisonment of Alexander Murray], when another was taken in the house, which, in reality, made distinctions among the people, and laid a line between the rich and poor that seemed impassable. This was the act for the better preventing clandestine marriages, and for the more public solemnization of that ceremony… It declared, that any marriage solemnized without this previous publication, or a license obtained from the bishop’s court, should be void, and that the person who solemnized it should be transported for seven years. This act was at that time thought replete with consequences injurious to society; and experience has confirmed the truth of many of those objections… The poor, by being prevented from making alliances with the rich, have left wealth to flow in its ancient channels, and thus to accumulate, contrary to the interests of the state [my italics].\textsuperscript{79}

Similarly, in recounting the 1381 Peasant’s Revolt in England, the later Goldsmith made minute changes to his earlier retelling of the event to lambast with greater vigour the unjust restrictions that the members of the lower order of society had been forced to endure, which limited their potential for usefulness. Not only did he

\textsuperscript{78} Goldsmith, \textit{Letters from a Nobleman}, II, 241-42.
abstain from critically referring to the rioters as having been driven towards ‘sedition’ by the desire to enjoy the ‘luxury and opulence which they saw others enjoy’, but he also interposed a fresh remark that suggestively asserted the need for them to be allowed to partake in the economic activities of the state:

Notwithstanding the numbers who by war, by a residence in towns, and by other means had become free, yet there was still multitudes in the country, who had lands in villenage [sic], that were only slaves to the lords from whom they held… Several of those had become opulent enough to purchase their freedom; but by an unjust act of parliament in this reign, these purchases were declared of no validity. This act the peasants considered as an infraction of the laws of humanity, and such indeed it must be allowed to have been. But it had long been the prescriptive manner of reasoning, to have on regard for the rights of a certain class of men, who were supposed too low for justice. The seeds of discontent were still more cultivated by the preaching of several men, who went about the country, inculcating the natural equality of mankind; and consequently, the right that all had to an equal participation of the goods of nature [my italics]. Hitherto we have seen popular insurrections only in towns; but we now find the spirit of freedom gaining ground in the country…

Furthermore, in his favourable estimation of Henry VII’s frugality, Goldsmith, in 1771, made subtle alterations to its corresponding passage, found in the Letters from a Nobleman, before re-utilising it, to drive home with greater strength the notion that in an ideal society, wealth should be kept from falling into the hands of the parasitic aristocrats and courtiers for the sake of the nation’s health. In particular, he refashioned one line to render more explicit the disdain he held of the poor and hardy being exploited to satiate the gluttony of the ostentatious members of the upper-class:

A great part of the miseries of his [Henry] predecessors proceeded from their poverty, which was mostly occasioned by riot and dissipation. Henry saw that money alone could turn the scale of power in his favour; and therefore hoarded up all the confiscations of his enemies with the

utmost frugality. From hence he has been accused by historians of avarice; but that avarice which tends to strengthen government, and repress sedition, is not only excuseable [sic], but praise-worthy. Liberality in a king is too often a misplaced virtue. What is thus given, is generally extorted from the industrious and needy, to be lavished as rewards on the rich, the insidious, and the fawning, upon the sycophants of a court, or the improvers of luxurious refinement [my italics].

Thus, Goldsmith, in composing *The History of England*—despite having jettisoned his preceding persona as a lecturing nobleman—adhered to what was then considered to be the salient duty of a historian: to guide the public towards improvement. Accordingly, in this work, he did not shirk from identifying and suggestively cautioning his readers against perceived, contemporary dangers that threatened Britain. Importantly, these strands of cautionary, political convictions had been fermenting and maturing in his mind since compiling the *Letters from a Nobleman*, and he delivered his message with greater consistency and firmness. Moreover, he invested greater effort in communicating to the people what he considered to be the key to creating a robust, tight-knit national body: that of ensuring an equitable distribution of wealth amongst the useful members of society. It is evident that the later Goldsmith was increasingly serious of his role as an educator of man. There are probably multiple reasons underlying this progressive shift in attitude. However, one can assert that it likely had much to do with the fact that, by 1771, he was no longer assailed by the sense of self-doubt that he had plagued him in his earlier years; especially during the period when he wrote to Daniel Hodson, contemplating the possibility of leaving for India as a ship’s surgeon. Rather, he was a respectable member of English society, and, subsequently, may have felt a greater sense of responsibility and ability in his role as an instructor.

**Conclusion**

From what has been discussed, it may be discerned that *The History of England* is highly important when considering Goldsmith’s socio-political outlook; deserving a closer inspection than what has been afforded up to this point. Far from being doggedly...
restricted in his vision by partisan inclinations, as has been asserted or alluded to by a number of notable modern scholars studying or remarking upon this text, Goldsmith, in 1771, was committed to restraining his deep Tory proclivities, and made an effort to occupy a middling position for the sake of his reputation and based upon his innermost principles. Subsequently, from a position of relative freedom from any party dogma, he presented a stronger case against the perceived ills of contemporary society and asserted with increased clarity and effectiveness the need for a more equitable distribution of wealth amongst the useful members of society.

In conclusion, the later Goldsmith was a disciplined and broad-minded writer, who confronted the issue of national health with a growing sense of seriousness and commitment. This hammers yet another nail into the coffin of the notion that he was primarily a sentimental poet, and, instead, enhances our understanding of him as having been an author who harboured deep political intents. While he was not a rigorous and detailed philosopher comparable to the likes of Hume and Smith, it is appreciable that he had constantly nurtured and refined his outlook and expression on social and economic matters. Indeed, the History of England evidences Goldsmith’s almost stubborn adherence to his socio-political convictions. The later Goldsmith was not only revisiting the Letters from a Nobleman in expressing his stance towards military robustness, luxury and commerce, imperialism and the need for a more equitable distribution of wealth, but he was also echoing what he had espoused in The Traveller, wherein he had lavished praise upon the virtue of hardness and attacked the degenerative influence of trade and riches and empire building, and called for the laying of ‘proportion’d loads on each’. Furthermore, it is telling how he uncompromisingly clung to his low regard for luxury and the dispersal of the population, despite having been attacked by critics upon these two points when The Deserted Village was published.

Against this backdrop, it is possible to challenge and further complicate A. Norman Jeffares’ reflection upon Goldsmith, whom he described — through a study of

82 Goldsmith, The Traveller, pp. 250, 264-64, ll. 31-36, 361-74.
83 The reviewer of The Deserted Village writing in the Critical Review of June 1770 argued against the supposed depopulation lamented in the poem by declaring that ‘England wears now a more smiling aspect than she ever did’. And a contributor to the Monthly Review included a lengthy exposition upon the issue of luxury, noting that it was ‘essentially necessary to national greatness’. See ‘V. The Deserted Village, a Poem, by Dr. Goldsmith… Griffin.’, Critical Review, June 1770, pp. 435-43 & ‘ART. V. The Deserted Village; a Poem… Griffin. 1770.’, Monthly Review, June 1770, pp. 440-45.
The Traveller and The Deserted Village — as an exile who had disguised his ‘personal melancholia and loneliness with public laughter.’ Rather than that of a tragic ‘solitary guest in England’, the History of England strongly suggests that Goldsmith was a resilient and wilful actor within the sphere of English socio-political debate. Doing the utmost to jettison the stain of party politics, which still coloured the writings of many, fellow historians, he displayed his capabilities as an increasingly mature and earnest critic, invested in the betterment of English society. He was, first and foremost, a level-headed patriot not unlike Lord Viscount Falkland and Admiral Robert Blake whom Goldsmith had — as noted above — lauded as impartial heroes.

84 Jeffares, ‘Goldsmith the good natured man’, pp. 18-19.
3. The Island of Saints and Sages: Goldsmith and Ireland

Introduction

In the preceding chapter, Oliver Goldsmith’s stance towards socio-political matters pertaining to Britain, as discerned from a reading of the History of England (1771), has been discussed, divorced from any consideration of his background as an Irishman in London. Here, an attempt will be made rectify this ‘oversight’ by investigating how he may have confronted his identity as an Irishman and what kind of influence it may have exerted upon his historical writing. As noted earlier, questions pertaining to Goldsmith’s stance towards Ireland have garnered much interest amongst modern Goldsmith researchers, and there has emerged two, conflicting interpretations. On the one hand, the likes of Katherine Balderston (1928), Ralph Wardle (1957), Alexander Jeffares (1975) and Seamus Deane (1986) have determined or suggested that the author’s attachment to Ireland had gradually waned as his career in London progressed. On the other hand, Declan Kiberd (2001), John Lucas (1990) and, more recently, Michael Griffin (2013) and Norma Clarke (2016), have presented a case for considering Goldsmith as having been enduringly influenced and motivated by Irish concerns. Importantly, their studies have either completely, or largely, disregarded the author’s two English histories in reaching their respective conclusions. Yet, even amongst the few scholars who have taken an interest in these underappreciated texts, there has been little consensus regarding this issue. While Robert Seitz (1933) saw evidence in the Letters from a Nobleman (1764) of Goldsmith’s deep-seated Irish sympathies, Graham Gargett (2001) asserted that the same work and the History of England reveal him to have been a writer who clearly considered himself to be English.¹

In this chapter, Goldsmith’s two English histories will be examined in a bid to reach a clearer understanding of his relationship with Ireland. Firstly, his letters, anecdotal evidences, non-historical writings and the memorandum he dictated to Thomas Percy, will be assessed, by the means of which it will be demonstrated that these sources, when viewed on their own, do, indeed, present a case for thinking of Goldsmith as a writer who increasingly wished to adopt an English identity. Following

¹ See pp. 42-44, 46-48 of this work to revisit the summaries of the studies listed here.
this, the developments that were taking place in contesting the historical portrayal of Ireland during the eighteenth century will be touched upon as a prerequisite to appreciating the significance of certain depictions and discussions of the country and Irishmen that are found in the *Letters from a Nobleman* and the *History of England*. To this extent, the works of Charles O’Conor and John Curry will be considered. Importantly, it will be noted that the new interpretations propounded by these intellectuals had filtered down to individuals who were part of Goldsmith’s intimate circle of acquaintances: including Samuel Johnson, Edmund Burke and Tobias Smollett.

In the third section, Goldsmith’s historical texts will be investigated to reveal that, while his outward show of connectedness with Ireland was increasingly tenuous, he never fully relinquished a sense of concern for his home country. Accordingly, it will be shown how, despite being uninterested in the historiographical shifts that were taking place in Ireland, and his growing sense of attachment with Britain, he remained committed to defending and bettering the image of Ireland upon select, ‘safe’ points, and chiding the English for their neglectful, overbearing and unequal treatment of their neighbour. To conclude, it will be proposed that it is by reviewing Goldsmith’s histories that one can find firm ground upon which to consider *The Deserted Village* (1770) as having been composed with the veiled intent to criticise the unbalanced and unjust relationship that existed between Ireland and England. However, a cautionary point will be made, urging readers not to view Goldsmith as a revolutionary figure who had sought to become embroiled in a contentious political debate.

**The importance of being English**

Goldsmith’s status as a well-travelled Irishman, who, in his case, had studied medicine in Edinburgh and toured the continent, before struggling to establish himself as an author in London, was not unique in the eighteenth century. The Irish were engaged militarily, academically and economically in many parts of the world, not least in Britain, during this period. As such, Goldsmith was not without like company upon reaching England in 1756.² However, in contrast to many of his Irish compatriots,

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Goldsmith was able to find his way into the folds of authorly greatness, an envious victory that brought in its train intriguing consequences for his Irish sensibility.³

Unlike many of his fellow writers, Goldsmith was one who was not inclined to pen many letters.⁴ Nevertheless, during his youthful period as a medical student abroad, it is evident that he was assailed by a deep yearning for home. In writing to his brother-in-law, Daniel Hodson, sometime during the winter of 1752-1753, while he was in Edinburgh, he added a postscript, wherein he touchingly added that his thoughts were with ‘[e]very Freind [sic]’, and in particular with Jack, his youngest brother, of whom he noted that he could not think about ‘without affliction’, despite concealing such sentiments from him.⁵ Much in the same vein, in corresponding with his kindly benefactor and uncle, the Reverend Thomas Contarine, a few months later on 8 May 1753, he likened himself to a ‘Turkish Spy at Parris [sic]’; a ‘recluse’ who had ‘left behind in Ireland Every thing’ he thought ‘worth possessing’, including friends that he loved and a ‘society that pleas’d [sic] while it instructed’. He continued by reflecting upon the regret he felt at the ‘Loss of such Enjoyments’, and from having to leave behind Kilmore, which he professed as having known better than any other.⁶

Furthermore, in writing to his college acquaintance, Robert Bryanton on 26 September 1753, he bashfully requested that a word of regard be passed on to his mother, for whom, he confessed, he ‘still’ had a feeling of ‘sneaking kindness’.⁷ And, in one of his final letters posted from Scotland, which was addressed to Contarine, he desired that his ‘earnest love’ be conveyed to Jane Lawder, the recipient’s daughter, and her husband.⁸

It was upon leaving Edinburgh and completing his tour of the continent, during his first years of struggling to make a living in London, however, that Goldsmith’s sense of homesickness reached its peak. In a letter he addressed to Daniel on 27 December 1757 — while he ridiculed the brogue and the unsophisticated mannerisms of

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³ See Clarke’s *Brothers of the Quill* for further information regarding Goldsmith’s early Irish literary acquaintances who had ‘failed’ in their endeavours to attain a level of fame that Goldsmith was able to achieve.
⁴ It is relevant to note here a remark made by James Grainger (1721-1766) in a letter to Percy, date 24 March 1764, wherein the former referred to Goldsmith’s lack of interest in epistolary correspondence: ‘When I [Grainger] taxed little Goldsmith for not writing as he promised, his answer was, that he never wrote a letter in his life; and faith I believe him— except to a bookseller for money.’ See ‘Introduction’ in *Letters*, p. xv.
the Irish — he wrote his most poignant and lengthy exposition upon his ‘Unaccountable [fondness] for the country [Ireland]’ that he felt:

I do not think proper to undeceive my Friends; but whether I eat or starve, live in a first floor or four pairs of stairs [attic] high, I still remember them with ardour, nay my ve[ry coun]try comes in for share of my affection… [Why the p]lague then so fond of Ireland! Then all at once, be[cause y]ou my dear friend, and a few more, who are exceptions [to the g]eneral picture, have a residence there. This it is that gives me all the pangs I feel in separation. I confess I carry this spirit sometimes to the souring the pleasures I at present possess. If I go to the opera where Signora Colomba pours out all the mazes of melody; I sit and sigh for Lishoyireside, and Johnny armstrong’s last good night from Peggy Golden. If I climb Flamstead hill where nature never exhibited a more magnificent prospect; I confess it fine but then I had rather be placed on the little mount before Lishoy gate, and take in, to me, the most pleasing horizon in nature.9

Yet, soon after writing this letter, it is evident that several of Goldsmith’s links with home were beginning to weaken. In particular, his relationship with his mother had reached a nadir by 1758. Granted, even before leaving Ireland, he had been on uncertain terms with her, due to his neglectful conduct that had cost him an opportunity to study law in London, following his graduation from Trinity College, Dublin. As recounted by Catherine Hodson, his older sister, Goldsmith had squandered away the money that had been provided by Contarine for this purpose, their exasperated mother had upbraided her son for being an ‘ungratefull [sic] Savage a Monster’ for not having sent a word of thanks to those who had, allegedly, aided the penniless Goldsmith on his unanticipated journey home from the port of Cork. It is likely that a proper reconciliation between the two was not achieved, as he went on to live with his sister before travelling to Edinburgh.10 Despite this setback in their relationship, Goldsmith’s affection for his mother remained unabated.11 However, it is recognisable that by 31 August 1758, Goldsmith’s disappointment at his mother’s refusal to correspond with him had reached

11 See Goldsmith’s letter to Bryanton of 26 September 1753 referred to above.
a breaking point. In writing to Daniel on this date, he desperately requested that word
from her be sent to him: ‘Pray do this for me’, he begged, ‘for heaven knows I would do
anything to serve you.’ Notably, this was the last occasion upon which he called upon
for news of her, or asked that his regards be passed on to his mother.

Another personal Irish connection of Goldsmith’s that was strained during this
period was the one that he had with the Lawder family. Not only was Contarine dead by
1758, but it was gradually dawning upon Goldsmith that his relationship with Jane —
whom, according to Catherine, had been ‘very [sic] fond’ of him, and had been his
‘particular Friend’ in their childhood — was precariously balanced. As such, on 15
August 1758, he made what appears to be a last ditch effort at salvaging what he could
of their friendship, by writing a surprisingly lengthy letter to her, which attempted to
excuse himself for not having kept in touch with her on a regular basis. While his
motives for doing so were not wholly innocent — he desired her aid in gathering
subscriptions for his upcoming publication, An Enquiry into the Present State of Polite
Learning in Europe (1759) — it is undeniable that he was sincere in his wish to mend
ties, and was deeply worried over her silence, which he realised probably stemmed
from a sense of displeasure towards him:

If you should ask, why in an interval of so many years, you never heard
from me… I have the best excuse in recrimination. I wrote to Kilmore
from Leyden in Holland, from Louvain in Flanders, and Rouen in
France, but receivd [sic] no answer. To what could I attribute this silence
but to displeasure or forgetfulness. Whether I was right in my conjecture,
I do not pretend to determine, but this I must ingenuously own, that I
have a thousand times in my turn endeavoured to forget them whom I
could not but look upon as forgetting me… I was, madam, when I
discontinued writing to Kilmore in such circumstances that all my
endeavours to continue your regards might be attributed to wrong
motives, my letters might be regarded as the petitions of a beggar and
not the offerings of a friend, while all my professions insstead [sic] of

13 Hodson, ‘Mrs Hodson’s Narrative’, pp. 18.
being considered as the result of disinterested esteem might be ascribed to venal insincerity…’

By 1770, his break from his mother and the Lawders was complete. The former had passed away during this year. There is an intriguing anecdote by James Northcote (1729-1807), in which it is recounted that Goldsmith only appeared in half-mourning for his mother; his appearance explained as that for a ‘distant’ relation to Frances Reynolds (1729-1807), the youngest sister of Joshua Reynolds. While John Forster has firmly rejected this account, by asserting that the bill retained by Goldsmith’s tailor shows that the author had requested for a proper suit of mourning, the possibility remains open that he had referred to his mother in an aloof manner; wounded by the distance she had kept with him since his having left Ireland. Also, with regards to his association with the Lawders, it is recognisable that he no longer harboured any hopes of re-establishing ties. In writing to his younger brother, Maurice, on 10 January 1770, he not only refused to accept the ‘fourteen or fifteen pound’ that had been left for him upon Contarine’s death, but also wrote of their cousin as having ‘almost forgot[ten]’ him. While he did speak highly of the Lawders as a family deserving their ‘sincerest gratitude’ and expressed hope that one day he would be able to ‘return and encrease their good humour’, it is notable that up to his death, he never penned another letter to them that we know of.

Indeed, from 1770 onwards, it is appreciable that Goldsmith was no longer affected by a sense of ‘maladie du Pays’, and did not feel that furthering his intimate links with Ireland was of a particularly pressing matter. In the same letter to Maurice, in which he had defeatedly accepted that Jane thought very little of him, not only did he bitterly refer to Ireland as ‘your country’ — occasioned by the disappointment he felt at the unwillingness of his friends from home to reply to the ‘hundred letters’ he had supposedly wrote to them — but also alluded to the growing sense of comfort he felt with his situation in England by proudly reporting upon his selection to the post of professor at the Royal Academy, and by noting his friendship with ‘Burke, Johnson, Reynolds and Coleman’. Also, while in this correspondence, and in a few more that

17 Ibid., pp. 81-82.
followed, he did show an eagerness to receive news of the doings of the family, and even expressed hope, in writing to Daniel on June 1771, of being able to pay Ireland a visit one day, it is telling how he never attempted to actuate a return. His accompanying Mrs Horneck and her daughters to France in 1770, and his ability to surround himself with luxuries befitting his later station in life as a respectable author suggests that such a journey was not impossible. Moreover, his reluctance to aid Maurice upon his unexpected arrival in London sometime between January and June of 1770, reveals that he was not especially keen on the idea of his kin travelling to him either.

Of course, one should not exaggerate the extent to which Goldsmith’s personal ties with home had loosened. Just as he had done so in his earlier years, he continued to hold in high regard the Hodson family. As such, when Daniel’s son, William, appeared in London, immediately following Maurice’s visit, he exerted great effort to guide and support him towards a career as a doctor. Not only did he dissuade his nephew from pursuing a life on the stage and wrote to Reynolds in order to procure him the ‘assurance of a place as full surgeon to India’, but he also attempted to act as a conciliator between him and his father, who, evidently, was displeased with his leaving for England. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the later Goldsmith was no longer affected by an overwhelming sense of loss and alienation that he had been prone to feel in his earlier years. It is notable, in this regard, that his last letter home was that to Daniel sometime in June 1771, and, up until his death on April 1774, he did not engage in any further epistolary contacts with either his family or friends in Ireland, but, instead, focused upon his communications with his London acquaintances.

Not unlike the trajectory followed by him in his letters, it appears that Goldsmith’s public stance towards Ireland became increasingly relaxed as his time in London lengthened. In the beginning, perhaps, driven by his intense feeling of homesickness, he had written several times upon subjects that were directly related to Irish matters. Accordingly, during his first stint as a professional writer, working as a contributor to the *Monthly Review* under the employ of Ralph Griffiths, he engaged in

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19 It is relevant to add here that Goldsmith, up until his death, acted as an important port of call for many recently arrived Irish migrants. His last letter of March 1774 was that addressed to an Isaac Jackman (1752?-1831), a Dublin native and playwright, wherein he apologised for not being able to keep their appointment, as he was ‘too ill to Stir abroad’. See ‘66: To Isaac Jackman’, in *ibid.*, pp. 142-43.
20 Goldsmith, ‘36: To Daniel Hodson’. 
reviewing, on August 1757, the anonymously published work by Edmund Pery (1719-1806), a Limerick native: the *Letters from an Armenian in Ireland* (1757).\(^{21}\) While Goldsmith was reserved towards the author’s perceived inability to effectively present the fictional façade of the narrator as an Oriental commentator, he betrayed his Irish sensitivity by full heartedly endorsing Pery’s critique against Britain’s unequal economic relationship with Ireland:

> But tho’ this performance contains little that can be supposed to excite the curiosity of an inhabitant of Trebisonde, (and is, consequently, in that respect defective) it contains many things interesting to a native of Britain. The properest means of increasing our own power, by increasing that of a country which contributes to our wealth, are here explained; and the manifest error, in politics, of a government which endeavours to enrich one part of its dominions by impoverishing another, and of chusing to have but one flourishing kingdom when it might be possessed of two, is here concisely and prettily exposed.\(^{22}\)

Following this review, he produced — in a short time span — a number of laudatory, biographical essays, which reflected upon the life and achievements of notable Irish figures. In the first (29 December 1759) and second (5 January 1760) numbers of the *Weekly Magazine*, he wrote an account of George Berkeley (1685-1753) and Robert Boyle (1627-1691). Notably, in the former text, he devoted an entire paragraph to recount an anecdote that he had heard from Contarine, wherein it is mentioned how his uncle had supposedly aided the philosopher in their youthful, college years in conducting a dangerous experiment, designed to satisfy the latter’s curiosity concerning the ‘pains and symptoms’ a malefactor may experience in the course of being hanged.\(^{23}\) Also, regarding the latter work, Goldsmith could not resist deviating from his primary source material, the *Biographia Britannica* (1747-1766), to include a kind word towards Ireland, wherein he noted that the ‘manner in which children are brought up by the nurses’ of that country was ‘certainly very

\(^{21}\) Pery was Speaker in Ireland from 1771 to 1785, and was elevated to the Peerage on 30 December 1785, as Viscount Pery of Newtown, co. Limerick. See ‘Edmund Sexton Pery’, *Notes and Queries*, 107 (1876), 56.

\(^{22}\) Oliver Goldsmith, ‘*Letters from an Armenian in Ireland*… 1756. 12mo. 3s. Owen.’, in *CW*, I, 90-94.

\(^{23}\) Oliver Goldsmith, ‘Some original MEMOIRS of the late famous Bishop of CLOYNE.’, in *ibid.*, III, 34-40.
commendable’, as it prepared the mind and body for ‘vigor and dispatch.’\(^{24}\) Furthermore, in writing for the *British Magazine* on July 1760, he composed a touching portrait of the blind, Irish bard, Turlough O’Carolan (1670-1738).\(^{25}\) Here, not only did he bestow high praise upon O’Carolan for his musical abilities, but he also suggestively referred to the overbearing nature of English hegemony in Ireland:

Their [Irish] bards, in particular, are still held in great veneration among them; those traditionary heralds are invited to every funeral, in order to fill up the intervals of the howl with their songs and harps. In these they rehearse the actions of the ancestors of the deceased, *bewail the bondage of their country under the English government* [my italics], and generally conclude with advising the young men and maidens to make the best use of their time, for they will soon, for all their present bloom, be stretched under the table, like the dead body before them.\(^{26}\)

Importantly, it was his fictional, journalistic text of 29 December 1759, written in an epistolary fashion and published in the *Weekly Magazine*, ‘A Description of the Manners and Customs of the Native Irish’, wherein Goldsmith wrote his most generous account of the contemporary state of Ireland. In this work, in addition to presenting the Catholic and Protestant Irish in relatively sympathetic terms — he described the former as being ‘valiant, sensible, polite, and generally beautiful’, despite their shortcomings, and the latter as having ‘superinduced over the rough English character a degree of ceremony and politeness’ — he included an explicit condemnation of the British for their neglectfully imperious attitude towards their neighbour:

While our travellers are busied in studying the manners, the soil, and produce of distant countries, there are several which are at our very doors possessed of peculiarities hitherto unknown, and yet quite neglected; like conquerors who have been too eagerly employed in foreign conquests, we leave our native dominions without notice or regard. Perhaps our conquered kingdom of Ireland is as strong an instance of this as any that may be found, since whether we regard its

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24 Oliver Goldsmith, ‘*The Life of the Hon. ROBERT BOYLE.*’, in *ibid.*., pp. 40-45.
25 It is possible that Goldsmith may have encountered O’Carolan in the house of Contarine sometime during his youthful years. See Griffin’s *Enlightenment in Ruins*, pp. 21-22.
26 Oliver Goldsmith, ‘*The HISTORY of CAROLAN, the last Irish Bard.*’, in *CW, III*, 118-20.
natural history, or the manners of its original inhabitants, we may in both find matter for speculation and curiosity. Many wonders in the former are still left undescribed, as the mountain of Case Corin in the western division of the kingdom, and several peculiarities of the latter have been injuriously or injudiciously represented.\(^{27}\)

However, following the period of 1757-1760, Goldsmith’s engagement with subjects that were openly and intimately related to Ireland dramatically decreased. Indeed, other than *The Traveller* (1764), which he chose to dedicate to his elder brother, Henry, and in which he had reflected upon the growing distance between himself and Ireland with sorrow, and his extended biographical work of 1770, wherein he had produced a sympathetic account of the Irish poet, Thomas Parnell (1679-1718) — whom, he claimed, his father and uncle had the occasion to be acquainted with — he no longer published texts that were singularly devoted to Irish concerns.\(^{28}\) Notably, even in these two works he did not bother to discuss or refer to the problematic issue of the unequal economic and political relationship that existed between Ireland and England. Rather, there is a discernible touch of Anglicisation in them. In *The Traveller*, following his elaboration upon the state and people of Holland, he waxed solely upon the virtues and problems of Britain, without a single obvious mention being made of Ireland.\(^{29}\) And in the *Life of Dr. Parnell*, while he gently rebuked the poet for his gloomy attitude towards his home country, there is nothing within it that would suggest that the author harboured any sense of grievance towards England’s treatment of Ireland.\(^{30}\) Instead, we are presented with a pleasantly simple tale of a lonely writer who had kept up an affectionate stream of correspondence with his literary friends in Britain.

Significantly, the Anglicised outlook found in *The Traveller* and the *Life of Dr. Parnell* was not a new development. From the start of his writerly career, Goldsmith was keen to wear the garb of a polite, English author. Accordingly, in reviewing the *Letters from an Armenian in Ireland*, despite having chided Britain for stifling Ireland’s

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\(^{27}\) Oliver Goldsmith, ‘*A Description of the Manners and Customs of the Native Irish. In a Letter from an English Gentleman.*’, in *ibid.*, pp. 24-30.

\(^{28}\) Parnell was a Protestant Irish poet and essayist, who was born in Dublin, and, as with Goldsmith, had attended Trinity College, Dublin. His circle of friends and acquaintances included the likes of Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope and Joseph Addison. See Bryan Coleborne, ‘*Parnell, Thomas (1679-1718)*’, in *DNB* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/21390>, accessed 17 September 2018.


\(^{30}\) Oliver Goldsmith, *The Life of Dr. Parnell*, in *CW*, III, 415-16.
economic potential, he wrote in such a fashion as that to ‘mislead’ his English audience into thinking that he was one of them. To this extent, not only did he coolly re-convey Pery’s rather unflattering assessment of the state of learning found in Trinity College, Dublin, but he also firmly aligned himself with his audience in assuring them that the problems faced by Ireland was not wholly of ‘their’ doing:

He [Pery] describes the House of Lords in Ireland, as led entirely by the Bishops, who are commonly creatures of the Crown, the other members of that assembly being bred up in too much indolence and ignorance to have any influence as orators. He next mentions the Commons, who being elected for their own, or the King’s life, are so much the more liable to bribery, as the emoluments are likely to be of a more lasting continuance. Hence we behold that country involved in all the intricacies of state-chicanery; those who should be its guardians, corrupting, and as much corrupted, in their little sphere of power, as we can possibly be in our larger. It is some consolation to think, that if our calamities be as general as some would persuade us they are, our own vices alone have not brought them on; our fellow-subjects of Ireland having contributed their share.31

Much in the same vein, in ‘A Description of the Manners and Customs of the Native Irish’, Goldsmith outwardly adopted, and expertly fulfilled, the persona of an English gentleman who was reporting back home to a ‘Jack’. Despite having had a few favourable things to say of the Irish Catholics and their Protestant landlords, he carefully kept them at an arm’s length by including remarks that emphasised just how different they were from the likes of ‘him’; the English.32 ‘The manners of the original inhabitants, which they to this day preserve unvaried, are entirely different from those of the English, and partake somewhat of the ancient Scythian, and modern Spanish customs,’ he wrote. ‘Their burials, pattons [sic], and cakes, their houses furniture and dress,’ he continued, ‘all partake somewhat of these two different nations, and sufficiently mark the original from whence they sprung.’ Following this, in the final

31 Goldsmith, ‘Letters from an Armenian in Ireland… 1756. 12mo. 3s. Owen.’, p. 92.
32 This essay has an open-ended quality to it that allows for multiple interpretations to be brought to bear unto it. See Michael Griffin’s ‘‘What d’ye call him, Teirconneldrago...’': Oliver Goldsmith and the Seven Years’ War”, in The Culture of the Seven Years’ War: Empire, Identity, and the Arts in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World, ed. by Frans de Bruyn and Shaun Regan (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), pp. 169-87, for a more positive take on its display of Goldsmith’s Irishness.
paragraph of the essay, he reflected upon the mannerisms and conduct of the more refined members of Irish society, to, again, muse over the incompatible nature of their behaviour with that of the English, which was conveyed with a tone of superiority:

In short I spent a month in a part of the kingdom where I expected to meet nothing but savages in as good company, with as good cheer, and as hearty a reception as I ever remember to have seen. They sit however too long at their meals, I have sometimes staid at the table where we dined for several hours, until the servant came to inform us that supper was served in the next room. They still drink too much which is a certain sign they have not yet arrived at true politeness, since every country is more drunken in proportion as it is barbarous.33

It is likely that Goldsmith, in his earlier years, was motivated to present himself as an English author, as he feared that his Irish background would impact negatively upon his budding career. The disdain he had felt at playing the part of a ‘facetious Irish man’ in the company of the Duke of Hamilton, during his short stay in Edinburgh, and the difficulty he faced in finding employment in London upon his arrival there, due to his being ‘born an Irishman’, probably affected him deeply in this regard.34 Yet, it is intriguing to consider how, even after he had gained prestige as a poet, following the publication of The Traveller, he never full-heartedly embraced his Irish identity. Instead, it is discernible that in the latter half of his writerly career, he had grown quite comfortable with his Anglicised persona. Perhaps, this is evident in his last, unfinished poetical composition, the Retaliation: A Poem, which was worked upon sometime shortly before his death in 1774 but was only published posthumously on 19 April 1774. This jaunty work, wherein he sought to prove his epigrammatic powers by providing fictional epitaphs for his circle of learned friends, suggests that he was relatively content with his situation as a fully-fledged member of the polite London literary society.35 Nowhere in this text do we find a sense of pathos or worry for home, nor a lingering remembrance of those old, Irish acquaintances that he had kept company

33 Goldsmith, ‘A Description of the Manners and Customs of the Native Irish.’, pp. 25, 29-30.
with during his years as a Grub Street hack, which included the likes of John Pilkington (1709-1750).\textsuperscript{36}

Indeed, it appears that as his career in England progressed, Goldsmith was not only increasingly comfortable with his Anglicised guise but was also determined that posterity should be aware of his supposedly deep, familial ties with Britain. On 28 April 1773, upon the urging of Percy, he dictated to him a memorandum of his own life; the intention being that the information provided would be used by the latter in drawing up his biography.\textsuperscript{37} In the course of this meeting, Goldsmith made several questionable claims concerning his bloodline, of which Percy, himself, was suspicious. Firstly, the former described his father, the Reverend Charles Goldsmith, who had passed away unexpectedly on 1747, as having been a native of the County of Durham; an account that was later corrected by Percy, who determined that Charles was actually from the ‘County of Roscommon in the Diocese of Elphin at a place called Ballyoughter.’

Following this, Goldsmith informed his friend that his family was ‘allied’ to the much-celebrated British hero of the Battle of the Plains of Abraham (1759), James Wolfe (1727-1759) — needless to say, an unlikely story. Even more surprisingly, he declared that his mother was ‘allied’ to Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658), in compliment to whom he, allegedly, had been bestowed his Christian name.\textsuperscript{38} It is difficult to imagine that Goldsmith was being sincere, albeit mistaken, in his report. More than likely, flushed with his recent success of \textit{She Stoops to Conquer} (1773), he was unable to resist indulging in a few, self-congratulatory fibs.

Thus, the wearing of the English mask, which likely started off as a defensive measure, had, near the end of Goldsmith’s career, solidified to become a fundamental part of his identity construction. No longer was he the grieving medical student and Grub Street ‘hack’ who pined for home, bemoaned the aloofness of his mother and Jane and published upon Irish matters in quick succession. Rather, he was a man who had

\textsuperscript{36} As noted by Clarke, the later Goldsmith loved to recall a tale in which he had supposedly been duped by Pilkington into lending him money for an improbable cause, involving two white mice. His doing so was not only designed to amuse his audience, but was likely crafted to reflect well on his person; to assert himself as a polite author who had moved on to better company. See Clarke’s \textit{Brothers of the Quill}, pp. 58-64.

\textsuperscript{37} Percy, a writer and the Church of Ireland bishop of Dromore, first met Goldsmith on 21 February 1759 at the Temple Exchange Coffee House. They remained as friends until the latter’s death; upon which the former began work on composing a biographical account of Goldsmith. The process was arduously long-winded and complicated, and it was only in 1801 that Percy’s account of Goldsmith’s life was published.

found a place in London as a successful writer. So assured and comfortable was he in his station, that the earlier sense of urgency he had felt at maintaining his intimate ties with home had faded.

**Contesting ‘barbaric’ Ireland**

The pleasure with which the later Goldsmith had recounted his alleged English heritage to Percy is, to a certain degree, understandable. During the eighteenth century, the Irish were associated with unflattering character traits. In the popular imagination, they were commonly considered to be foolish, wasteful and socially inept. This poor standing of the Irish was even reflected in the field of history writing. Long before Goldsmith’s time, the British perception of Ireland and its past was dictated by a sense of hostility against the Hibernian culture and people. The writer who had done much to establish this outlook was Giraldus Cambrensis (1146-1220/23), who described the Irish as a dumb, lazy and brutish people in need of the civilising influence of the Normans. Later, David Hume came to stand as the foremost inheritor and propagator of Cambrensis’ ideological outlook. In the *History of England from the Invasion of Julius Cæsar to the Accession of Henry VII* (1762), Hume described the Irish as a people whose isolation from the rest of the Western world had consigned them to a state of primitiveness and the ‘most profound barbarism and ignorance’. He even went so far as to claim that the northern invasions into the country had likely improved them rather than spreading ‘barbarism’ as had happened in ‘other parts of Europe’, by the virtue of towns being ‘planted along the coast by the freebooters of Norway and Denmark.’

However, despite the enduringly popular notion that the Irish had been a barbaric people who required outside intervention to become gentle, this narrative was under attack by the time Hume had come onto the scene. Preceding the release of his influential work on English history, select Irish Catholic learned men had already been

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41 Ibid.
laying the foundation for a reappraisal of what was considered by them to be a gross misrepresentation of their historical legacy. Among their number was Geoffrey Keating (1580-1644), a Roman Catholic priest and historian, who, in his *Foras feasa ar Éirinn* (1634), asserted that the Irish had been the custodians of learning and culture prior to the arrival of the Normans. A century later, worthy successors to Keating were still hard at work, imbued with a similar revisionist spirit. The most prolific writer of them was Charles O’Conor (1710-1791), an antiquary and religious propagandist, who was born in Kilnacranney, co. Sligo and was a member of one of the last land-owning, native Irish nobility. In 1753, O’Conor published his *Dissertations on the Antient History of Ireland*, wherein he not only attempted to portray the ‘Scots’ — by whom he meant the ‘antient Inhabitants of Ireland, or the Milesian Race; not those of modern Scotland’ — as having been a pious, militarily robust, commercially active and intellectually inclined group that had successfully flourished separate from the Grecian and Roman cultural trajectories, but, also, as having stood as the guardians of civility during Europe’s decline into ‘Gothic Darkness’, and as having provided the continuing line of British monarchs by their early movement eastwards and onto the continent.

Along with O’Conor’s field of speciality — that of ancient Ireland — the remembrance of the Irish Rebellion of 1641 was equally contentious. From the start, the English and Protestant Irish had been hysterical about what had happened. Earlier historians, including William Temple (1554/5-1627) and Edward Hyde, the Earl of Clarendon (1609-1674), described the rebellion as having been an unjustified and widespread attack against the Anglo-Irish and English populace of Ireland and determined that the number of victims had been extraordinarily high. Upon entering the mid-eighteenth century, Hume, in *The History of Great Britain, Containing the*...

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43 For further information on O’Conor’s life and background, and writings, see *Charles O’Conor of Ballinagare, 1710-91: Life and Works* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2015), edited by Luke Gibbons and Kieran O’Conor.
44 Charles O’Conor, *Dissertations on the Antient History of Ireland* (Dublin: James Hoey, 1753), pp. 88-90.
45 In the *History of the Irish Rebellion* (1646), Temple set the number of British and Protestants murdered at ‘above 300,000’. And in the *History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England* (1702), Clarendon loosely estimated that there were ‘forty or fifty thousand’ English Protestants who had been slaughtered at the commencement of the rebellion. See Temple’s *The Irish Rebellion: or, an History of the Attempt of the Irish Papists to extirpate the Protestants in the Kingdom of Ireland* (London: M. Cooper, 1746), pp. 9, 60-61 and Clarendon’s *The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England*, 6 vols, ed. by W. Dunn Macray (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), I, 397.
Reigns of James I and Charles I (1754), continued to keep the narrative of the Irish Rebellion of 1641 that had been set by Temple and Clarendon relevant. Just as his predecessors had done, he painted a harsh picture of the event, which spared no sympathy for the rebels. As far as he was concerned, the uprising had been a mass effort that defied human decency on an unprecedented scale. It is without doubt that, in drawing up this account, he had intended to evoke the feelings of anger, hatred and indignation towards the native and Catholic Irish peoples, whom he presented as a scheming and sadistic group, ever ready to betray their unsuspecting and kindly English neighbours. 46

Unsurprisingly, the manner in which the rebels were depicted by Hume, Clarendon and Temple did not sit well with the Catholic Irish, and they sought to dismantle aspects of their portrayal of the revolt. It is important to detail the rich historiographical debate that occurred in the mid-eighteenth century as it will allow us to get a sense of Goldsmith’s positioning within it. We can also observe that this debate resonated in London and among Goldsmith’s contemporaries. From the 1740s onwards, Curry, a close acquaintance of O’Conor and a medical doctor, was the key figure in this contest for Ireland’s near past. In his first extended study of the rebellion, A Brief Account from the most Authentic Protestant Writers of the Causes, Motives, and Mischiefs, of the Irish Rebellion (1747), he attempted to dislodge the established view that the ‘Irish Papists’ were a traitorous people who had attacked the English and the Protestant Irish without provocation. To this extent, in the first section of the work, he provided a meticulous rebuttal, in the form of a dialogue between a Dissenter and a member of the Church of Ireland, against Clarendon’s claim that, prior to the outbreak of hostilities, the state of Irish affairs, ‘both spiritual, and temporal,’ had been ‘quiet and happy’. Instead, he had the latter interlocutor correct the former by informing him of how the governance of the country had been designed to ruthlessly uproot the Catholic Irish populace; to unjustly deny them wealth and land. Following this, Curry proceeded to not only propose that the grievances held by the Irish provided a sympathetic ground upon which to rebel, but also denied that the uprising had, initially, been a general one. 47 Rather, he claimed that it had been ‘confined to some Parts of

47 Curry, not content with merely defending the conduct of the Irish in 1641, even went on the offensive to place much of the burden of responsibility for the atrocities committed onto the shoulders of the
Ulster only on the 23d of October, 1641’ and strenuously repudiated the allegation that a great number of English and Protestant Irish had been murdered in the nascent stages of the rebellion.48

For both O’Conor and Curry, importantly, their revisionist histories were not solely intended to ‘rectify’ the understanding of ancient Ireland and the Irish Rebellion of 1641 merely upon scholarly grounds. In large part, they were compelled by a concern to improve the image, and, subsequently, the economic and social situation of their fellow Irish Catholics, who were treated by the minority Protestant elite as second-class citizens through the succession of sectarian, legislative measures — known as the ‘popery’ or ‘penal’ laws — that were formulated in a piecemeal fashion to safeguard the English and Anglo-Irish interests in Ireland from the 1690s onwards.49 O’Conor first publicly revealed the political nature of his historical focus in publishing the Seasonable Thoughts Relating to our Civil and Ecclesiastical Constitution (1751).50 In this pamphlet, he asserted the need to remove the current civil disabilities affecting the Catholic population of Ireland for the sake of enhancing the industrious use of land and improving commerce, which, he argued, would give the kingdom the ‘finest Face of any Country in Christendom’. To support his case, he referred to Ireland’s historic status as a ‘Temple of Liberty, and the Emporium of Learning to all Europe’; by the means of which he tacitly assured his reader that the Irish Catholics were not an inherently dangerous group, but had much potential to function usefully as ‘true and

Protestants. As such, in addition to arguing that the Irish had not been the instigators of the rebellion, he declared that it was the English who had attacked them with orders from above. In contrast, he strongly suggested that the deeper Irish character was unsullied by the murderous acts that were executed by an ungovernable few amongst them by writing that their leaders had expressly refused to sanction any such violence. See Curry’s, A Brief Account from the most Authentic Protestant Writers of the Causes, Motives, and Mischiefs, of the Irish Rebellion (London: n.p., 1747), pp. 47-48.

48 Ibid., pp. 4-6, 27-29.

49 It should be mentioned here that the majority of Irish Catholic writers during this period, including O’Conor and Curry, were not advocating for a political break from Britain. It would only be with the arrival of Theobald Wolfe Tone (1763-1798), the founder of the United Irishmen, that Irish independence would become a serious agenda. See T.O. McLoughlin’s Contesting Ireland: Irish Voices against England in the Eighteenth Century (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999), p. 26.

50 It must be cautioned here that while O’Conor was greatly motivated upon political grounds for engaging in historical discussions over Ireland, he was also keen to display scholarly honesty and rigour in his works. Indeed, when the first and second editions of the Dissertations are compared, it is noticeable that he was growingly concerned in ensuring that his arguments were founded upon authentic and reliable sources. See Clare O’Halloran’s Golden Ages and Barbarous Nations: Antiquarian Debate and Cultural Politics in Ireland, c. 1750-1800 (Cork: Cork University Press, 2004), pp. 25-40.
loyal’ subjects to ‘his Majesty King George’, deserving equal treatment under the ‘Laws of Freemen and Protestants’.51

Similarly, Curry strongly suggested in the Historical Memoirs of the Irish Rebellion in the Year 1641 (1758) — a work that was drawn up in order to defend and re-assert the points of argument, which he had laid out in A Brief Account — that he was seeking to vindicate the historical reputation of the 1641 rebels in order to encourage the withdrawal of the many restraints that were in place against his people.52 Accordingly, he attached to this text an advertisement that he had written in conjunction with O’Conor, wherein he not only warned of how a refusal to grant economic participation to the Catholics would eventually lead to a ‘flux of monied Property’ overseas and the land being ‘thinned of Men and Money, to strengthen’ foreign enemies, but, also heavily criticised Hume’s History of Great Britain for having portrayed the uprising in the typical fashion as a general and barbaric assault against the English; an erroneous outlook which, he recognised, could further exacerbate the ill-treatment that the Catholic populace of Ireland were still subject to:

It is certainly to be lamented, that so able an Historian as Mr. Hume… should be so far led astray, by my Lord Clarendon’s Authority, as to transfer the greatest Outrages of the fatal Year 1641, from the original and real Authors, to the unfortunate IRISH alone; who, for forty Years before, have suffered all the Torture of a cruel Bondage of Mind and Body: A Wound from such a Hand is, in a great Degree, fatal… But Mr. Hume is still alive, to repair the Injury he has done: It is incumbent on him to do so. A great Genius lays on his blackest Colours with a just Indignation, where he thinks they are most merited; and as he may possibly hurt the Living, by the Odium cast on the Dead…53

Driven by the immediate, political relevance of their antiquarian and historical projects, O’Conor and Curry were compelled to ensure that their revisionist versions of

51 Charles O’Conor, Seasonable Thoughts Relating to our Civil and Ecclesiastical Constitution (Dublin: n.p., 1753), in The Irish Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment, ed. by David Berman and Patricia O’Riordan, 6 vols (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2002), VI, 1-51.
52 Walter Harris (1686-1761), a Protestant Irish antiquarian, published in 1752 his Fiction Unmasked, wherein he attacked Curry’s revisionist thesis found in A Brief Account. Curry worked upon the Historical Memoirs in a bid to defend his earlier work against the challenge posed by this text.
Irish history would be accessed by the wider audience of Britain, and not remain confined to Ireland. To this extent, they were not disappointed: their works managed to reach and influence a number of prominent, British authors and thinkers of the day. One such individual was Johnson. George Faulkner (1703-1775), the Irish printer and bookseller associated with Jonathan Swift (1667-1745), and a close acquaintance of O’Conor, passed on the Dissertations to this eminent lexicographer, who was deeply impressed by it. So much so, that he wrote a letter to O’Conor on 9 April 1757, exhorting the latter in his endeavour, and, while he was primarily interested in seeing the study of the Irish language improve, rather than in addressing the unjustness of the penal laws, he, nevertheless, signalled his acquiescence to the notion that ancient Ireland had once been the epicentre of learning and religiosity:

I [Johnson] have lately, by the favour of Mr Faulkner, seen your [O’Conor] account of Ireland… I have long wished that the Irish literature were cultivated. Ireland is known by tradition to have been once the seat of piety and learning; and surely it would be very acceptable to all those who are curious either in the original of nations, of the affinities of Languages, to be further informed of the revolutions of a people so ancient, and once so illustrious… As I wish well to all useful undertakings, I would not forbear to let you know how much you deserve, in my opinion, from all lovers of study, and how much pleasure your work has given…

Incidentally, a short time after having written this letter, the Catholic group headed by O’Conor and Curry sought Johnson’s help in preparing statements of grievances and in drawing up petitions for redress. In part encouraged by Faulkner who had made known the ‘animated language which Johnson frequently indulged in, when he dilated on the oppressions laid on the Roman Catholics of Ireland’, fifty guineas were prepared to solicit his services. However, as recounted by O’Conor’s grandson, Johnson did not ‘undertake the task proposed in favour of the Irish peasantry’. Although the reasons for Johnson having declined to write in ‘favour of Roman

54 Boswell, Life of Johnson, I, 204-05.
56 Charles O’Conor, Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Late Charles O’Conor (Dublin: J. Mehain, 1796), pp. 334-35.
Catholic claims and rights’ is difficult to discern, Alexander Napier assures us that Johnson ‘never lost his interest in Irish antiquarian inquiries or the discoveries of philology, as they affected the language spoken in Ireland.’ Indeed, twenty years after his first correspondence, he again wrote to O’Conor through Thomas Campbell, expressing regret how ‘discoveries in Irish Antiquity and large publications in the Irish language’ were yet to materialise.\textsuperscript{57}

Along with Johnson, O’Conor and Curry also found a sympathetic figure in Burke. During Burke’s second stay in Ireland, under the service of William Gerard Hamilton (1729-1796), he had sought out these two men — he met O’Conor by the end 1763, perhaps, in order to elicit help from him in translating old documents, and Curry in 1764, to obtain information regarding the Irish Rebellion of 1641 — and, subsequently, became a promoter of their interpretive outlooks on Irish history. As such, in addition to having encouraged O’Conor in publishing his second edition of the \textit{Dissertations} (1766), he also read Curry’s \textit{Historical Memoirs} and took it back with him with the intention of directing the publication of an altered London edition ‘under [his] inspection, & correction.’\textsuperscript{58} While he later withdrew his support from the latter project, he remained committed to Curry’s thesis of the uprising.\textsuperscript{59} In a letter to William Markham (1719-1807) in 1771, he strongly insisted on how the rebellion of 1641 had been ‘extremely and most absurdly misrepresented’:

You [Markham] mention at the End of the Roll of obnoxious tenets which my friends were so indiscreet as to utter in your Company in former times, the Irish Rebellion, by which I suppose you mean the great Rebellion of 1641… W.B. and my Brother most certainly never have spoken to you on the Subject. They know little or nothing of the Irish History. They have never thought on it at all; I have studied it with more Care than is common… Indeed, I have my opinion on that part of history, which I have often delivered to you; to every one I conversed with on the Subject, and which I mean still, to deliver whenever the occasion calls for it. Which is ‘That the Irish Rebellion of 1641 was not only (as our silly things called Historys [sic] call it), not utterly

\textsuperscript{57} Napier, ‘Johnson’s Relations with Charles O’Conor’, p. 568.
\textsuperscript{58} John C. Weston, Jr., ‘Edmund Burke’s Irish History: A Hypothesis’, \textit{PMLA}, 77 (1962), 397-403.
unprovoked but that no History, that I have ever read furnishes an
Instance of any that was so provoked’. 60

Moreover, before meeting with Curry in person, Burke had passed on the
Historical Memoirs to Smollett, who was evidently satisfied with its contents to permit
a favourable review of it to appear in the February 1761 edition of the Critical Review,
of which he was the editor at that time. In this article, the burden that the Irish Catholics
had shouldered under their English overlords preceding the outbreak of hostilities in
1641 is acknowledged, and it concluded its assessment by strongly recommending the
work as an even-tempered and revelatory piece that would rectify the readers’
prejudicial outlook towards Ireland: ‘We shall say nothing further, but that those who
are desirous of surmounting illiberal prejudices, of having their eyes purged from the
film of historical falsehood, and of seeing their fellow-subjects vindicated from the
imputation of a crime, which is indeed a reproach upon human nature, will find
uncommon satisfaction in perusing these Memoirs, which, in our opinion, are written
with the accuracy of a scholar, the candour of a gentleman, and the moderation of a
Christian.’ 61 It is worthwhile noting here that Smollett, himself, engaged in promoting
Curry’s reinterpretation of events, whilst editing and translating Voltaire’s writings; a
project that spanned the period of 1761-1765. To Voltaire’s claim that the Irish had
barbarically ‘massacred upwards of forty thousand’ Protestants in 1641, he fixed a
footnote, wherein he critically reflected upon the exaggerated nature of this figure, and
cautiously alluded to the possibility that the Catholics had a just cause for their actions:
‘Such is the computation of most historians; but the whole is a shocking exaggeration,
derived from animosity and misapprehension: if we should read four instead of forty
thousand, we should approach nearer the truth; and, we are afraid, it will be found
difficult to prove that the catholic were the aggressors.’ 62

61 ‘ART. VI. Historical Memoirs of the Irish Rebellion in the Year 1641… 8vo.’, Critical Review, February 1761, pp. 116-22. Unfortunately, the identity of the reviewer remains anonymous. This work is not listed in Claude E. Jones’ seminal study of 1946, wherein suggestions were made as to the identity of contributors for several of the Critical Review’s articles. See Jones’ ‘Contributors to The Critical Review 1756-1785’, Modern Language Notes, 61 (1946), 433-41.
However, the sympathy and support that Johnson, Burke and Smollett displayed towards the works of O’Conor and Curry was not necessarily reflective of the general attitude of the London learned public. The unflattering, historical portrayal of the Irish continued to hold currency in England, with a particular resistance being shown towards any attempt at revising the understanding of the 1641 Irish Rebellion. As such, an anonymous reviewer writing in the August 1767 edition of the *Monthly Review* assessed Curry’s *Historical Memoirs* in a rather lukewarm fashion by positing that while the author’s thesis was in part true, only ‘party zeal’ would incline one to accept it as being of the whole truth.63 Moreover, in April of the same year, a pithy and more scathing review of the work had appeared in the *Critical Review*; by which time, incidentally, Smollett was no longer the editor of the periodical. Evidently, for some, the topic was still a ‘hot’ issue that was not open for a candid reassessment:

This author [Curry] is a professed advocate in extenuation, if not vindication, of the Irish rebellion. He is very properly pitted with Walter Harris, Esq; to whom he addresses his performances; for we find in his work abundance of false reasoning, inconclusive arguments, and intemperate zeal, but nothing which reflects any new light upon the subject. The authorities he writes from lie on every stall, or, at least, are to be found in every bookseller’s shop; and therefore our readers might think we were abusing their patience, should we give any extracts from a performance so palpably partial.64

Thus, prior to and against the backdrop of Goldsmith having engaged in composing the *Letters from a Nobleman* and the *History of England*, contemporary, Irish Catholic antiquarians and historians, including O’Conor and Curry, were hard at work to dispel the unflattering portrayal of historical Ireland that had become commonplace. Driven by the desire to be treated as equal citizens with the right to engage fully within the economic and social life of the country, they reached out in a bid to influence a number of the foremost thinkers and writers of their day. While their success was somewhat limited, they did manage to find sympathetic ears amongst a

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64 ‘Historical Memoirs... Pr. 2s. 6d. Williams’, *Critical Review*, April 1767, p. 310. The reviewer’s identity is unknown. Jones does not refer to this article in his study of contributors writing in the *Critical Review*. See Jones’ ‘Contributors to the Critical Review 1756-1785’.
number of literary and intellectual luminaries who belonged to Goldsmith’s intimate
circle of friends.

**Goldsmith, the cautious Irishman**

Whether or not Goldsmith had read the *Dissertations* and the *Historical
Memoirs* cannot be ascertained, as he never mentioned or discussed them directly in his
writings. Nevertheless, it is difficult to believe that he was ignorant of O’Conor and
Curry’s theses and their political cause prior to having composed his two English
histories. This is especially so as he had a close relationship with Johnson, Burke and
Smollett from an early point of his writerly career. According to Prior, Goldsmith was
first introduced to Johnson on 31 May 1761, when the former entertained the latter,
along with several other literary figures, at his lodgings in Wine-Office Court. And he
met Smollett sometime between 1758 and 1759 through Archibald Hamilton (1719-
1893), the printer of the *Critical Review*.\(^6^5\) As for his encounter with Burke, it is
possible that it occurred at Robert Dodsley’s at about 1758 or 1759.\(^6^6\) Not only did
Goldsmith develop a lasting friendship with these luminaries, but they also harboured
feelings of mutual respect towards each other as fellow men of letters. In particular, it
appears that the intellectual bond between Goldsmith and Burke was strong. Even
before meeting him in person, Goldsmith was impressed with Burke, and wrote a
complimentary review of the latter’s *Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) in the *Monthly
Review* for May 1757.\(^6^7\) In turn, Burke was flattered by Goldsmith’s assessment of this
text, and, in the following years, became an ardent supporter of his works: he was
favourably inclined towards *The Traveller* (1764), was enthusiastic over *The Deserted
Village* (1770), and, as noted by Donald Bryant, was one of the few people who
immediately recognised the value of *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766).\(^6^8\) As such, there is
good reason to believe that, as they saw each other more frequently as members of

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\(^6^6\) Donald Cross Bryant, *Edmund Burke and his Literary Friends* (St. Louis: Washington University
Press, 1939), pp. 84-86. Bryant also posits that Goldsmith may have met with Burke at Joshua Reynolds’
during this period. However, this clashes with the understanding that Goldsmith became first acquainted
with Reynolds on 1761. Additionally, it is worthwhile to note here that, while not meeting in person, it is
probable that Burke knew of Goldsmith during their years at Trinity, College Dublin. See Michael J.
Griffin’s ‘Burke, Goldsmith and the Irish Absentees’, in *Edmund Burke’s Irish Identities*, ed. by Séan
\(^6^7\) See Goldsmith’s review of Burke’s *Sublime and Beautiful* in Friedman’s *CW*, I, 27-35.
\(^6^8\) Bryant, *Edmund Burke and his Literary Friends*, pp. 93-94.
Johnson’s literary club, which was established during the winter of 1763-1764, they must have had an occasion or two to converse upon historical and contemporary Irish matters.

Additionally, it is possible that Goldsmith had the opportunity to hear, second-hand, of the revisionist attempts being made in the field of Irish history writing during his childhood years, whilst under the care and mentorship of Contarine. Among the number of notable, learned men that his uncle was acquainted with, he had an especially convivial relationship with O’Conor, as recounted later by this eminent, Catholic Irish antiquarian’s grandson, also named Charles O’Conor (1764-1828):

Happening one day to dine with Mr Contarine, — ‘Mr. O’Conor,’ said the parson, ‘I am glad to see that you like my beef, I hope it is orthodox’ — ‘Sir,’ said the other, ‘every thing that is Irish, is orthodox.’ — The reply was so unstudied, and so much to the good parson’s taste, that filling out a bumper, — ‘Well, then’ said he, ‘O’Conor, here is every thing that is Irish, for it is orthodox.’ The two gentlemen then unbosomed themselves; the magic influence of good cheer brightened up new horizons for futurity, fancy revelled in new combinations, the Saturnian reign with all its golden harvests and innocent pleasures was anticipated, the hearts of the two neighbours were expanded by a consciousness, that though they differed in religious opinions, they differed not through worldly, but through honest motives, and this rendered their convivial happiness more exquisite; it was a feast of fellowship, that gave free course to the genial current of the soul.’

Under these circumstances, it is intriguing to consider how Goldsmith, in composing his first English history, the *Letters from a Nobleman*, paid very little heed to the recent, historiographical challenges made to the conception of Ireland’s past, and instead chose to reassert the old notion of the kingdom as a land of barbarians and savages. In the third letter of the first volume of this work, he included Ireland — along with ‘Wales, the Highlands of Scotland,… Biscay, Crim Tartary, &c.’ — in the list of

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69 As noted by Michael F. Cox, Contarine was ‘the strongest, best, and most enduring influence exercised on Goldsmith in his early days.’ See Cox’s ‘The Country and Kindred of Oliver Goldsmith’, *Journal of the National Literary Society*, 1 (1901-1903), 81-111.

countries that had preserved the ‘primitive manners’ of the Celts, during the period when the rest of Europe was being influenced by the westward movement of the ‘Greek, the Roman, and Teutonic languages and customs’. He even went on to single out Ireland — albeit, not in an entirely hostile fashion — as a place where the ‘vestige of barbarous antiquity’ could still be witnessed. Moreover, in discussing the Irish Rebellion of 1641, he propagated the established understanding of it, by heavily truncating Hume’s account of the event, as having been an unprecedented cruel and general assault by the Catholics against the Protestants:

In the midst of these troubles [Parliament petitioning Charles I in a bid to ‘abase’ him], the Papists of Ireland fancied they found a convenient opportunity of throwing off the English yoke. Religion and liberty often inspire the most atrocious actions; and they did so now. The Papists took a resolution, of which we find many horrid examples in history. They attempted to cut off all the Protestants in that kingdom at one blow. Not less than forty thousand persons fell a sacrifice upon this occasion. In such a number of murders cruelty put on a thousand different shapes; rapes, burnings, and tortures were practiced in every part of that miserable island; and all the Protestants perished who had not the good fortune to make early provision for their safety.  

There is a slim chance that Goldsmith, in 1764, was inclined to present ancient Ireland in a relatively unfavourable light, and to discuss the 1641 rebellion from a typically English point of view, as he may have been — as a member of the Protestant community — unconcerned for the continuing plight that the Catholic Irish were in under the penal laws. However, when one considers that only a few years prior to compiling the *Letters from a Nobleman*, he had composed his sympathetic account of O’Carolan, wherein — as noted above — he had tacitly referred to the oppressive nature of English rule in Ireland, this proposal appears tenuous. What is more likely is that he was worried that writing positively of his country and contesting the conventional narrative of the uprising would potentially betray his Irish origin, and, subsequently, compromise the work’s standing in the eyes of its readership. As such, he presented the majority of the letters as having been supposedly penned by an

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anonymous nobleman who, he made certain, would be recognised as an Englishman. In the opening lines of the text, he set the scene by having a proud father congratulate his son, a Charles, for his recent academic accomplishments at the University of Oxford. Then, in the following epistolary section, he extolled the virtues of reading the history of England by noting that it was ‘the proper study of an Englishman’. Moreover, he continued by remarking upon how it was of particular value to him, as he would one day stand as an ‘important character to support’ England’s ‘administration’.

Notably, seven years later, in composing his second English history, Goldsmith’s Anglicised approach to matters pertaining to historical Ireland had solidified even further. In his account of the Norman invasion of Ireland in the twelfth century, he provided a fuller description of the barbaric state that the country was supposedly in during that time. While in the Letters from a Nobleman, he had merely quipped of how it was ‘at that time barbarous’, in the History of England, he remoulded and transplanted phrases from Hume’s work to paint a gloomier picture of the situation, and, consequently, strongly alluded to the invading army of Henry II as having been a liberating and civilising force, an outlook that was not uncommon amongst the English and Anglo-Irish during the eighteenth century:

The [Irish] natives, kept in strictest bondage, grew every day more ignorant and brutal; and when at last they rose upon their conquerors, and totally expelled them the island, they wanted instructors to restore them to their former attainments. From thence they continued in the most deplorable state of barbarism. The towns that had been formerly built were suffered to fall into ruin; the inhabitants exercised pasture in the open country, and sought protection from danger by retiring into their forests and bogs. Almost all sense of religion was extinguished; the petty princes exercised continual outrages upon each others [sic] territories; and nothing but strength alone was able to procure redress.

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72 Ibid., I, 1, 7-8.

73 Goldsmith, Letters from a Nobleman, I, 84 & History of England, I, 249-50. For an example of the acceptance with which the notion that the English had a civilising effect upon the Irish was held, see the anonymously published An Appeal to the People of Ireland (Dublin: Peter Wilson, 1749). See also O’Conor’s response to this text (A Counter-Appeal to the People of Ireland [Dublin: n.p., 1749]), wherein he dismissed the claim that Ireland had been a ‘Hell of Devils’ prior to the arrival of Henry II, and refuted the idea that the Irish had been ‘by degrees moulded and formed into Humanity by the English Laws’.
Also, in at least four passages of the *History of England*, Goldsmith included fresh remarks not found in the *Letters from a Nobleman* that reminded his readers of how the Irish were a savage people and the kingdom a realm forsaken by culture and politeness. Firstly, in the account of Edward I’s campaign in Scotland, he unfavourably depicted the Irish soldiers mobilised by the king — along with the Welsh — as men who were used to a ‘desultory war’, in contrast to the English, who were characterised as being courageous and disciplined. Secondly, in conveying the ambitious and headstrong personality of the Earl of Essex (1565-1601), who, for a while was considered by Elizabeth I as her favourite, he had the occasion to point out that the natives of Ireland were ‘not yet thoroughly brought into subjection to the English’, and, thus, ‘took every opportunity to make incursions upon the more civilized inhabitants and slew all they were able to overpower.’ Following this, in the course of describing the increasingly tense situation between Charles I and Parliament, he reflected upon the Irish units that had been shipped over from the neighbouring kingdom to augment the king’s forces as being comprised of men who ‘still retained their fierceness and their barbarity.’ Lastly, he wrote of how Cromwell’s army was unwilling to obey the order of Parliament to disband, and for the remaining soldiers to transfer to Ireland, as that country was ‘yet uncivilized, uncultivated, and barbarous.’

Additionally, in recounting the Irish Rebellion of 1641 in the *History of England*, he more faithfully and extensively transcribed his account from Hume’s work to place stronger emphasis on notion that it was a villainous act of treachery that had been spurred on by the base sentiment of jealousy against the English. It is relevant to note here that, unlike his earlier description of the event, he went so far as to condemn the uprising as an expression of savagery that only a barbaric country like Ireland could foment. And, in addition to remaining staunchly committed to the assumption that the number of innocent victims killed had been extraordinarily high, he supplemented Hume’s pornographic portrayal of the evils allegedly committed upon the Protestants by referring to the murders that had taken place on Portadown Bridge on November 1641:

> But though the citizens of Dublin had just time enough to save themselves from danger; the protestants dispersed over the different

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parts of the country, were taken unprepared. O’Neale and his confederates had already taken arms in Ulster. The Irish, everywhere intermingled with the English, needed but a hint from their leaders and priests to massacre a people whom they hated for their religion, and envied for their riches and prosperity. The insurrections of a civilized people, are usually marked with very little cruelty; but the revolt of a savage nation, generally aims at extermination. The Irish accordingly resolved to cut off all the protestants of the kingdom at a stroke… In vain did flight save from the first assault; destruction, that had an extensive spread, met the hunted victims at every turn. Not only death, but studied cruelties were inflicted on the unhappy sufferers; the very avarice of the revolters could not restrain their thirst for blood, and they burned the inhabitants in their own houses to encrease their punishment. Several hundred were driven upon a bridge; and from thence obliged, by these barbarians, to leap into the water, where they were drowned… The protestants were driven there from their houses, to meet the severity of the weather, without food or raiment, and numbers of them perished with the cold, which happened at that time to be peculiarly severe. By some computations, those who perished by all these cruelties, are made to amount to an hundred and fifty, or two hundred thousand; but, by a moderate computation, they could not have been less than forty thousand.75

Furthermore, in the final chapter of the History of England Goldsmith deviated from the narrative of the Letters from a Nobleman to make a laudatory remark towards Britain, wherein he recognised the ‘glorious figure the British nation appeared in to all the world’ during the reign of George II. But, perhaps, the most damning proof of his stronger desire to wear the garb of a staunch, British patriot is found in his account of the aftermath of the Siege of Limerick (1691). Here, he expanded upon an earlier observation made in 1764, to more forcefully convey the notion that the English, under the command of William III, had treated the defeated Irish in a benevolent and tolerant manner, and, consequently, blithely passed over the problematic issue of the penal laws:

75 Ibid., III, 245-46.
Limerick, the last retreat of the Irish forces, made a brave defence; but soon seeing the enemy advanced within ten paces of the bridge foot, and perceiving themselves surrounded on all sides, they determined to capitulate; a negotiation was immediately begun, and hostilities ceased on both sides. The Roman catholics by this capitulation were restored to the enjoyment of those liberties in the exercise of their religion, which they had possessed in the reign of king Charles the second. All persons were indulged with free leave to remove with their families and effects to any other country, except England and Scotland.\textsuperscript{76}

Considering that by the time Goldsmith had begun to compile his later English history, he had attained public notice as the author of \textit{The Traveller}, \textit{The Vicar of Wakefield} and \textit{The Deserted Village}, it is doubtful that a fear, akin to what he had felt whilst composing the \textit{Letters from a Nobleman} — that the recognition of his status as an Irishman could potentially compromise the reception of his work — played a direct hand in his increased determination to veil his Irish background and to present himself as a faithful British citizen. Rather, it is more likely that, much in accord with what has been discovered above through his non-historical engagements, this shift was the result of his growing sense of comfort with his practiced, English persona and his improved situation as an established member of the London literary and learned ‘elite’. Indeed, it is telling how he had opened the \textit{History of England} by proudly flashing his writerly credentials and by alluding to his well-connectedness within the authorly community:

\begin{quote}
From the favourable reception given to my Abridgement of Roman History, published some time since, several friends, and others, whose business leads them to consult the wants of the public, have been induced to suppose, that an English history written on the same plan would be acceptable. It was their opinion that we still wanted a work of this kind, where the narrative, though very concise, is not totally without interest, and the facts, though crowded are yet distinctly seen.\textsuperscript{77}
\end{quote}

However, regardless of the greater, outward show of Englishness he presented, the \textit{History of England} exposes another side to Goldsmith’s approach towards his Irish


\textsuperscript{77} Goldsmith, \textit{History of England}, I, p. i.
identity that one struggles to discover elsewhere: that is, as late as in 1771, he continued to harbour a deeply personal and impulsive feeling of affinity and concern for his home country. To begin, it is observable that Goldsmith, in composing the *History of England*, was not overly enthused at the excessively hostile depiction of the ancient Irish that he found in Hume’s English histories. As such, while he heavily relied upon this Scottish philosopher’s work to draw up his account of the Irish Rebellion of 1641, it is noticeable how he was unable to unquestioningly accept the bombastic claim asserted by him, which alleged that the ancient Irish were a barbaric people who had been steeped in savagery since the beginning of time, and that the Danish invasions had only improved their condition. Rather, he adeptly appropriated passages from Smollett’s text, before providing a truncated summary of Hume’s assessment of the early state of Ireland, to strongly convey the notion that the native Irish had once achieved the pinnacle of learning, only to fall into a state of darkness due to the constant incursions by the Danes:

Ireland was at that time [prior to the Norman invasion] in pretty much the same situation that England had been, after the first invasion of the Saxons. They had been early converted to Christianity; and, for three or four centuries after, possessed a very large proportion of the learning of the times; being undisturbed by foreign invasions, and perhaps too poor to invite the rapacity of conquerors, they enjoyed a peaceful life, which they gave up to piety, and such learning as was then thought necessary to promote it. Of their learning, their arts, their piety, and even their polished manners, too many monuments remain to this day for us to make the least doubt concerning them; but it is equally true, that in time they fell from these advantages; and their degenerate posterity, at the time we are now speaking of, were wrapt in the darkest barbarity. This may be imputed to the frequent invasions which they suffered from the Danes, who over-ran the whole country, and every where spread their ravages, and confirmed their authority.78

Also, it is evident that the later Goldsmith tended to feel a sense of affinity for his fellow Irishmen and could not resist straying from his source materials to present

78 Ibid., pp. 248-49.
certain individuals in a relatively sympathetic light. Such was the case with John Cade, who had, in 1450, led a popular revolt against Henry VI. In writing of this rebel, he freely omitted and modified phrases from Hume and Smollett’s texts to portray him as a somewhat heroic figure rather than that of a pure villain. Accordingly, he desisted from describing him as a ‘man of low condition’, as Hume had done, and, instead, merely wrote that he was ‘a native of Ireland’. And, rather than noting in passing the initial success he had over the king’s forces, as Smollett had done, he committed an independent line narrating the event; and that from Cade’s perspective. Much in the same vein, he depicted John Felton (1595-1628), the assassin of George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham, with greater sensitivity than Smollett, who had largely characterised him as having been a sullen, vindictive and fanatical individual. For Goldsmith, Felton was a brave patriot, albeit a misguided one:

In the general discontent that prevailed against this nobleman [Buckingham], it was daily expected that some severe measures would be resolved on; and he was stigmatized as the tyrant and the betrayer of his country. There was one Felton, who caught the general contagion; an Irishman of a good family, who had served under the duke as lieutenant, but had resigned, on being refused his rank on the death of his captain, who had been killed at the Isle of Rhé. This man was naturally melancholy, courageous, and enthusiastic; he felt for his country, as if labouring under a calamity which he thought it in the power of his single arm to remove.

Additionally, it is recognisable that Goldsmith was unable to full-heartedly accept the notion that the Irish tended to be a cowardly and militarily incompetent people, who could never measure up to the vastly superior spirit of the English; an outlook that was propagated by Voltaire in Le Siecle de Louis XIV (1751): ‘Les Irlandais, que nous avons vu de si bons soldats en France & en Espagne, ont toujours mal combattu chez eux. Il y a des nations, dont l’une semble faite pour être soumise à

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79 It should be noted here that while Cade has been commonly supposed to have been an Irishman, this belief stands on dubious grounds. See I.M.W. Harvey, ‘Cade, John [Jack] (d. 1450)’, in DNB (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/4292>, accessed 17 September 2018.
l’autre. Les Anglais ont toujours eu fur les Irlandais la supériorité du genie, des richesses & des armes.\(^{84}\) Consequently, in describing the defeat that they had suffered at the Battle of the Boyne (1690), he sought to salvage what he could of their martial reputation by extrapolating an original anecdote that he had included in his earlier work of 1764, to retell of how an ‘O’Regan’, an ‘old Irish captain’, had boldly quipped that ‘if the English would exchange generals, the conquered army would fight the battle with them over again.’\(^{85}\) Also, in conveying the ill-fated Spanish naval expedition against the forces of Admiral John Byng (1704-1757) in 1718, he deviated from the *Letters from a Nobleman* and more closely followed Smollett’s account of the event to recognise the noteworthy conduct of George Camocke (1666-1732), an Irish naval officer who was then serving under Spain:

The English had for some time acquired such expertness in naval affairs, that no other nation would attempt to face them, but with manifest advantage. The Spaniards seemed distracted in their councils, and acted with extreme confusion. They made a running fight, and the commanders behaved with courage and activity, in spite of which they were all taken expect three, which were preserved by the conduct of one Cammoc [*sic*], their vice admiral, a native of Ireland.\(^{86}\)

But, perhaps, most importantly, it is noticeable how Goldsmith, in 1771, was still troubled by the neglectful and overbearing manner in which Ireland was being treated by the British, and consequently, could not help gently chiding his English readers upon these two points. As such, in remarking upon Henry V’s successful inroad into France, he appropriated a line that he had used in the *Letters from a Nobleman*, by the means of which he criticised this monarch’s campaign as having produced ‘scarce any good effects at home’, as it only induced the people to become ‘savage’, and forgetful of ‘cultivating’ those possessions that ‘lay nearer home’.\(^{87}\) It is likely that he was referring to the contemporary situation surrounding his own country as he wrote this line, as it strongly resonates with a quip he had made earlier in ‘A Description of the Manners and Customs of the Native Irish’, wherein — as noted above — he had the figure of an Englishman, travelling through Ireland, bemoan how his fellow English

had, hitherto, busied themselves in ‘studying the manners, the soil, and produce of distant countries’, while passing by their neighbouring domains ‘without notice or regard’. And, in discussing Cromwell’s consolidation of personal power during the Commonwealth period, Goldsmith bitterly noted — as he had done in 1764 — of how Ireland and Scotland were ‘treated as conquered provinces, in which the protector issued his absolute orders without even the mask of his former hypocrisy’. That he was not merely making a historical reflection is discernible when it is taken into consideration how he had made a similarly suggestive utterance in his article concerning the life and achievements of O’Carolan, where it was pointed out that the bards of Ireland incite their audience to ‘bewail the bondage of their country under the English government’. 

Remarkably, in the History of England, Goldsmith even sallied out, with renewed vigour, to attack the particular issue of the skewed balance of parliamentarian power that was in existence between Ireland and Britain; to the detriment of the former. Accordingly, in describing the Maurice Annesley case of 1719, the ‘resolution’ of which effectively rendered Irish Parliament dependent on that of Great Britain, not only did he reiterate the points that he had established in the Letters from a Nobleman — that the event was of the utmost consequence for both nations, and that it had been a ‘blow’ to the Irish, who felt it most ‘severely’ — but he also lay greater emphasis on the grievous nature of the affair. Indeed, compared to the relevant passage found in his earlier English history, its expanded counterpart of 1771 pulses with a stronger sense of anger and disappointment towards the Irish political elite for having allowed the parliament of their country be demoted to a subordinate position:

Notwithstanding all opposition the bill was carried by a great majority, and soon after received the royal assent. The people of Ireland were not at that time so well acquainted with their rights and just privileges as they are at present. Their lords then were mostly made up of men bred up in luxury and ignorance; neither spirited enough to make opposition, nor skilful enough to conduct it. It is very extraordinary that this bill, *which was a real grievance* [my italics], produced no commotions in the

90 Goldsmith, ‘*The HISTORY of CAROLAN, the last Irish Bard*.’, pp. 118-19.
kingdom of Ireland; and that the coinage of half-pence by one Wood, in England, for the people of that country, which was no grievance, was attended with very great disturbances. The reason must be, that the latter opposition was conducted by a man of genius, and the former *imposition* [my italics] submitted to by men of weak abilities.91

Moreover, Goldsmith did not merely use the *History of England* as a platform to express Irish grievances. Beyond this, he actively, albeit subtly, sought to encourage his English readers to treat with his country on a more equal basis by presenting their neighbours as a people who were capable of functioning as unswervingly loyal and useful patriots. To this end, not only did he assert that, following the Norman invasion of Ireland, ‘that beautiful island’ had continued with ‘unshaken fidelity’ as an ‘appendage to the English crown’, but he also wrote of the contest during the Seven Years’ War between Eyre Coote (1726-1783), a Kilmallock born East India officer, and Thomas Arthur, comte de Lally (1702-1766), a French general with Irish ancestry, with greater circumspection, so as to sweep under the rug the strong Irish Jacobite and French connection that existed. As such, while in the *Letters from a Nobleman*, he had generously acknowledged both men as having been Irishmen, who were each staunchly attached to the service of their respective crowns, in his later account, he only made explicit that Coote was a native of the country. Moreover, he utterly removed any reference to a ‘Colonel O Kenedy’ who had stood against Coote at Carangoly:

> In the mean time the operations against the French were carried on with much more splendid success. The troops headed by colonel Coote, a native of Ireland, and possessed of prudence and bravery, marched against general Lally, resolved to come to a decisive engagement. On his march he took the city of Wandewash, he afterwards reduced the fortress of Carangoly, and at length came up with the French general, who had no thoughts of declining the engagement… 92

Accordingly, despite Goldsmith’s willing acquiescence with and even furthering of the typical anti-Irish narrative in certain instances, there was enough of an Irishman left in him in 1771 that he could not resist attempting to elevate Ireland’s image and

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standing in other, select passages. To a large extent, this conundrum can be explained by referring to the company he had kept in London. Being in the midst of the likes of Johnson and Robert Nugent, Lord Clare, who was a strong proponent of supporting Ireland’s economic growth, he may have felt a sense of assuredness that allowing his lingering, innermost sympathy for his native homeland to be expressed in the form of upholding the learned and civilised nature of ancient Ireland and rebuking the English for their poor treatment of the Irish was acceptable. And his decision to challenge the notion that the Irish were militarily incompetent may have been considered by him to be a ‘safe’ point of attack too. On the contrary, it is possible that he recognised that to reinterpret key historical events, including that of the 1641 Irish Rebellion and the aftermath of the Siege of Limerick, was to go much too far; that it would be irreconcilable with his hard-fought status as a well-established ‘Englishman’. Despite his close relationship with Smollett and Burke, it is conceivable that he may have been aware of the poor reviews that had emerged in the two major book review publications of the day in 1767 regarding Curry’s *Historical Memoirs*, and, subsequently, felt that to engage in contesting issues that were deeply ingrained within the popular imagination would lead him into a quagmire of contentious political debate, which he desired to avoid.

Had O’Conor and Curry read Goldsmith’s English histories, it can be imagined that they would have been sorely disappointed. The former would have especially been so, considering his relationship with Contarine. Undoubtedly, they would have viewed Goldsmith as having abided by Hume’s narrative too closely. Indeed, one cannot put Goldsmith in the same category with these two Irish writers. Nowhere in the *History of England* do we find a comparable revisionist slant nor a concern for the plight that the Catholics were in. Yet, Goldsmith was not so far removed from them either. In his own way, he carefully sought to promote Ireland’s situation, whilst protecting his persona as a staunch British patriot.

**Conclusion**

Goldsmith’s two English histories must be considered to be an integral part of the investigative process when contemplating his stance towards Ireland. By focusing solely on his personal letters and non-historical engagements, it is easy to fall into a
sense of assuredness that, as his time in London lengthened, he was growing less concerned with familial ties and the pertinent, contemporary issues surrounding Ireland and was increasingly comfortable with his practiced persona as an Anglicised author. But when the Letters from a Nobleman and the History of England are taken into account, it becomes evident that the matter has an unexpected complexity to it. In part, they confirm that Goldsmith was, indeed, progressively determined to mask his Irish identity to, instead, present himself as a great, British patriot; so much so, that he was even willing to disregard the revisionist works of O’Conor and Curry, with the consequent result of further propagating the predominant notion regarding Ireland as a failed state, which was only civilised through the benevolent, guiding hand of the English, and that the 1641 Rebellion had been an act of unprecedented betrayal against the innocent Protestants. However, Goldsmith’s later history also reveals that he enduringly harboured a deep sense of personal attachment towards his home country. Crucially, in direct contrast to the point made earlier, of how he was disinclined to write of the political imbalance that existed between Ireland and Britain following the period of 1757-1760, it is noticeable that in 1771 he was yet prepared — albeit cautiously — to criticise the English for their ill treatment of their near neighbours.

It is upon this recognition that one can assert, with a greater sense of certainty, that The Deserted Village was likely composed with the veiled intent to decry the poor state that Ireland was in due to Britain’s disregard for this kingdom. For a long time, modern scholars have been intrigued by the possibility that in describing the decline of Auburn, Goldsmith was, in fact, making a reference to his childhood home of Lissoy. And, more recently, Griffin and Clarke have forwarded an updated and a more refined version of this argument by describing the poem as having been a work of subtle protest against the obstruction of Ireland’s economic potential by England, and as a discourse upon the issue of Irish land ownership and emigration. However, as intriguing as these proposals are, their power to convince has been somewhat compromised by the relative lack of engagement with Goldsmith’s two English histories. While the contextual background offered by Griffin and Clarke — wherein the relationship between Goldsmith and James Oglethorpe (1696-1785) and Robert Nugent, Lord Clare are

93 For a comprehensive view of the debate that has raged over the identity of Auburn, see John Montague’s ‘The Sentimental Prophecy: A Study of The Deserted Village’, in Art of Oliver Goldsmith, pp. 90-106.
94 Griffin, Enlightenment in Ruins, pp. 113-45 & Clarke, Brothers of the Quill, pp. 331-35.
mentioned — go some way towards establishing their interpretive viewpoints, there
remains many stumbling blocks that cannot be ignored: perhaps, the most salient of
them being that in his dedicatory address to Reynolds, Goldsmith himself had claimed
that his poetical exercise was founded upon what he had witnessed during his
‘excursions’ to the English countryside.95 It is only when one acknowledges that in the
History of England — which was composed only a year following the release of The
Deserted Village — he played the dual game of wearing the garb of an Anglicised
author whilst chiding his British readers for their unjust treatment of the Irish, that it is
appreciable that he had been likely seeking, in 1770, to tacitly address the problematic
relationship between the two kingdoms.

However, Goldsmith was not seeking to radically disturb the deepest aspects of
the historical narrative as understood by the English. Not only does his acquiescence
and even the furthering of the dominant perception of Ireland’s status as a barbaric
landscape support this contention, but the subtlety with which he had chastised the
English for their stifling of Ireland’s political and economic potential is telling.
Moreover, it is possible to view Goldsmith’s specific deviations from the typical, anti-
Irish outlook involved a careful selection process on his part. It is probable that he had
felt comfortable in taking the English to task concerning ancient Ireland’s reputation as
a learned and civilised nation and debunking the notion of the Irish’s supposed lack of
the martial vigour and urging for his home country be treated as an equal partner with
England upon the belief that these were relatively acceptable grounds for
reconsideration. Moreover, it is likely that he sincerely believed that a more balanced
relationship between the two nations, infused with a feeling of mutual respect, would be
of benefit to both. Perhaps, his familiarity with Johnson and Robert Nugent, Lord Clare
encouraged him to think along such lines. As such, it is observable that Goldsmith was
no revolutionary; a proto-Theobald Wolfe Tone (1763-1798) with a mind towards
drastic political changes. Yet, neither was he a ‘court jester to the English’ who had
‘almost forgot’ his ‘native land’.96 Rather, he was a loyal British citizen, who did what
he could, out of personal inclination and within the confines he found himself in, far
from Ireland, to modestly press for the cause of his home country.

95 Goldsmith, The Deserted Village, in CW. IV, 285-86.
4. For a Slice of their Scurvy Religion: Piety, Catholicism and Judaism

Introduction

Up to this point, our discussion has engaged in subjects that have garnered much interest from modern Goldsmith scholars: that of his socio-political outlook and of his Irishness. In this final chapter, attention will be focused upon a topic that has attracted little serious study, despite its importance to the wider field of eighteenth-century scholarship: that of his religious attitudes. It is relevant to remind ourselves here that, most recently, Laura Kennelly has, in her comparative examination of the History of England (1771) with David Hume’s historical text, referred to how Oliver Goldsmith was — in composing this work — an author who was concerned to delete criticisms of religion; who was keen to maintain the religious status quo; who worried of the Roman Catholic agitators; and who wished to present the Puritans as a ‘new cleansing phenomenon which blossomed’ during the reign of Elizabeth. Nevertheless, it is notable that she had subsumed such references to the larger issue of how Goldsmith had composed a Tory history ‘incognito’. It is, indeed, puzzling that Goldsmith researchers have not approached the question of Goldsmith’s attitude towards religion as an independent point of concern, when it is considered how the period in which he lived and wrote was deeply affected by the ‘jostling’ between the Enlightenment values of reason, tolerance and amicability with those beliefs and prejudices that have been endurably embedded in the popular mind.

As such, an attempt will be made here to fill in this noticeable gap. By examining Goldsmith’s historical compilations, along with his relevant essays, reviews and poems, and anecdotal evidence, a fuller picture of his career-long approach towards issues of religion will be produced. In the first section, it will be noted how during the eighteenth century, there was an antagonistic split between those who challenged aspects of the religious belief system and those who resisted such ‘innovations’. Within this spectrum, it will be argued that Goldsmith was ever situated in-between these polar opposites; that he was a writer who combined a deep, and even an increasingly conventional sense of religiosity with grounded-realism and open-mindedness. In the

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second section, it will be recognised how Goldsmith was immersed in environments that were still affected by a sense of hostility and angst against the Catholics and Catholicism. Against this backdrop, he was positioned in the midst of two distinct attitudes towards Catholicism and its adherents: that, on the one hand, he was progressively becoming more in tune with the typical sectarian outlook of the time, and, yet, on the other hand, he managed to reserve some sense of sympathy and tolerance for them. Finally, in the third section, it will be recognised how the climate of the time was also affected by anti-Semitic feelings. It will be asserted that while Goldsmith was never able to extricate himself from such prejudicial sentiments, he was, nonetheless, always ready to denounce the acts of violence and mistreatment that the Jews had been subjected to historically. To conclude, it will be proposed that Goldsmith was an author who was fundamentally a worldly Christian and Protestant. As one who could not divorce himself fully from the biases of his time but was committed to the well-being of man. Based upon this, it will be briefly noted how such an understanding of him can help us consider afresh the manner in which he had confronted the protagonist of The Vicar of Wakefield (1766); which in turn would aid us in further establishing a stronger appreciation of the novel’s complex nature. Moreover, a bolder theory will be hazarded as to how one can take into account the diversity of Goldsmith’s stance towards religious matters. It will be posited that behind his seemingly multifarious approach one can identify one crucial concern: that of social cohesion and power.

**Innovation and conservatism**

Amongst modern scholars, the characterisation of the Enlightenment as a period in which reason was contrasted with faith has had a dominant influence. While, as argued by S.J. Barnett, the extent to which learned individuals were intent on revising or demolishing the tenets of devotional life should not be overstated, it is undeniable that there did exist in the eighteenth century a lively, literary scene wherein texts that

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2 Goldsmith’s general approach towards religiosity and Catholicism and Judaism will be focused upon, without an in-depth review being made of his outlook on the Dissenters, as Kennelly has gone some way towards revealing important aspects of this point by discussing Goldsmith’s attitude towards the Puritans.
provided a critical examination into what were perceived to be the problematical aspects of faith were produced and challenged by reactionary critics and thinkers.³

Of the many works that were published in the eighteenth century that pursued a critical line of enquiry into the issue of faith, those by Hume deserves recognition, for, as noted by Arthur Friedman, it is likely that Goldsmith was aware of this eminent author’s early work, An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (1748), which included at least two chapters that systematically, albeit cautiously, challenged fundamental aspects of the Christian belief system.⁴ In section X, Hume railed against religious enthusiasm by disputing the validity of miracles — without which he recognised that the ‘Christian Religion’ could not be ‘believed by… any reasonable person’ — and, instead, promoted the rigorous examination of material evidences, gathered in the course of human life, along the lines of probability: ‘It is experience only, which gives authority to human testimony; and it is the same experience, which assures us of the laws of nature.’ Following this — in section XI — in the form of a fictitious conversation, he sought to dismantle the undue faith held by Christians in God’s particular providence towards individuals, and in their hope for an afterlife in heaven, by rendering explicit the unsoundness of reasoning upon divine matters from suppositions. Accordingly, he wrote of how no ‘new fact can ever be inferred from the religious hypothesis; no event foreseen or foretold; no reward or punishment expected or dreaded, beyond what is already known by practice and observation.’⁵

In addition to these two texts, it is probable that Goldsmith had also read Hume’s later work, the ‘Natural History of Religion’, which first appeared in 1757 as part of a series of essays published under the title of the Four Dissertations.⁶ In this relatively lengthy exposition, which takes up nearly half of the volume, he contrasted theism with idolatry and polytheism by conducting an examination along speculative, historical lines. While he asserted in the introduction that the ‘whole frame of nature bespeaks an intelligent author’, and of how ‘no rational enquirer can, after serious reflexion, suspend his belief a moment with regard to the primary principles of genuine Theism and Religion’, he did not consider theistic sentiments to be legitimate upon self-

⁴ See Friedman’s footnote in ‘A Resverie’, in CW, I, 448, f.n. 1.
⁶ See Friedman’s footnote in ‘A Resverie’, p. 448, f.n. 1.
evident grounds, as one must recognise that the ‘belief of invisible, intelligent power has been very generally diffused over the human race, in all places and in all ages’, without being ‘so universal as to admit of no exceptions’ nor as ‘uniform in the ideas’ as has been suggested. Moreover, in the following sections, he included a candid observation concerning theism’s tendency to be intolerant towards other faiths, and of how the polytheistic belief in multiple deities was not as far-fetched as one may be inclined to believe. Also, in chapter XIV, he attacked the habit amongst votaries of ‘every religion’ of their seeking of divine favour by ‘frivolous observances, by intemperate zeal, by rapturous extasies, or by the belief of mysterious and absurd opinions.’

These reflections upon religion, propounded by Hume, were contentious, and not necessarily well-received by fellow authors and members of the reading public. Despite the assurances he included in his texts, wherein he sought to portray himself as a strong proponent of the theistic belief in the existence of a single, divine creator, and even as a defender of Christianity — in his chapter concerning miracles found in An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, he promoted his method of reasoning as being serviceable to ‘confound those dangerous friends or disguised enemies to the Christian Religion’ who would undertake to ‘defend’ the faith by the ‘principles of human reason’ — he was regarded with suspicion by sensitive individuals as a religious sceptic. Accordingly, a reviewer of the Four Dissertations, who signed himself off as ‘R’, lambasted Hume in the February 1757 edition of the Monthly Review by criticising the ‘Natural History of Religion’ as an underhanded work intended to attack the religion of the country; to ‘weaken its authority by oblique hints, and artful insinuations’, and to fill the minds of readers with ‘uncomfortable fluctuations of scepticism, and the gloom of infidelity.’ He repeated these sentiments again in concluding his assessment of this essay by lamenting how the work, while abounding with ‘shrewd reflections, and just observations, upon human nature’, mixes in a ‘considerable portion of that sceptical spirit, which is so apparent in all his works; and with some insinuations, artfully couched, against the Christian religion.’

8 Hume, Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, p. 94.
Similarly, Hume’s religious musings in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, especially his thoughts concerning miracles, met with comparable resistance. Notably, George Campbell (1719-1796), a Church of Scotland minister and college head, published in 1762 a work titled, *A Dissertation on Miracles*, based upon a sermon delivered before the synod of Aberdeen in October 1760, in which he challenged the argument advanced by Hume by employing common-sense principles to demonstrate that the positive testimony of a reliable witness is superior to the body of indirect evidence supporting the laws of nature. In the advertisement to this text, he asserted that the ‘Essay on Miracles deserves to be consider’d, as one of the most dangerous attacks that have been made’ on Christianity, and, whilst recognising how Hume’s ‘useful volumes’ on ‘history, and on criticism, politics, and trade, have justly procur’d him… the highest reputation as a writer’, he lamented that the author’s pen ‘should have been sullied by attempts to undermine the foundations both of natural religion, and of reveal’d’.10 As noted by Jeffrey M. Suderman, contemporary readers tended to sympathise with Campbell’s line of reasoning, and concluded that he had ‘decisively defeated’ Hume.11 Amongst their number was ‘R’, who, in reviewing Campbell’s *Dissertation* for the *Monthly Review* of June 1762, not only praised the work as a ‘candid, spirited, and sensible performance’, but concluded by objecting to the ‘illiberal’ manner in which Hume had treated religion, and the ‘many ungenerous sneers… in regard to Christianity and its professors’ he had included in his essay.12

To an extent, Goldsmith, in his earlier years as a writer, is identifiable as having belonged to the crowd of religious apologists who were suspicious of Hume’s enquiries into matters pertaining to religion. Such may be determined from his periodical work of 3 November 1759, ‘A Resverie’, published as a number to his journal, *The Bee*, wherein he made a probable reference to Hume as one of those fortunate authors granted a seat in the carriage of fame for his historical works only after having him reprimanded by the coachman for supposedly having attempted to overturn the tenets of Christianity:

This grave gentleman [Samuel Johnson] was scarce seat, when another, whose appearance was something more modern, seemed willing to enter yet afraid to ask. He [Hume] carried in his hand a bundle of

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essays, of which the coachman was curious enough to enquire the contents. ‘These (replied the gentleman) are rhapsodies against the religion of my country.’ ‘And how can you expect to come into my coach, after thus choosing the wrong side of the question.’ ‘Ay, but I am right (replied the other;) and if you give me leave, I shall in a few minutes state the argument.’ ‘Right or wrong (said the coachman) he who disturbs religion, is a blockhead, and he shall never travel in a coach of mine.’

Indeed, Goldsmith’s wariness towards upsetting religion was such that he included a lengthy passage in *An Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe* (1759), which explicitly condemned endeavours of the like as being detrimental to the well-being of the nation. In the chapter concerning the situation of modern literature in France, he warned his readers of how an author, ‘who with all the impotence of wit, and all the eager desires of infidelity’, writes ‘against the religion of his country’ only to potentially ‘raise doubts’, without providing ‘conviction’, which ultimately renders ‘society less happy’. This, he followed with an anecdote concerning the ‘late poet Saint Foix’, who had, in his youth, supposedly been chastised by his father for attempting to draw up a ‘new system of religion’ by being led to observe a ‘crucifix exquisitely painted’ in the latter’s apartment, wherein it was quipped by him: ‘My son… you desire to change the religion of your country, behold the fate of an innovator.’ In concluding this tale, Goldsmith noted of how the ‘change of religion in every nation, has hitherto produced barbarism and ignorance’, and of how ‘such will be probably its consequences in every future period’, as when the ‘laws, and the opinions of society, are made to clash, harmony is dissolved, and all the arts of peace unavoidably crushed in the encounter.’

Moreover, it is observable that the younger Goldsmith was worried about the influence of irreligiosity within society. In his review of William Hawkins’ works, which was published on August 1759 in the *Critical Review*, he expressed hope that the ‘divines’ would set aside frivolous theological conundrums so that they would, instead,

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14 In the ‘Memoirs of M. de Voltaire’, which was probably written sometime during the last weeks of 1758 and the early days of 1759, Goldsmith recounts along similar lines of how Voltaire was dissuaded from undertaking a comparable project by his own father. See ‘Memoirs’ in Friedman’s *CW*, III, 234.
‘rather turn their arms against the common enemy’ of ‘infidelity’ amongst the masses.\(^{16}\) Much in the same vein, in his essay, ‘Some REMARKS on the modern manner of PREACHING’, which was printed in the *Lady’s Magazine* of December 1760, he lamented how the English clergy, despite being, allegedly, the most learned and genteel in Europe, were ‘found last in the effects of their ministry; the vulgar, in general, appearing no way impressed with a sense of religious duty.’ ‘I am not for whining at the depravity of the times, or for endeavouring to paint a prospect more gloomy than in nature,’ he continued, ‘but certain it is, no person who has travelled will contradict me, when I aver, that the lower orders of mankind in other countries, testify on every occasion the profoundest awe of religion, while in England they are scarcely awakened into a sense of its duties, even in circumstances of the greatest distress.’\(^{17}\)

Notably, Goldsmith’s desire to see the preservation of religion in society was, perhaps, most forcefully expressed in his essay of 17 November 1759, titled, ‘Of Eloquence’. In this work, he boldly espoused his belief — in a language that probably would have alarmed Hume — of the need for the state to revitalise the religious spirit of the masses, as he claimed that this was the only means by which society could survive:

> Enthusiasm in religion, which prevails only among the vulgar, should be the chief object of politics. A society of enthusiasts, governed by reason among the great, is the most indissoluble, the most virtuous, and the most efficient of its own decrees that can be imagined. Every country that has any degree of strength, have had their enthusiasms, which ever serve as laws among the people. The Greeks had their *Kalokagathia*, the Romans their *Amor Patriae*, and we the truer and firmer bond of the Protestant religion. The principle is the same in all; how much then is it the duty of those whom the law has appointed teachers of this religion to enforce its obligations, and to raise those enthusiasms among the people, by which alone political society can subsist.\(^{18}\)

Nevertheless, it would be erroneous to perceive the early Goldsmith as having been a mere reactionary. As is discernible from Letter CXI of his *Citizen of the World*,

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\(^{17}\) Oliver Goldsmith, ‘Some REMARKS on the modern manner of PREACHING’, in CW, III, 150-55.

which was first published in the *Public Ledger* on 11 March 1761, he was keen to dismantle the morose religiosity of Dissenters, and instead promote the easiness of the established religion, wherein people ‘laugh when they are pleased’ and groan only when placed under ‘pain or danger’.\(^\text{19}\) Remarkably, there is a passage in this periodical essay that appears to sit awkwardly with the argument posited in his earlier work, ‘Of Eloquence’, in which he criticised the extreme seriousness of the Dissenters as being a form of unreasonable enthusiasm:

By this time you perceive that I am describing a sect of Enthusiasts, and you have already compared them with the Faquirs, Bramins, and Talapoins of the East. Among these, you know, are generations that have been never known to smile, and voluntary affliction makes up all the merit they can boast of. Enthusiasms in every country produce the same effects; stick the Faquir with pins, or confine the Bramine to a vermin hospital, spread the Talapoin on the ground, or load the Sectary’s brow with contrition; those worshippers who discard the light of reason, are ever gloomy; their fears increase in proportion to their ignorance, as men are continually under apprehensions who walk in darkness.\(^\text{20}\)

A similar attitude of wariness towards religious fanaticism and excess may also be discovered in Goldsmith’s probable work of 1764, titled the *Lives of the Fathers*, and his essay of 1759, ‘Some PARTICULARS Relating to FATHER FREIJO’.\(^\text{21}\) According to Alfred Seitz, in the former — an account of Christian saints that was compiled from a reading of the *Apostolici* (1677) and the *Ecclesiastici* (1683) by William Cave (1637-1713), a Church of England clergyman and patristic scholar — there are lines that may be attributed to Goldsmith, in which miracles — treated with some caution even by Cave — are regarded with ‘uncompromising suspicion’. An example of such is identified in the narrative concerning Dionysius the Areopagite, a

\(^{19}\) It should be mentioned here that in *She Stoops to Conquer*, Goldsmith has the character of Tony Lumpkin sing a bawdy pub song that appears to reflect this sentiment: ‘When Methodist preachers come down, /A preaching that drinking is sinful, /I’ll wager the rascals a crown, /They always preach best with a skinful. /But when you come down with your pence, /For a slice of their scurvy religion, /I’ll leave it to all men of sense, /But you my good friend are the pigeon. /Toroddle, toroddle, toroll.’ See *She Stoops to Conquer*, in CW, V, 87-217 (p. 117).


\(^{21}\) Regrettably, this study has not been able to directly refer to the *Lives of the Fathers*, due to its rarity. Also, it appears that no copies of another of Goldsmith’s early work on religion, the *Life of Christ* — advertised in 1764 as volumes II of the *Young Christian’s Library* — has survived.
first century A.D. judge in Athens, who, it was written, ‘while living… converted numbers to Christianity, so when dead his sepulchre was resorted to by superstition; and by its pretended miracles gave rise to falsehood.’

Much in the same vein, in the latter text, Goldsmith praised a ‘Padre Freijo’ for his devotion to ‘unravelling the mysteries of nature, and explaining physical experiments’; of ‘displaying the concurrence of second causes, in those very wonders which the vulgar ascribe to super-natural influence.’ The concluding anecdote included in this piece is worth conveying in full:

Passing through [‘a small town of the Kingdom of Valencia’] at the hour of mass, he [Father Freijo] alighted from his mule, and proceeded to the parish-church, which he found extremely crowded, and there appeared on the faces of the faithful a more than usual alacrity. The sun, it seems, which had been for some minutes under a cloud, had begun to shine on a large crucifix, that stood on the middle of the altar, studded with several precious stones. The reflexion from these, and from the diamond eyes of some silver saints, so dazzled the multitude, that they unanimously cried out, A miracle! A miracle! Whilst the priest at the altar, with seeming consternation, continued his heavenly conversation. Padre Freijo soon dissipated the charm, by tying his handkerchief round the head of one of the statues, for which he was arraigned by the inquisition; whose flames, however, he has had the good fortune hitherto to escape.

Accordingly, it is observable that Goldsmith, in his nascent years as a professional writer, was conservatively inclined and harboured feelings of deep devotion that was combined by a sense of grounded realism and caution. Upon this matter, one cannot help but recall two intriguing anecdotes conveyed by John Evans; both of which pertain to Goldsmith’s time as a temporary headmaster at the Presbyterian school of John Milner in 1757. According to one, Goldsmith, upon hearing that one of Milner’s daughter had died while he was away at Peckham, had exclaimed with ‘solemn emphasis’ — ‘She is now with God!’ Allegedly, said in such a manner that it ‘struck the family with a deep impression of his piety.’ Yet, in another occasion, he reportedly advised Hester Milner, when asked what commentary on the

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Bible he would particularly recommend, to follow ‘Common Sense’ as the ‘best interpreter of the SACRED WRITINGS!’

Following the publication of *The Traveller*, Goldsmith’s earlier streak of religious conservatism and commitment remained intact and even began to deepen. As recognised by Ralph Wardle, in the *Roman History*, Goldsmith conventionally referred to Jesus Christ as ‘our Saviour, Christ’ and called Christianity, ‘our holy religion’. Also, in concluding the reign of Tiberius, Goldsmith made a subtle alteration to Laurence Echard’s narrative, which he had relied upon in constructing this segment, to personally express his sense of condemnatory disgust towards the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, of whom he did not shy away from portraying as the incarnation of the God the Son: ‘Little more need be said of these times, but that, in the eighteenth year of this monarch’s reign, Christ was crucified; as if the universal depravity of mankind, wanted no less a sacrifice than that of God himself, to reclaim them.’ Moreover, a line in a passage describing the demise of the Emperor Alexander (207-235 A.D) reveals that, contrary to Hume, Goldsmith had no issue with the belief in an equitable afterlife: ‘He [Alexander] died in the twenty-ninth year of his age, after a prosperous reign of thirteen years and nine days; his death proving, that no virtue or justice can guard us against the misfortunes of life; and that good men are to expect their reward in a place of more equitable distribution.’

And in the preface of the *History of England*, Goldsmith included a relatively lengthy critique of Hume’s position on religion, after noting that he had relied upon this author’s volumes on English history, along with those by ‘Rapin, Carte, [and] Smollett’, in which he voiced, with greater confidence and refinement, a sentiment comparable to that he had asserted in the ‘Resverie’ through the character of the coachman:

But though I must warmly subscribe to the learning, elegance, and depth of Mr. Hume’s history, yet I cannot entirely acquiesce in his principles. With regard to religion, he seems desirous of playing a double part, of appearing to some readers as if he reverenced, and to others as if he ridiculed it. He seems sensible of the political necessity of religion in every state; but at the same time he would every where insinuate, that it

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owes its authority to no higher an origin. Thus he weakens its influence, while he contends for its utility, and vainly hopes that while free-thinkers shall applaud his scepticism, real believers will reverence him for his zeal.\(^28\)

Additionally, in the larger body of the *History of England*, as noted by Kennelly, it is evident that Goldsmith, in compiling passages from Hume’s English history, ‘consistently’ chose to ‘delete’ criticisms against religion found in it. As an instance of such, she pointed out how there is a telling absence in the former’s narrative concerning the persecution of Protestants that took place under the reign of Mary I, backed by the theological justifications offered by Stephen Gardiner (1483-1555), of a sweeping remark made by the latter regarding the effect of religious excitement.\(^29\) While Hume had referred to the bloody restoration of Catholicism by commenting that ‘no human depravity can equal revenge and cruelty covered with the mantle of religion’, Goldsmith chose to refrain from making a like reflection, despite, otherwise, having closely followed this author’s narrative in providing a detailed account of the ‘martyrdom of Hooper, bishop of Gloucester, and Rogers, prebendary of St. Paul’s.’\(^30\) Instead, in the place where this statement could have been fitted, Goldsmith restricted himself to elaborating upon the baseness of the queen’s primary henchmen. Accordingly, he described Gardiner as a conniving and hypocritical bishop, who, whilst supportive of the plan to punish recalcitrant individuals with the ‘utmost rigour’, was ‘too prudent’ to appear at the head of such punitive acts, and therefore delegated this office to ‘Bonner, bishop of London’; a ‘cruel, brutal, and ignorant man.’\(^31\)

Other than acts of wilful ‘exorcizing’, one may also recognise how Goldsmith inserted in the *History of England* an extended, personal reflection that is reflective of his conviction of the need for a robust spirit of religiosity to be nurtured in society. In describing the tumultuous debates regarding religion that took place during the nascent years of George I’s reign, Goldsmith deviated from Tobias Smollett’s narrative to include an expanded version of an assessment that he had made earlier, in the *Letters from a Nobleman*, wherein he criticised the government’s attempt to stifle such

discourse as being harmful to the establishment and improvement of religious life. ‘Nothing can be more impolitic in a state,’ he wrote, ‘than to hinder the clergy from disputing with each other; they thus become more animated in the cause of religion, and which side soever they defend, they become wiser and better as they carry on the dispute.’ ‘To silence argument in the clergy,’ he continued, ‘is to encourage them in sloth and neglect; if religion be not kept awake by opposition, it sinks into silence, and no longer continues, an object of public concern.’ Undoubtedly, he was concerned to maintain the relevance of faith in society, as he was convinced it could, ‘in some measure put a stop’ to the evils of fraud and prodigality introduced by commerce and wealth.32

Finally, in his posthumously published Grecian History, one may detect a deep strain of Christian devotion in his narrative describing the trial and execution of Socrates, held in 399 B.C. Whilst he freely inserted his own reflections upon the laudable acts of this philosopher, whom he held in high esteem, he reverted to faithfully transcribing a line found in Temple Stanyan’s work, in which it was argued that Socrates was likely an early monotheist, as he had attained ‘the notion of one only true God’, and thereby deserved a place amongst the ‘Christian philosophers.’ Moreover, in a later passage, he had Socrates espouse a sense of profound respect for this God:

Socrates passed the rest of the day with his friends, and discoursed with them with his usual cheerfulness and tranquillity. The subject of conversation was the most important, but adapted to the present conjuncture; that is to say, the immortality of the soul. What gave occasion to this discourse was, a question introduced in a manner by chance, Whether a true philosopher ought not to desire, and take pains to die? This proposition taken too literally, implied an opinion, that a philosopher might kill himself. Socrates shews that nothing is more unjust than this notion; and, that man appertaining to God, who formed and placed him with his own hand in the post he possesses, cannot abandon it without his permission, nor depart from life without his order.33

Importantly, it is evident that, when considering the narrative of Socrates’ death found in the *Grecian History*, Goldsmith was becoming more of a narrow-minded religious thinker in the latter part of his life. While in the *Roman History* and the *History of England*, he included lines that are suggestive of a forgiving attitude towards paganism — in the preface of the former he reflected that it would be unfair to judge pagan leaders by Christian standards, and in the latter, he wrote of how the practice of ‘idolatrous worship’ by the Saxons was merely a form of ‘innocent’ relaxation — the passage regarding the eminent Greek philosopher’s trial conveys a contrary attitude. By closely following Stanyan’s text, he informed his readers of how Socrates, whilst not daring to ‘openly oppose the received religion’, likely ‘despised and laughed’ at the ‘monstrous opinions and ridiculous mysteries’ of the Romans, as ‘having no other foundation than the fables of the poets’. Perhaps, one may further bolster the notion that the later Goldsmith was increasingly rigid in his conservative outlook by referring to an anecdote conveyed by James Boswell. According to him, as he reported to Johnson on 9 April 1773, Goldsmith had remarked to him a ‘few days before’ of how as he would take his ‘shoes from the shoemaker’ and his coat from ‘the taylor’, as he would take his ‘religion from the priest’.

However, despite his continuing, and even increasingly restrictive and unyielding sense of religiosity — undoubtedly, the latter Goldsmith would have felt a greater sense of aversion at revisiting Hume’s assertion, made in the ‘Natural History of Religion’, that the legitimacy of theism was not self-evident — Goldsmith’s histories reveal that he was at no point, in the latter half of his writerly career, a reactionary devoid of tact and reason. In the *Roman History*, there are at least two instances wherein Goldsmith displayed his ability to distance himself from the sentiments of Christian fervour that Echard was prone to. Firstly, in describing the measures taken by Constantine I (272-337 A.D.) in establishing the power of Christianity within his realm, after his successful campaign against Licinius I (314-324 A.D.), he deviated from Echard’s narrative, which lauded these resolutions, to include a critical remark against that emperor’s command that ‘in all the provinces of the empire the orders of the bishops should be exactly obeyed’, by noting how this privilege, ‘in succeeding times’ had been put to ‘very indifferent use’ by ‘these fathers’. Secondly, in summarising the

reign of Julian, who ruled from 361 to 363 A.D., he largely ignored the lengthy exposition Echard provided concerning this emperor’s reversion to paganism and hostility towards the Christian faith.\textsuperscript{37} Instead, he merely included a favourably benign assessment of this ruler:

Julian, his [Constantius II] successor, surnamed the Apostate, upon account of his relapsing into paganism, was, notwithstanding, a very good and a very valiant prince. He, by his wisdom, conduct and oeconomy, chased the barbarians, that had taken fifty towns upon the Rhine, out of their new settlements; and his name was a terror to them during his reign, which lasted but two years.\textsuperscript{38}

In the *History of England*, Goldsmith’s mild sensibility may be inferred, in part, from a faithful transcription he made from Hume’s work — despite his removal of a number of other, problematical lines — that suggests that he was not willing to accept extreme forms of Christian devotion or piety to be good. Accordingly, in his description of the lively sense of religiosity that existed during the eighth century, following the successful union of the Heptarchy, he closely followed Hume’s narrative to convey how the immoderate reverence with which the clergy and the monkish lifestyle were upheld was detrimental to the politico-social life of man — a seeming insinuation hinting of how one’s earthly duties should never be considered secondary to his spiritual needs:

Indeed, the reverence for the clergy was carried so high, that if a person appeared in a sacerdotal habit on the highway, the people flocked round him, and with all the marks of profound respect, received every word he uttered as an oracle. From this blind attachment, the social and even military virtues began to decline among them… Monastic observances were esteemed more meritorious than active virtues; and bounty to the church atoned for all the violences done to society. The nobility, whose duty it was to preserve the military spirit from declining, began to prefer the sloth and security of a cloister, to the tumult and glory of war; and these rewards, which should have gone to encourage the soldier, were

\textsuperscript{37} Laurence Echard, *The Roman History: from the Removal of the Imperial Seat by Constantine the Great, to the Total Failure of the Western Empire in AUGUSTULUS*, 5\textsuperscript{th} edn. (London: R. Bonwick, 1720), pp. 69-71.

\textsuperscript{38} Goldsmith, *Roman History*, II, 486, 494.
lavished in maintaining the credulous indolence of monastic superstition.\(^{39}\)

Perhaps, it would be appropriate at this juncture to mention another similarity that Goldsmith shared with Hume, evidencing both men’s sense of being grounded in the natural world: that of their profound respect for the philosophical and scientific achievements of Francis Bacon (1561-1626).\(^ {40}\) In his essay on miracles, Hume gave a nod of assent to this thinker by including a relatively lengthy quote of his, by the means of which he bolstered his own argument for the need to embrace the ‘principles of reasoning’; to consider every relation as ‘suspicious, which depends in any degree upon religion, as the prodigies of LIVY’.\(^ {41}\) While Goldsmith, in the *History of England*, did not engage in a comparable, detailed exposition upon the expressions of Bacon, he did, nevertheless, signal his appreciation for him by re-including a personal line that he had inserted in the *Letters from a Nobleman*, wherein he lavished praise upon him as the foremost important figure in the sphere of philosophical thought who existed during the period of Elizabeth’s reign: ‘Spenser and Shakespeare are too well known, as poets, to be praised here; but of all mankind, Francis Bacon, lord Verulam, who flourished in this reign, deserves, as a philosopher, the highest applause; his style is copious and correct, and his wit is only surpassed by his learning and penetration.’\(^ {42}\)

Returning to our original strain of thought, another instance of Goldsmith’s sense of wariness towards excessive religiosity, as found in the *History of England*, may be observed in his narrative concerning the immediate aftermath of Thomas Becket’s murder in 1170, which was unwittingly instigated by Henry II. In this segment, he expanded upon Smollett’s narrative, to which he had referred, by reinserting a personally-devised line that he had used in the *Letters from a Nobleman*, to ridicule the masses for their credulous faith in miracles. The Humean resonance is, indeed, palpable in this passage:

The circumstances of the murder… made a most surprising impression on the people. No sooner was his death known, than they rushed into the


\(^{40}\) To capture a glimpse of Bacon’s accomplishments in the study of the natural world, and to enhance one’s understanding of Goldsmith’s sense respect for this philosopher, see the latter’s posthumously published work, the *Survey of Experimental Philosophy, Considered in its Present State of Improvement* (London: T. Carman & F. Newbery, 1776), 2 vols.


church to see the body; and dipped their hands in his blood, crossed
themselves with it, as with that of a saint. The clergy, whose interest it
was to have Becket considered as a saint… did all that lay in their power
to magnify his sanctity, to extol the merits of his martyrdom, and to hold
him out as the fittest object of the veneration of the people. Their
endeavours soon prevailed. Innumerable were the miracles said to be
wrought at his tomb; for when the people are brought to see a miracle,
they generally find or make one. It was not sufficient that his shrine had
the power of restoring dead men to life; it restored also cows, dogs, and
horses. It was reported, and believed, that he rose from his coffin before
he was buried, to light the tapers designed for his funeral: nor was he
remiss, when the funeral ceremony was over, in stretching forth his
hands to give benediction to the people.43

Much in the same vein, in narrating the rise and fall of Joan of Arc (1412-1431),
during the Lancastrian phase of the Hundred Years’ War (1337-1453), Goldsmith did
not fail to include lines of scepticism in the *History of England* that criticised the
superstitious sentiments that were prevalent during that period. As such, in introducing
the character of Joan, he extrapolated from Hume’s text a passage that referred to her
impulse towards rallying against the English as having involved a willingness, on her
part, to mistake her zeal ‘for the inspirations of heaven’.44 Later, whilst recounting her
capture at Compiègne by the Burgundian faction, he lambasted the ‘credulity’ of the
English and French, in their consideration of her as a saint in her moments of success,
and, upon her captivity, as a ‘sorceress, forsaken by the daemon who had granted her a
fallacious and temporary assistance’, by quipping how ‘nothing was too absurd to gain
belief, that coincided with their passions.’ Moreover, he warned his readers against the
pernicious influence of misguided faith by attacking the cruelty of the ‘infamous
sentence’ that she was made to suffer on 30 May 1431, when she was burned at the
stake: ‘Superstition adds virulence to the natural cruelty of mankind; and this cruel
sentence served only to enflame the hatred between the contending powers, without
mending the cause of the invaders.’45

Lastly, in the *Grecian History*, regardless of his increasingly narrow sense of religious commitment, it is noticeable how Goldsmith was still able to appreciate, in at least one instance, the display of meritorious fidelity a pagan showed for his gods, and recognised the danger of a misguided, pious passion in another. Concerning the former point, he had, in describing Diomedon’s trial, following the Battle of Arginusae, which took place in 406 B.C. during the Peloponnesian War, wherein this general was accused, along with several other commanders, for having abandoned shipwrecked sailors, closely followed Charles Rollin’s account to convey a sympathetic portrayal of him as a man who was ‘full of goodness and religion’, even at death’s door, concerned only to repay what was owed to the gods for the recent victory over the Spartans. With regards to the latter, in describing the progress of the Third Sacred War (356-346), Goldsmith deviated from Stanyan’s narrative to include a personal appeal against wars instigated and driven by a mistaken sense of devotion: ‘Every one knows how much religious wars are to be dreaded, and the prodigious lengths which a false zeal, when veiled with so venerable a name, is apt to go.’

Thus, it is observable that Goldsmith, throughout his career as an author, was neither an innovator upon religious matters, nor an unduly staunch conservative. Despite being growingly earnest in his belief that religion was the necessary glue to society, he was level-headed enough to realise that attacking those filled with ‘goodness and religion’, irrespective of their belief system, and not putting a break to enthusiasm would compromise this very cohesiveness. Overall, there is a combined and jostling tone of grounded realism and open-mindedness, and fidelity in these works that reveals Goldsmith to have been a realistic author who sought to position himself in-between the sceptical rigour Hume’s mind and the excitement of his reactionary critics. Indeed, despite the growing chasm between himself those on the ‘wrong side of the question’, he never relinquished his sense of reason, as may be recognised from a conversation that took place between him and Johnson on 7 May 1773, wherein he had rendered explicit his wariness towards the thought of becoming a martyr:

GOLDSMITH. ‘I would consider whether there is the greater chance of good or evil upon the whole. If I see a man who has fallen into a well, I would wish to help him out; but if there is a greater probability that he

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shall pull me in, than that I shall pull him out, I would not attempt it. So were I to go to Turkey, I might wish to convert the Grand Signor to the Christian faith; but when I considered that I should probably be put to death without effectuating my purpose in any degree, I should keep myself quiet.'

The issue of Catholicism

Hitherto, the discussion of Goldsmith’s approach to religion has been conducted from a broad perspective. It is now necessary to turn our attention towards the particular issue of what his stance towards Catholicism may have been — the elephant in the room, so to speak, that has been lingering since reference being made of his posture against the clergy and superstition.48

Throughout his life, it is likely that Goldsmith was acutely aware of the anti-Catholic prejudices that were still prevalent in the eighteenth-century Ireland and Britain. As has been already touched upon in the last chapter, Irish society, during this period, was still deeply divided upon sectarian lines. While one must not exaggerate the extent to which the disenfranchised majority of Catholics were being oppressed by the ruling, Protestant minority — the penal laws, by the 1750’s, despite remaining on paper, were not necessarily enforced systematically — there continued to linger, never far from the surface, a sense of anxiety and scorn against the former by the latter; a fact that has been somewhat diluted by A. Lytton Sells, who, in his biographical work on Goldsmith, lay greater emphasis on the improvement of Catholic and Protestant relationships.49 Indeed, it is remarkable how many learned, Protestant Irishmen, who were interested in re-examining Ireland’s archaeological, geographical and historical riches could not wholly divest themselves from such sentiments. The members of the Physico-Historical Society stand as a case in point. As noted by Eoin Magennis, it was not uncommon for them to identify Catholicism with criminal savagery and as a barrier

48 As noted by Colin Haydon, one of the ways in which anti-Catholic sentiments manifested itself during this period was in the form of an aversion towards ‘priestcraft’ and ‘false’ miracles. See his *Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth-Century England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 4-6.
49 Sells, *Oliver Goldsmith*, pp. 21-23.
Moreover, it is notable how in the first survey that was published by this society in 1744, a relatively lengthy exposition on the 1641 rebellion was included in the preface, in which the event was reaffirmed as having been a concerted effort by the Catholics ‘to extirpate the English, their Manners and Religion out of the Kingdom’, and the plan to publish the dispositions that convey ‘the most flagrant and monstrous Instances of Cruelties at that time committed’ applauded.51

Significantly, even Protestant, Irish intellectuals who were sympathetic and amicable towards the Catholics, found it difficult to wholly distance themselves from the prevalent, anti-Catholic rhetoric. Such was the case with Thomas Leland, a librarian at Trinity College, Dublin, and an acquaintance of O’Conor, who invited the latter to consult the library’s holdings of Gaelic manuscripts in 1766. While his History of Ireland from the Invasion of Henry II (1773) demonstrates that he was willing, unlike Ledwich, to cautiously accept the Catholic thesis of a Milesian ancestry and the existence of a learned, pre-Christian civilisation in Ireland, he, nevertheless, in recounting the 1641 rebellion, reverted to illustrating the event in a vivid and condemnatory tone that played upon the stereotype of the Catholic Irish as being barbaric bigots.52 As noted by Michael Brown, the ‘pornography of violence’ that Leland indulged in served to antagonise and alienate his Catholic readers, including O’Conor, who declared that Leland had resigned ‘his literary merit and all credit with impartial men, in favour of present advantage either within his grasp or within his expectation’. Indeed, it was a ‘contentious lapse in the objective stance’ that Leland had claimed for himself in the prefatory address to the work.53

Although somewhat removed from the immediacy of the Protestant Irish worry for their lands and of another, potential murderous rampage, akin to what had happened in 1641, in eighteenth-century Britain, hostility against the Catholics was also very much alive. For the period of Goldsmith’s stay in London, from 1756 till his death in 1774, such sentiments were, perhaps, most evident during the Seven Years’ War, when much was made of the danger Protestantism faced with the newly formed alliance of

France with Austria. A flavour of this anxiety is found in an address of 1756 by George Whitefield (1714-1770), a Calvinistic Methodist leader, who railed against England’s enemies by infusing his rhetoric with anti-Catholic flair:

And think you, my dear Countrymen, that Rome, glutted as it were with Protestant Blood, will now rest satisfied, and say, “I have enough?” — No, on the contrary, having, through the good Hand of God upon us, been kept so long fasting, we may reasonably suppose, that the popish Priests are only grown more voracious, and (like so many hungry and ravenous Wolves pursuing the harmless and innocent Flocks of Sheep) with double Eagerness will pursue after, seize upon, and devour their wish’d-for Protestant Prey; and, attended with their bloody Red-coats, those Gallic Instruments of Reformation, who know they must either fight or die, will necessarily breath out nothing but Threatening and Slaughter, and carry along with them Desolation and Destruction in all its various Shapes and Tortures, go where they will.

Of course, suspicion and opposition towards the Catholics did not cease with the settlement of the Seven Years’ War. Such may be discerned from a piece that was written by Edmund Burke in 1780, which reflected upon the approaching executions to be committed upon the persons who had been participants of the recent Gordon Riots (1780), which began as an anti-Catholic protest in London against the Papists Act of 1778. In this short text, not only did he recommend the sentence of death for only a select few, who had acted under the ‘false or pretended principle of religion’, but also critically reflected upon how the larger populace had been, hitherto, guilty of intolerance:

But the reason which ought to make these people objects of selection for punishment, confined the selection to very few. For we must consider, that the whole Nation has been for a long time guilty of their Crime. Toleration is a new virtue in any Country. It is a late ripe fruit in the best

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54 Notably, prior to Goldsmith’s arrival to London, during the electoral campaign of 1754 in Bristol, Robert Nugent, the later patron of Goldsmith, who was an Irish politician and a recent convert to Anglicanism, was attacked by his political opponents along anti-Catholic lines. See the 9-11 April 1754 number of the London Evening Post.

Climates. We ought to recollect the poison, which under the Name of antidotes against Popery, and such like Mountebank Titles, has been circulated from our Pulpits, and from our presses, from the heads of the Church of England, and the heads of Dissenters. By degrees these publications have driven all religion from our own Minds, and filled them with nothing but a violence hatred of the religion of other people, and of course with a hatred of their persons, and so, by a very natural progression, has led them to the destruction of their Goods and houses and attempts upon their Lives.56

Not unlike the situation in Ireland, however — as has been suggested by Burke’s position of critical self-reflection — the attitude towards Catholics was not wholly dictated by ill feelings. Amongst the growing writing and reading public, despite the continuing effects of prejudice against Catholicism, there was a tendency to shift towards a more tolerant attitude, in part made possible by the weakening link between Jacobitism and popery. Such is, perhaps, most recognisable in the range of articles that were printed in fashionable magazines and periodicals in the 1760s and 1770s. In particular, the outputs of the Monthly Review, which had contacts with the rabid anti-Catholics led by Thomas Hollis (1720-1774), stand as a salient case in point.57 While this publication released numerous pieces in the years 1765-1767, in which alarm for the ‘growth of Popery’ and dislike for its doctrines were expressed, in the latter editions there is a remarkable inclusion of writings that convey a more sympathetic tone of tolerance. Accordingly, in the July 1774 edition, a favourable review of the anonymous text, Thoughts on the Quebec Act, appeared, wherein ‘N’, conveyed his assent to the justness of the recently passed Quebec Act of 1774; an act that included in its principle components the guarantee for Catholics to freely practice their faith.58 Also, a year following Goldsmith’s death the same reviewer again wrote into the Monthly Review.

wherein he agreed with the author of *An Inquiry into the Policy of the Penal Laws* in the need for lenity to be shown towards the Irish Catholics.59

Nevertheless, in conjunction with the gradual easing of sectarian tensions, the difficulty of wholeheartedly divorcing oneself from anti-Catholic sentiments and rhetoric remained. Such may be observed in the *Thoughts on the Quebec Act*, wherein its author, whilst defending the newly instated rights of Catholics to practice their religion in Quebec, included a relatively lengthy line that assured his readers that the ‘errors of the church of Rome hourly lose ground’ and that the ‘craft of priests and designing men’ were beginning ‘to be seen through by the people’, as they exercised ‘their own right of understanding’; that the ‘superstition that had so mingled with their doctrine’ was ‘almost banished’.60 Even Hume, who was an ardent supporter of the notion of religious toleration, let slip remarks, seemingly tainted with prejudicial sentiments against Catholicism, an example of which may be found in a section of his *History of England* that deals with the Popish Plot (1678-1681).61 Whilst having critically reflected upon the hysteria that was whipped up by the discovery of Edward Coleman’s letters, he also remarked upon the continuing danger the world faced from Catholic conspiracies:

> When the contents of these letters were publickly known, they diffused the panic, with which the nation began already to be seized on account of the popish plot. Men reasoned more from their fears and their passions than from the evidence before them. It is certain, that the active and enterprising spirit of the catholic church, particularly of the Jesuits, merits attention, and is, in some degree, dangerous to every other communion. Such zeal of proselytism actuates that sect, that its missionaries have penetrated into every nation of the globe; and in one sense, there is a *popish plot* perpetually carried on against all states, Protestant, Pagan, and Mahometan.62

Accordingly, Goldsmith, during his early years in Ireland, and as a professional writer in England, was immersed in environments that were still coloured by anti-Catholic attitudes, despite the growing tendency towards sectarian amicability and tolerance.⁶³ Intriguingly, when his non-historical writings are examined, one only finds a few instances of reflections upon the matter at hand; and those belong to texts of his earlier years as an anonymous ‘hack’. From this hodgepodge of journalistic remarks, it appears that the early Goldsmith tended towards the likes of Hume and Leland — who had a perplexingly mixed attitude towards the issue of Catholicism — rather than those who were simply anti-Catholic. On the one hand, it is possible to detect a general inclination towards perceiving the Catholic faith with an eye of contempt and superiority. In the preface of his early translation work, *The Memoirs of a Protestant* (1758), he not only detailed the cruelties that the Protestants in France were forced to suffer after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1598), but he also expressed his wish that his readers may ‘value… [their] Religion’ by contrasting it with the ‘furious Spirit of Popery’.⁶⁴ Also, in ‘A Description of the Manners and Customs of the Native Irish’ (1759), he inserted a somewhat demeaning, albeit humorous, report of the bawdiness of Irish, idolatrous festivity:

Their patrons also I have seen in no other Popish country in Europe; this is a term perhaps you do not understand, almost every fountain in this country is under the patronage of some saint, where the people once a year meet to shew their strength and best cloaths, drink muddy ale, dance with their mistresses, get drunk, and beat each other with cudgels most unmercifully, these religious meetings are never known to pass without blood shed and battery, and their priests often put themselves at the head of the opposite parties, and gain more renown by cudgel-playing than by piety.⁶⁵

It is worthwhile to note that the condescending manner in which Goldsmith portrayed the jovial display of saintly devotion by the Irish Catholics in ‘A Description of the Manners and Customs of the Native Irish’ has a similar resonance with another of his early writings. In Letter LXXVIII of *The Citizen of the World*, which was first

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⁶³ It is relevant to recall here that not only was Goldsmith an Anglican but had also considered a career in the Church — however fleetingly — following his graduation from Trinity College, Dublin in 1750.


⁶⁵ Goldsmith, ‘A Description of the Manners and Customs of the Native Irish’, p. 29.
published on 26 September 1760 in the *Public Ledger*, he included a relatively lengthy passage that described, in a ridiculing fashion, the absurdity of the French veneration for the Virgin Mary:

> Even religion itself loses its solemnity among them [the French]. Upon their roads at about every five miles distance, you see an image of the Virgin Mary dressed up in grim head-cloaths, painted cheeks, and an old red petticoat; before her a lamp is often seen burning, at which, with the saint’s permission, I have frequently lighted my pipe. Instead of the Virgin you are sometimes presented with a crucifix, at other times with a wooden Saviour, fitted out in complete garniture, with a sponge, spear, nails, pincers, hammer, bees-wax, and vinegar-bottle. Some of these images, I have been told, came down from heaven; if so, in heaven they have but bungling workmen.66

Yet, on the other hand, it is perceivable that the early Goldsmith was not necessarily averse towards the Catholics and their religion. While he may have mocked the native Irish and the French for their vulgar display of raucous and incredulous religiosity in ‘A Description of the Manners and Customs of the Native Irish’ and in *The Citizen of the World*, he, nevertheless, treated the character of the Jacobite host — from whom his English traveller received the most gracious hospitality — sympathetically and respectfully.67 Also, in ‘A sublime Passage in a French Sermon’, which was published in the *Weekly Magazine* on 12 January 1760, he wrote approvingly and enviously of how the French clergy were able to engage their congregation by a display of impressive oratorical skill founded upon earnestness; a far cry, he lamented, from the timid and lacklustre exhortations by the English priests, who were ‘afraid of the imputation of enthusiasm, and studious of being only thought fine gentlemen’.68 Furthermore, in the piece, ‘On Public Rejoicings for Victory’ (1759), he scornfully reflected upon the anti-Catholic anxiety that had been whipped up during the Seven Year's War by having the ridiculous figure of an indigent tradesman, who was quarrelling with his wife in public, espouse such sentiments:

The husband, who was, it seems, a journeyman shoemaker, damned her [his wife] for being a Jacobite in her heart; that she had not a spice of loyalty in her whole body; that she was as fond of getting drunk one day as another: If the French had got the better, continues he, what would become of our property? If Monsieurs in wooden shoes come among us, what would become of the gentle craft, what would become of the nation, when perhaps Madam Pompadour herself might have shoes scooped out of an old pear-tree; and (raising his voice) you ungrateful slut, tell me, if the French papishes had come over, d---n my blood what would become of our religion? 69

As such, it is observable that the younger Goldsmith, who had laboured as a translator and essayist, wavered somewhere in no man’s land, neither aligning himself to the camp of staunch Protestant partisans, nor that of the Catholic apologists. Notably, this seemingly noncommittal outlook is replicated in his anonymous English history of 1764. Whilst he declaimed against Catholicism — in the chapter concerning the reign of James II — as a religion that ‘almost ever’ contracts ‘the sphere of… understanding’ to render it ‘impossible’ for its adherents to ‘lay a just claim to extensive views, or consistency of design’, he, nevertheless, had the coolness of mind to follow Smollett in criticising the anti-Catholic fervour that had been instigated by Titus Oates (1649-1705): ‘Several Jesuits were tried’, he lamented, ‘their very profession was at that time sufficient to destroy them… no mercy could be expected, and several, though apparently innocent, were executed as traytors upon this miscreant’s [Oates] information.’ 70 In what remains of this section, an attempt will be made to determine if Goldsmith’s approach towards the Catholic faith changed in the latter half of his writerly career. By comparing the History of England with the Letters from a Nobleman, it will be revealed that he had followed with greater care the writings of his external sources to include, in a select number of passages and segments of the former, new lines condemnatory of Catholicism, which indicates that he was increasingly affected by the typical, sectarian manner of thinking. However, it will be cautioned that he had not become a Protestant zealot. Instead, it will be pointed out that he remained faithful to the ideals of religious toleration and amicability.

70 Goldsmith, Letters from a Nobleman, II, 63-64, 69-70.
That Goldsmith had ‘fleshed out’ certain passages and segments in the *History of England* by closely following his external sources to produce narratives containing lines hostile towards Catholicism that were previously unincluded, is detectable in at least four instances. An example of such is found in his description of John Lackland’s submission to Pope Innocent III (1160/61-1216) in 1213. While in the *Letters from a Nobleman* he had merely written of how this instance of deference had rendered the king ‘contemptible in the eyes of… [the] people’, in his later account, he made fuller use of Hume’s text to lay greater emphasis on the notion that Rome was a meddling influence in the political life of Britain, by quipping how John had surrendered the ‘independence of his kingdom to a foreign power’, and by inserting an anecdote concerning the fate of a ‘Peter of Pomfret’, who had allegedly foreseen the actuation of this event:

John was now once more, by the most abject submissions, reinstated in power; but his late humiliations did not in the least serve to relax his cruelty or insolence. One Peter of Pomfret, an hermit, had foretold, that the king this very year should lose his crown; and for that rash prophecy he had been thrown into Corse castle: John now determined to punish him as an impostor, and had him arraigned for that purpose. The poor hermit, who was probably some wretched enthusiast, asserted the truth of his prediction, alledging, that the king had given up his crown to the pope, from whom he again received it. This argument would have prevailed with any person less cruel than John.71

Also, in conveying Mary I’s phantom pregnancy, he deviated from his earlier, pithy remark, wherein he had merely written of how the queen was ‘delivered of a false conception’, to insert a relatively lengthy passage — derived from his reading of Hume’s English history — that was more in tune with the popular notion that the Catholics were a superstitious and credulous people. Accordingly, he described the incident by mocking the excitement that it caused amongst her fellow, religious adherents:

From Philip’s first arrival in England the queen’s pregnancy was talked of; and her own extreme desire that it should be true, induced her to

favour the report. When Pole, the pope’s legate, was first introduced to her, she fancied the child stirred in her womb; and this her flatterers compared to the leaping of John the Baptist in his mother’s belly, at the salutation of the Virgin. The catholics were confident that she was pregnant; they were confident that this child should be a son; they were even confident that heaven would render him beautiful, vigorous, and witty. But it soon turned out that all their confidence was ill founded; for the queen’s supposed pregnancy was only the beginning of a dropsy, which the disordered state of her health had brought upon her.⁷²

Furthermore, it is observable that in composing the History of England, Goldsmith committed a greater number of lines, procured from his study of Smollett’s text, which played upon the continuing Protestant fear of Catholic conspiracies. Such may be discerned from his account of the multiple threats of assassination that Elizabeth I had faced during her reign from the disgruntled camp of Catholics. Whereas, in the Letters from a Nobleman, he had not bothered to elucidate upon this matter, in his later work, he faithfully transplanted a summarised version of the plots hatched up by William Parry (d. 1585) and John Ballard (d. 1586). Notably, he even abided by his source to remind his readers that the conspirators were all of the Catholic faith, and to justify the harshness with which the members of this religion were treated as a result:

These attempts, which were entirely set on foot by the catholic party, served to encrease the severity of the laws against them. Popish priests were banished the kingdom; those who harboured or relieved them were declared guilty of felony; and many were executed in consequence of these severe edict. Nor was the queen of Scots herself without some share of the punishment. She was removed from under the care of the early of Shrewsbury, who had always been indulgent to his prisoner, particularly with regard to air and exercise; and she was committed to the custody of Sir Amias Paulett, and Sir Drue Drury, men of honour, but inflexible and rigid in their care and attention.⁷³

Lastly, in Goldsmith’s later account of James II’s last stand in Ireland, he followed with greater fidelity the work of Smollett to present, in stronger terms, the Irish Catholics as a barbaric group. Whereas, in the *Letters from a Nobleman*, he had conveyed the ill treatment that the Protestants in Ireland were subjected to in a single line, in the *History of England* he produced an entire paragraph dedicated to detailing the acts of cruelty and unjustness that they were forced to endure before the arrival of William III’s forces:

The Inniskilliners were no less remarkable than the former for the valour and perseverance with which they espoused the interests of William. And indeed the bigotry and cruelty of the papists upon that occasion were sufficient to excite the tamest into opposition. The protestants, by an act of the popish parliament, under king James, were divested of those lands which they had been possessed of since the Irish rebellion. Three thousand of that persuasion, who had sought safety by flight, were found guilty of treason, and attained. Soldiers were permitted to live upon free quarter; the people were plundered, the shops of tradesmen, and the kitchens of the citizens, were pillaged, to supply a quantity of brass, which was converted into coin, and passed, by royal mandate, for above forty times its real value. Not content with this, he imposed, by his own authority, a tax of twenty thousand pounds a month on personal property, and levied it by a commission under the great seal; all vacancies in public schools were supplied by popish teachers. The pension allowed from the exchequer to the University of Dublin was cut off, and that institution converted into a popish seminary. Brigadier Sarsfield commanded all protestants of a certain district to retire to the distance of ten miles from their habitations on pain of death; many perished with hunger, still more from being forced from their homes, during the severest inclemencies of the season.74

Importantly, the later Goldsmith’s stronger inclination to observe the writings of Smollett and Hume to include lines critical of popery and the Catholics reflects his increasingly conventional, sectarian outlook. Indeed, it is unlikely that he was merely

attempting to fulfil his duty as a compiler with greater rigor, but was personally more in sync with the Protestant worldview. That this was so may be gathered from his portrayal of John Wycliffe (d. 1384) — a predecessor to Protestantism — in the *History of England*. Not only did he provide a detailed explanation of this dissenting figure’s theological ideas in this work, which he had not bothered to do in the *Letters from a Nobleman*, but he also excised Hume’s reference to him as a man who had been ‘tinctured with enthusiasm’ to provide a more straightforward, commendable account of his struggle against the Roman Catholic Church:

It was during this reign [Edward II], that John Wickliff [sic], a secular priest, educated at Oxford, began to propagate his doctrines; and he has the honour of being the first person who had the sagacity to see through the errors of the church of Rome, and courage enough to attempt a reformation. He denied the doctrine of real presence, the supremacy of the church of Rome, and the merit of monastic vows. He maintained that the scriptures were the sole rule of faith; that the church was dependant on the state; that the clergy ought to possess no estates; and that the numerous ceremonies of the church were hurtful to true piety. In short, most of his doctrines were such as the wisdom of posterity thought fit to establish; and Wickliff failed in being a reformer, only because the minds of men were not yet sufficiently ripened for the truths he endeavoured to inculcate…

Nevertheless, despite the later Goldsmith’s greater tendency to be in accord with the popular, Protestant worldview, he had not become an anti-Catholic bigot. Such may be asserted upon at least four grounds. Firstly, in the *History of England*, he was more willing to portray certain, notable Catholic figures in a sympathetic light. This was the case in his description of Mary, Queen of Scots. While, in the *Letters of a Nobleman*, he had hurried through her scene of execution in 1587, in his later account, he carefully described her actions to depict her as an unfortunate individual who had courageously met her end. Notably, he even loosely followed Hume to convey her undying devotion to Catholicism with an air of detached respect:

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As soon as she [Mary] was seated, Beale began to read the warrant for her execution. Then Fletcher, dean of Peterborough, standing without rails, repeated a long exhortation, which she desired him to forbear, as she was firmly resolved to die in the catholic religion. The room was crowded with spectators, who beheld her with pity and distress, while her beauty, though dimmed by age and affliction, gleamed through her sufferings, and was still remarkable in this fatal moment. The earl of Kent observing, that in her devotions she made frequent use of the crucifix, he could not forbear reproving her, exhorting her to have Christ in her heart, not in her hand. She replied, with presence of mind, that it was difficult to hold such an object in her hand, without feeling her heart touched for the sufferings for him whom it represented.76

Secondly, the later Goldsmith was increasingly critical of the Protestant legacy. When one compares his two English histories, there is a telling difference in his approach towards Martin Luther (1483-1546). In contrast to his earlier, favourable estimation of this religious reformer, whom he had described as a ‘champion’ risen to ‘rescue human nature from its degeneracy’, in the History of England, he was subdued in his praise, and even somewhat hostile towards him: not only did he abstain from introducing him as a heroic figure, but he inserted a fresh remark to colour him as a ‘man naturally inflexible and vehement’. Furthermore, it is observable that Goldsmith, in 1771, was warier of the violence that had been employed in the establishment of the English Reformation during the reign of Edward VI. While he maintained his earlier view that the changes then being made were ‘calculated for the benefit of the subject’, in his later account he included lines that criticised — albeit gently — the reformers for having instigated a campaign of persecution:

But it had been well for the credit of the reformers, had they stopt at imprisonment only. They also resolved to become persecutors in turn; and although the spirit of their doctrines arose from a freedom of thinking, yet they could not bear that any should controvert what they had been at so much pains to establish.77

Thirdly, there are at least two instances where Goldsmith, in composing the *History of England*, refrained from re-using lines that he had incorporated in the *Letters from a Nobleman*, which refer to Catholicism as a bloody-thirsty faith with an inclination towards a base form of political ideology. Accordingly, his earlier remark of how the Catholic religion was ‘marked with cruelty, tyranny, and persecution’, which he had included in a passage discussing Elizabeth I’s execution of her design to dismantle popery within her realm, is missing from his later work; although, he did insert a fresh statement endorsing her efforts as having brought about the ‘form of religion’ that the British have since had the ‘happiness to enjoy’. Similarly, in his later account of the increasing boldness with which James II sought to re-introduce Romish influences into English religious life, he omitted a remark made in 1764 that justified the anxiety felt by the English Protestants of a potential Catholic reversion:

The Church of England took alarm; the peculiar animosity of the people against the Catholic religion proceeded not less from religious than temporal motives. It is the spirit of that religion to favour arbitrary power, and its reproach to encourage persecution. The English had too often smarted under both to be willing again to submit to either.78

Lastly, in compiling at least one passage of the *History of England*, Goldsmith demonstrated his willingness to closely follow his source material to give a fuller, critical account of an instance of popular frenzy that had exploded against the papists. Such was the case of his description of the Great Fire of London (1666). Whereas, in the *Letters from a Nobleman*, he had merely made a passing reference to it, in the *History of England*, he faithfully committed the details of and reflections upon this event provided by Hume to create a narrative that explicitly denounced the people’s vindictive zeal to lay the blame on the Catholics as having been occasioned by base ignorance:

This calamity [the plague of 1665] was soon after followed by another still more dreadful, as more unexpected: a fire breaking out at a baker’s house, who lived in Pudding-lane, near the bridge, it spread with such rapidity, that no efforts could extinguish it till it laid in ashes the most considerable party of the city… As the streets were narrow, and mostly

built of wood, the flames spread the faster; and the unusual dryness of
the season prevented the proper supplies of water. But the people were
not satisfied with these obvious motives; having been long taught to
impute their calamities to the machinations of their enemies, they now
ascribed the present misfortune to the same cause, and imputed the
burning of the city to a plot laid by the papists. But happily for that sect,
no proofs were brought of their guilt, though all men were willing to
credit them. The magistracy, therefore, contended themselves with
ascribing it to them, on a monument raised where the fire began; and
which still continues as a proof of the blind credulity of the times.79

Far from having become a staunch Protestant, it is observable that the later
Goldsmith was, as he had been in 1764, a strong proponent of religious tolerance; not
unlike Hume, who had devoted an entire section in his English history to espouse the
virtue of Cardinal Pole’s stance against Mary I’s persecutory zeal, and Leland, who had
openly acknowledged the ‘friendship and assistance’ of Charles O’Conor in the
preliminary discourse of the History of Ireland.80 Such may be recognised in the
passage that deliberates upon James I’s religious policy. Here, he extrapolated and
expanded upon an earlier set of remarks he had made in the Letters from a Nobleman,
to uphold the spirit of leniency with which James had confronted the prevailing
problem of sectarian tensions:

However, tho’ James persevered in asserting his prerogative, and
threatened those who should presume to abridge it, yet his justice and
clemency were very apparent in the toleration which he gave to the
teachers of different religions throughout the kingdom. The minds of the
people had long been irritated against one another, and each party
persecuted the rest, as it happened to prevail; it was expected, therefore,
that James would strengthen the hands of that which was then
uppermost; and that the catholics and sectaries should find no protection.
But this monarch wisely observed, that men should be punished for
actions, and not for opinions; a decision which gave general

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dissatisfaction: but the universal complaint of every sect was the best argument of his moderation towards all.\textsuperscript{81}

Much in the same vein, in a later chapter of the \textit{History of England}, Goldsmith reincorporated an entire paragraph from the \textit{Letters from a Nobleman} — nearly word for word — to approvingly reflect upon William III’s sincere desire to promote a state of religious amicability, unlike his ousted predecessor, James II, who had supposedly only pretended towards an outlook of tolerance, in order to disguise his actual intent of empowering the Catholic faction within Britain:

His [William] reign commenced with an attempt, similar to that which had been the principal cause of all the disturbances in the preceding reign, and which had excluded the monarch from the throne. William was a Calvinist, and consequently averse to persecution; he therefore began by attempting to repeal those laws that enjoined uniformity of worship; and though he could not entirely succeed in his design, a toleration was granted to such dissenters as should take the oaths of allegiance, and hold no private conventicles. The papists themselves, who had ever thing to fear, experienced the lenity of his government; and though the laws against them were unrepealed, yet they were seldom put into rigorous execution. Thus, what was criminal in James, became virtuous in his successor, as James wanted to introduce persecution, by pretending to disown it; while William had no other design, but to make religious freedom the test of civil security.\textsuperscript{82}

It is worthwhile to note here that not only was the later Goldsmith constant in his support for religious tranquillity, but he was also enduringly averse towards violent forms of religious intolerance. A salient example of such may be found in his account of Henry VIII. Just as he had done in the \textit{Letters from a Nobleman}, in the \textit{History of England}, he concluded his account of this monarch by opining that it was unacceptable to excuse the cruelty with which he had treated those who had disagreed with him on matters of religion — among his other crimes — upon the ground that he had instigated the Church of England’s break from Rome:

Cranmer desired him [Henry] to give some sign of his dying in the faith of Christ, he squeezed his hand, and immediately expired, after a reign of thirty-seven years, and nine months, in the fifty-sixth year of his age. Some kings have been tyrant from contradiction and revolt; some from being misled by favourites, and some from a spirit of party. But Henry was cruel from a depraved disposition alone; cruel in government, cruel in religion, and cruel in his family. Our divines have taken some pains to vindicate the character of this brutal prince, as if his conduct, and our reformation had any connexion with each other. There is nothing so absurd as to defend the one by the other; the most noble designs are brought about by the most vicious instruments; for we see even that cruelty and injustice were thought necessary to be employed in our holy redemption.83

Incidentally, the only instances wherein Goldsmith had ‘favourably’ referred to religious persecution in both of his English histories are found in the opening paragraphs of the chapters concerning Elizabeth I’s coming to power. In both cases, he sardonically applauded the violence of Mary I’s program to reverse the effects of the English Reformation by musing how it had inadvertently convinced the larger populace to embrace Protestantism:

Were we to adopt the maxim of the catholics themselves, that evil may be done for the production of good, one might say that the persecutions in Mary’s reign were permitted only to bring the kingdom more generally over to the protestant religion. Nothing could preach so effectually against the cruelty and vices of the monks, as the actions of the monks themselves. Wherever heretics were to be burnt, the monks were always present, rejoicing at the flames, insulting the fallen, and frequently the first to thrust the flaming brand against the faces of the sufferers. The English were effectually converted by such sights as these from their ancient superstitions. To bring the people over to any opinion, it is only necessary to persecute, instead of attempting to convince. The people had formerly been compelled to embrace the protestant religion,

and their fears induced them to conform; but now almost the whole nation were protestants from inclination.\textsuperscript{84}

Thus, it is recognisable that Goldsmith was an author who progressively struggled to maintain a middling posture towards the issue of Catholicism as his career progressed. On the one hand, he was increasingly affected by the conventional, sectarian mode of thinking. Importantly, he was not merely reflecting the biases of his sources but was likely in personal accord with them. Yet, on the other hand, it is notable how he had included fresh remarks that treat certain, notable Catholic figures with sympathy; had critically re-examined the Protestant legacy; had abstained from reincorporating from his history of 1764 at least two, overtly hostile remarks against the alleged Catholic proclivity for tyranny and persecution; and had composed at least one paragraph with greater fidelity to its source material to lambast an instance of hostility shown towards the papists. All in all, it is perceivable that Goldsmith was a loyal Protestant, who, however, never lost sight of the need to discourage mob fervour, and to praise acts of dignity, akin to that shown by Mary, Queen of Scots. In other words, it is likely that Goldsmith was equally, if not more so, concerned for the stability of society as he was of promoting Protestantism. Subsequently, while it is not possible to unquestioningly accept Sells’ claim that Goldsmith was free from anti-Catholic bias, neither can we decry him as having stood in the camp of Protestant zealots.\textsuperscript{85} Rather, we must rest content at the recognition that he confined himself— not unlike Hume and Leland— to marching near the ‘tail-end’ of the multitude, whilst remaining steadfastly committed to upholding the virtue of religious toleration and amicability.

**Anti-Semitism in Britain**

While one can assert that Goldsmith was not bigotedly aligned to a particular sect of the Christian faith, despite his increasing acquiescence in the Protestant worldview, it remains questionable what his attitude may have been towards those who were situated beyond its boundaries. In this final section, an attempt will be made to determine what his outlook on Judaism and those of its faith may have been — those


\textsuperscript{85} Sells, *Oliver Goldsmith*, p. 23.
religious outsiders who shared in the social, political and legal inconveniences that were faced by the Irish and British Catholics.

Compared to her European neighbours, in eighteenth-century Britain, there were relatively few instances of ‘serious’ outbreaks of anti-Semitic fervour. Nevertheless, prejudicial attitudes towards the Jews remained very much part of the mindset of the people, as was revealed in the vigorous resistance that was put up against the Jewish Naturalisation Act of 1753 — misleadingly described as the ‘Jew Bill’ by contemporaries — that implemented a modest change to the law, permitting individuals professing Judaism to apply for a private act of naturalisation without having to take the Christian oaths. In the course of this public outcry, unflattering caricatures of the Jewish figure flooded the press; a number of which played upon the well-established portrayal of the Jew as being a lowly and unprincipled opportunist who was deeply entrenched in the world of pecuniary interests — a possible combination of the image of a well-heeled member of the Sephardi community with that of the Ashkenazi Jew, who often spoke little English and worked in menial occupations. An instance where this character appears is found in a cartoon that was published on October 1753, titled, ‘The Grand Conference of the Jew Predominant’, wherein the Jewish financier, Samson Gideon (1699-1762), is depicted as wearing fashionable clothing and declaring his gratitude, in broken English of a recently arrived, indigent immigrant, to Henry Pelham (1694-1754) and company — men who had secured the passage of the act in question — whilst presenting a bag of money. It should be mentioned here also that the world of theatre was complicit in laying the foundations for the strong reaction towards the Jew Bill. As noted by Emily Anderson, the villainous portrayal of Shylock by Charles Macklin (1690-1797), an Irish actor who arrived in London in the 1720s, did much to whip up anti-Semitic attitudes amongst the British, theatre-going audiences.

In addition to this awkward image of the Jew as being an unsophisticated newcomer — eking out a living through the means of peddling and other like low-paid

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87 The hostility shown towards this Act of Parliament was such, that it was eventually repealed on 28 November 1753. See Crome’s “The 1753 ‘Jew Bill’ Controversy”, p. 1454.
jobs — and, yet, a richly dressed and unscrupulous banker, criticism against the ‘Jew Bill’ was founded upon at least two more popular conceptions of the Jewish identity. Firstly, there was a prevalent understanding that they were an aggressive people, ever keen to carve out a piece of land to call their own. An especially perverse example of this perception is found in the 18-20 October 1753 number of the London Evening Post, wherein an anonymous contributor parodied Genesis 34 to depict the Jews as having paid off the ‘Pelhamites’ to have all British men circumcised, only to slay them whilst ‘their private parts were sore’, leaving the path open for the appropriation of their livestock, land, and wives and daughters. Secondly, there still existed during this period, the belief that the Jews were stained with the guilt of their ancestors, who had played a hand in the crucifixion of Christ. As such, there were fears that the wilful introduction of these people would comprise the spirit of Christianity within Britain.

Along these lines, an ‘Archaicus’ declaimed against the naturalisation of ‘that People which crucified the Lord of Life’, citing how ‘All Fellowship, and Inter-Community of Christians with Jews, in Rights Civil and Religious… must make Those Partakers in Sin and Guilt with These, and involve them in their Judgement and Plague.’

Notably, such anti-Semitic perceptions did not solely reside in the minds of cartoonists, newspaper scribblers and anonymous enthusiasts, but also coloured the viewpoints of well-known figures who belonged to the ‘republic of letters’. Voltaire — whose writings were immensely popular in the English-speaking part of the world, and influential to Goldsmith — stands as a salient example. While he often attacked instances of Christian intolerance towards the Jews, as may be recognised in his early epic poem on Henry IV, wherein he lambasted the Spanish Inquisition for having burned at the stake those ‘unhappy Jews’, he, nevertheless, revealed in a number of other texts, the deeply ingrained prejudice and hostility he held for these people.

The ABC (1768) deserves particular attention in this regard, as there is a passage in this work that conveys in a condensed form the many, contradictory ways in which they were popularly caricatured; from being bellicose and threatening, yet impotent, to being avaricious, yet poorly equipped to succeed: ‘Nice politics, those of an unhappy people

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90 ‘The thirty-fourth Chapter of GEN ——’, London Evening Post, 18-20 October 1753.
who were bloodthirsty without being warlike, usurious without being commercial, brigands without being able to hold on to their spoils, almost always enslaved and almost always in revolt, sold in markets by Titus and Adrian just as the animal called unclean by the Jews is sold, and which was more useful than they were.'

Closer to home, one can find a similar sense of reservation — albeit significantly less vitriolic — towards the Jews in Smollett’s discussion of the ‘Jew Bill’, found in his Continuation of the Complete History of England (1763). While it is evident that he was critical of the hysterical opposition that had been directed against it — he dismissed the prognostications made of a Jewish rise to hegemonic and religious power, and the anxieties felt from the thought of aiding a tainted people, as ‘frivolous’ and ‘chimerical’ — he was, nevertheless, unable to divest himself of the image of the usurious Jew. Accordingly, he wrote of how the measure had been ‘supported by some petitions of merchants and manufacturers, who, upon examination, appeared to be Jews, or their dependants; and countenanced by the ministry, who thought they foresaw, in the consequences of such a naturalization, a great accession to the moneyed interest, and a considerable increase of their own influence among the individuals of that community.’ Moreover, it is noteworthy that his inclination to defend the Act of 1753 was founded upon the belief that the Jews would have ‘gradually forsaken their own unprofitable and obstinate infidelity’ to ‘open their eyes to the shining truths of the gospel’ and ‘join their fellow-subjects in embracing the doctrines of Christianity.’

Not unlike Voltaire and Smollett, when one examines Goldsmith’s non-historical writings, it becomes evident that Goldsmith’s attitude towards the Jews was also tainted by common prejudice. Although in at least two instances he made remarks that seem to suggest that he disapproved of the ill treatment they were subjected to historically and recently there are numerous references made in his other texts that are indicative of the strong inclination he had for perceiving them in their caricatured

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94 Previously, Tuvia Bloch had suggested that the portrayal of the benevolent Jew, Joshua Manasseh, in The Adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom (1753) was indicative of Smollett being supportive of the promoters of the ‘Jew Bill’. However, this stance has been effectively challenged by Ian Campbell Ross in his article, ‘Smollett and the Jew Bill of 1753’, AN&Q, 16 (1977), 54-55.
forms. For an example, in both ‘The Adventures of a Strolling Player’ (1760), and the ‘Specimen of a Magazine’ (1762), he alluded to the falling of the stocks as a concern that would only affect the Jews. Also, in ‘A Description of Various Clubs’ (1759) he presented a scene, wherein a ‘Mr. Dibbens’ was engaged in a dispute over ‘the old subject of religion’ with a ‘Jew Pedlar’. Later, in the posthumously published, *The Haunch of Venison* (1776), he again made use of the figure of the lowly Jew by having him appear as one of the glutinous, political scribblers arrived for a complimentary meal.

Beyond seeing the Jews in terms of their unflattering stereotypes, it is also recognisable that Goldsmith, the essayist, harboured feelings of hostility towards them. Such may be discerned from Letters XXII and LXXII of *The Citizen of the World*, which were first published in the *Public Ledger* on 24 March 1760 and 10 September 1760 respectively. In the former, he had Lien Chi Altangi, in the course of his lamentations on the inequitable and opaque nature of life, occasioned by his receiving news that his son was captured as a slave, refer to the Jews, not only as being one of the number of those who pretend to ‘revelations’ that do little to ‘aid the enquiry’, but also as a murderous people. As such, he wrote of how the ‘Jews who pretend that deity is pleased with the effusions of blood, are not less displeasing’ than the ‘Indian who bathes his visage in urine’ and the ‘christian who believes in three gods’. In the latter, he had the Chinese philosopher present the Jews as a corrupt race, along with the Gours and Tartars, in a bid to oppose the Marriage Act of 1753:

> But this restraint upon matrimonial community, even considered in a physical light is injurious. As those who rear up animals take all possible pains to cross the strain in order to improve the breed; so in those countries, where marriage is most free the inhabitants are found every age to improve in stature and in beauty; on the contrary where it is

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96 In his essay of 1759, ‘The History of Hypasia’, Goldsmith described how the ‘patriarchate of Alexandria’ had ‘long meditated the banishment of the Jews’, possibly spurred on by ‘an ill-grounded zeal for the Christian religion’. And in his satirical conveyance of the contents of a Lisbon newspaper, found in *The Citizen of the World*, he noted that ‘two Jews’ had been victims along with ‘three young women’, of the credulous, persecutory zeal of the inquisitors. See Goldsmith’s, *The Bee*, pp. 401-04 & *The Citizen of the World*, pp. 31-36.


confined to a *cast*, a *tribe*, or an *hord*, as among the Gours, the Jews, or the Tartars, each division soon assumes a family likeness, and every tribe degenerates into peculiar deformity.\(^{100}\)

It is upon turning to the *Letters from a Nobleman*, the *Roman History*, and the *History of England*, however, that we are confronted with indubitable evidence that Goldsmith was deeply impressed by a prejudicial outlook towards the Jews throughout his literary career, as each of these works contain one or more passages that betray such sentiments. Accordingly, in his first English history, he selectively summarised Smollett’s account of the ‘Jew Bill’ by ignoring the critical references made against the feverish opposition that had been mustered against it, to cast a more sympathetic gaze towards those who had resisted the passing of the act:

This session of parliament was also distinguished by another act equally unpopular, and, perhaps, equally injurious to the religion of the community. This was a law for naturalizing the Jews. The ministers boldly affirmed, that such a law would greatly contribute to the advantage of the nation; that it would increase the credit and commerce of the kingdom, and set a laudable example of political toleration. Many others, however, were of very different sentiments; they saw that greater favour was shewn, by this bill, to the Jews, than to some other sects professing the Christian religion; that an introduction of this people into the kingdom would disgrace the character of the nation, and cool the zeal of the natives already too lukewarm. However, notwithstanding all opposition, this bill was passed into a law; nor was it till the ensuing session of parliament, that it was thought necessary to be repealed.\(^{101}\)

In the *Roman History*, he not only confirmed the popular notion that the Jews were an avaricious group — in discussing the ‘lust and avarice’ of Domitian (51-96 A.D.), the twelfth emperor of Rome, he noted how ‘large sums’ were exacted from the ‘rich Jews’, who ‘even then began to practice the arts of peculation, for which they are at present so remarkable’ — but also, in at least two instances, presented them as a barbaric force. Firstly, in narrating the First Jewish-Roman War (66-73 A.D.), he


faithfully followed Echard’s account to describe them as being an ‘obstinate and infatuated people’, who, in addition to resisting Roman power, ‘split into two parties, that robbed and destroyed each other with impunity, still pillaging and, at the same time, boasting their zeal for the religion of their ancestors.’ Secondly, in recounting the Jewish uprising that had taken place during the reign of Trajan, who ruled from 98-117 A.D., he committed a generous portion of the text to provide his readers an obscenely detailed passage, derived, yet again from Echard’s work, that laid out the horrors that had been committed by them:

While he [Trajan] was employed in these wars, there was a dreadful insurrection of the Jews in all parts of the empire. This wretched people, still infatuated, and ever expecting some signal deliverer, took advantage of Trajan’s absence in the east, to massacre all the Greeks, and Romans, which they got into their power, without reluctance or mercy. This rebellion first began in Cyrene, a Roman province in Africa; from thence the flame extended to Egypt, and next to the island of Cyprus. These places, they, in a manner, dispeopled with ungovernable fury. Their barbarities were such, that they ate the flesh of their enemies, wore their skins, sawed them asunder, cast them to wild beasts, made them kill each other, and studied new torments by which to destroy them.102

Notably, Goldsmith even reproduced Echard’s rendition of the Second Roman-Jewish War (132-136 A.D.), which strongly played upon the prevalent anxiety of a Jewish insurrection, founded upon the understanding that they were a fanatical people ever jealous for their own lands, and willing to obtain it at any cost — and at the expense of the Christian populace; an account that would have undoubtedly elicited the grave assent of the anonymous contributor to the London Evening Post who had pondered upon the vulnerability of the circumcised groin:

He [Hadrian] gave orders for the rebuilding of Jerusalem, which was performed with great expedition, by the assistance of the Jews, who now began to conceive hopes of being restored to their long lost kingdom. But these expectations only served to aggravate their calamities; for being incensed at the privileges which were granted the pagan

102 Goldsmith, Roman History, II, 332.
worshippers in their new city, they fell upon all the Roman and Christians that were dispersed throughout Judea, and unmercifully put them all to the sword. In this cruel and desperate undertaking they were chiefly incited by one Barcocab, an impostor, who, willing to be thought the Messiah, or perhaps believing himself to be so, declared that he himself was the star foretold by Balaam, and that he was come down as a light from heaven to rescue them from bondage. Adrian was at Athens when this dangerous insurrection began; wherefore sending a powerful body of men, under the commend of Julius Severus, this general obtained many signal, though bloody, victories over the insurgents. The war was concluded in two years, by the demolition of above a thousand of their best towns, and the destruction of near six hundred thousand men in battle.103

Lastly, in the History of England, Goldsmith — in addition to maintaining his earlier, sympathetic position towards those who had resisted the passing of the ‘Jew Bill’ — referred to the Jews in a manner that implicitly enforced the notion that they were an unprincipled and duplicitous people. As such, in describing the cruelty that was shown towards them during the reign of Edward I, he concluded this passage by deviating from Hume’s narrative, which was largely critical of this monarch’s persecutory zeal, to tacitly remind his readers that they were an avaricious people: ‘This severity was very grateful to the people, who hated the Jews, not only for their tenets, but for their method of living, which was by usury and extortion.’ In a later chapter, he again alluded to their usurious nature, by including a personal remark, wherein he quipped how the ‘Jewish Rabbis’ had been ‘easily bought up’ by Henry VIII, in his bid to gather assent for his intended divorce from Catherine of Aragon. Furthermore, in recounting Charles I’s indiscrete intrusion into the House of Commons, in 1642, to personally see to the arrest of Lord Kimbolton, along with ‘Sir Arthur Haslerig, Hollis, Hambden, Pym, and Strode’, he broke from Hume’s account of this momentous event to include a line that was pregnant with the allusion of the Jews as a treacherous threat: “The common council only answered his [Charles] complaints with a contemptuous silence; and on his return, one of the populace, more insolent than the rest, cried out,

103 Ibid., pp. 346-47.
‘To your tents, O Israel!’ a watch word among the Jews, when they intended to abandon their princes.”

Furthermore, it is worthwhile to add here that there is a passage in the chapter concerning the reign of William Rufus (1056-1100), which intimates that Goldsmith abhorred the notion of allowing the Jewish faith to take precedence over Christianity. In recounting how this monarch had taken a non-committal stance towards matters that involved both religions, he not only replicated Hume’s critical assessment of these instances as being indicative of William’s irreligiosity, but he also made an additional remark, wherein he referred to such displays of ‘openness’ as being a form of carelessness:

…he [William] had but very little religion at best… It is reported of him, that he once accepted sixty marks of a Jew, whose son had been converted to Christianity, and who engaged him by that present to assist in bringing back the youth to Judaism. William employed both menaces and persuasion to that purpose; but finding his efforts ineffectual, he sent for the father, and informing him that the new convert was obstinate in his faith, he returned him half the money, and kept the rest for his pains. At another time, he is said to have sent for some learned Christian theologians and some Jewish rabbies, and bad them fairly dispute the points of their religion before him. He was perfectly indifferent, he said, which should prevail; he had his ears open to both, and he would embrace that doctrine, which, upon comparison, should be found supported on the most solid arguments. In this manner Rufus proceeded, careless of approbation or censure…

Yet, despite having harboured an enduring sense of reservation and hostility towards the Jews, Goldsmith’s two English histories and the Roman History also reveal that he was never able to full-heartedly endorse the acts of violence and maltreatment that these people had been forced to endure historically either. Accordingly, in the Letters from a Nobleman, although he heavily edited and truncated Smollett’s account of Henry III’s many attempts to fleece the people and cities of Britain and Wales, in

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105 Ibid., I, 179-80.
order to fill his ever-empty coffer, he did not neglect to recognise the burden that the Jews had to shoulder as well:

Infinite were the struggles for power between the barons and the King [Henry]… In order to render himself independent of them, he found a thousand ridiculous pretences for raising money without their assistance. He would invite himself to the houses of his subjects, and always expect a present at the door: he extorted from the Jews, wherever he found them, without any remorse. He even scrupled not to defraud minors of their lawful inheritances, to which he had been left protector; while the people had the mortification to see those sums lavished upon undeserving favourites, foreigners without merit, strumpets, flatterers, and all the vermin of a vicious court.¹⁰⁶

In the Roman History, not only did Goldsmith refrain from including mention of the role that the Jews had to play in the crucifixion of Christ — which his source material for this segment had not failed to do — but, also, in describing their revolt against Gessius Florus, the Roman procurator of Judea from 64-66 A.D., he discarded much of Echard’s critical reflections upon them, and produced a shorter account that lays emphasis — seemingly sympathetic — on the sufferings that they were subjected to during this period. As such, Echard’s attempt to villainise the Jews as a ‘miserable Nation’ that had ‘blinded themselves against the undeniable Miracles of our Saviour, and shed his innocent Blood’ to bring ‘upon ‘em the most calamitous Misfortunes, and the extremest Miseries’, is missing from Goldsmith’s text.¹⁰⁷ Instead, the cruelty exercised by Florus is given centre stage, with only a passing nod made at the end towards the Christian prophesy of the Jews as a cursed people condemned to wander the earth:

In the twelfth year of this emperor’s reign, the Jews also revolted, having been severely opprest by the Roman governors. It is said that Florus, in particular, was arrived at that degree of tyranny, that by public proclamation he gave permission to plunder the country, provided he

¹⁰⁶ Goldsmith, Letters from a Nobleman, I, 100-01.
received half the spoil. These oppressions drew such a train of calamities after them, that the sufferings of all other nations were slight in comparison to what this devoted people afterwards endured. I shall mention them more at length in the reign of Vespasian, in which, as Christ had prophesied, they came to a completion.\textsuperscript{108}

Also, in the chapter concerning the reign of Caligula, who ruled from 37 to 41 A.D., Goldsmith temporarily paused in compiling from Echard’s work to insert a relatively lengthy passage recounting Philo of Alexandria’s meeting with this emperor in 40 A.D., wherein he criticised the cavalier attitude with which this philosopher’s petition to alleviate the sufferings of the Alexandrian Jews was dismissed. While the ‘dialogue’ between Philo and Caligula was largely derived from Jean-Baptiste Louis Crévier’s \textit{L’Histoire des empereurs des Romains, jusqu’à Constantin} (1749), the line of disapprobation for the latter’s irreverent conduct was the product of Goldsmith’s own pen:

Upon their [Philo and the rest of the Jewish embassy] approaching him [Caligula] with the most profound humility, he began by calling them enemies of the gods, and by asking them how they could refuse to acknowledge his divinity? Upon their replying that they had sacrificed hecatombs both upon his accession to the empire, and his recovery from sickness, he replied, that those sacrifices were offered not to him, but for him. In the mean time, while they continued silently astonished at his impiety, he went from room to room, giving directions to his workmen concerning new improvements… He would now and then stop to ask some extravagant question… ‘What pretensions have you to be citizens of Alexandria?’ Upon this, Philo began to enter into the business of his embassy; but he had scarce commenced, when Caligula abruptly left him, and ran into a large hall… He then returned to the deputies, and assuming a more moderate air, ‘Well,’ cried he, ‘let me know what you have to say in your defence.’ Philo began his harangue where it had been interrupted before; but Caligula again left him in the midst of it, and gave orders for placing some pictures. \textit{Nothing can be a more striking}

\textsuperscript{108} Goldsmith, \textit{Roman History}, II, 240-41.
picture than this, of the manner in which this monster attended to the complaints of mankind [my italics].

Lastly, in the History of England, although Goldsmith had included a personally-derived line, which implicitly reminded his readers that the Jews were an avaricious group in his conveyance of Edward I’s hostility against them, he had, otherwise, abided by Hume’s narrative to chastise this monarch for having harboured ‘no compassion upon their sufferings.’ Much in the same vein, he had, again, faithfully compiled from Hume’s work, to relate an instance of violence the Jews had suffered under the tumultuous reign of Henry III in a critical tone:

In the mean time the earl of Leicester, no way discouraged by the bad success of his past enterprizes, resolved upon entirely overturning that power, which he had already humbled. For this purpose he formed a most powerful confederacy with the prince of Wales, who invaded England with a body of thirty thousand men. To these barbarous ravagers Leicester quickly joined his own forces, and the whole kingdom was soon exposed to all the devastation of a licentious army. The citizens of London also were not averse to this cause. Under the command of their mayor, Thomas Fitz-Richard, a furious and licentious man, they fell upon the Jews, and many of the more wealthy inhabitants, pillaging and destroying where-ever they came.

Moreover, in describing the slaughtering of the Jews that took place in London and York between 1180 and 1190, Goldsmith not only closely followed Hume’s account of the event to present a graphic picture of their sufferings, but he also added his own remark, wherein it was noted that the dire situation, which the Jews of Yok were forced into, was ‘horrid’ and ‘impolitic and unjust’. Intriguingly, he neglected to include mention of the Jewish involvement in the practice of usury, which Hume had elaborated upon in his text. Consequently, Goldsmith’s rendering of the event reads straightforwardly as a condemnatory tale, lambasting the ill-treatment exercised by the Christians against the Jews:

109 Ibid., 180-81.
A romantic desire for strange adventures, and an immoderate zeal for the external rites of Christianity, were the ruling passions of the times. By these alone glory was to be acquired; and by these Richard only hoped for glory. The Jews, who had been for some time increasing in the kingdom, were the first who fell a sacrifice to the enthusiastic zeal of the people; and great number of them were slaughtered by the citizens of London, upon the very day of the king’s coronation. Five hundred of that infatuated people had retired into York castle for safety; but finding themselves unable to defend the place, they resolved to perish by killing one another, rather than trust the fury of their persecutors. Having taken this gloomy resolution, they first murdered their wives and children; next threw the dead bodies over the wall against their enemies, who attempted to scale it; and then setting fire to the houses, perished in the flames.  

Thus, it is evident that Goldsmith had, through much of his writerly career, held a dual and seemingly conflicting attitude towards the Jews. On the one hand, his two English histories and the Roman History firmly establishes that he was enduringly and deeply affected by the anti-Semitic climate of the eighteenth century. Not only did he betray his inclination to support the opposition party that had resisted the passing of the ‘Jew Bill’ in the Letters from a Nobleman and the History of England, but he also referred and alluded to the Jews in ways that were much in line with the common, prejudicial outlook, which held them to be a usurious, barbaric and unprincipled people. Moreover, it is intriguing to consider how he may have been, in 1771, strongly averse to the notion of giving Judaism an equal billing with Christianity, as his critical reflection upon William Rufus’ non-committal approach towards both religions seems to suggest. However, on the other hand, these historical compilations also reveal that he was never able to full-heartedly approve of the acts of violence and mistreatment that the Jews had been subjected to historically. Through a process of excising, adding and copying, he produced a number of passages that were sympathetic of their plight, and condemnatory of the persecutors’ zeal. Along the lines of what has already been discussed in the preceding sections, it is likely that this apparent, contradictory jostling was born from his increasingly strong devotion to religiosity and Protestantism, combined with his enduring distaste for bigoted rashness and violence. In other words, it is probable that

111 Ibid., I, 276-77.
Goldsmith earnestly desired to see the Protestant faith supplant Judaism, but could not bring himself to pursue this cause outright, as he feared the destabilising consequences of religious violence. Accordingly, it is possible to identify Goldsmith as standing with the likes of Voltaire and Smollett: men of repute, who, while able, in certain instances, to criticise the hostility that had been shown towards these people, could not, nevertheless, escape from the prevailing prejudices of the time.

**Conclusion**

As such, it is appreciable how Goldsmith’s historical compilations provide a critical insight into his stance and outlook towards matters pertaining to faith and religion; a subject that has not been sufficiently examined by modern Goldsmith scholars, despite its relevance to the wider field of eighteenth-century studies. By referring to the *Letters from a Nobleman*, the *Roman History*, the *History of England*, and the *Grecian History*, along with his essays, reviews and poems, and anecdotal evidences provided by his acquaintances, it is possible to compose a picture of his career-long interactions with the issues of religiosity, Catholicism and Judaism. Overall, it is evident that he was an author who was caught between the moving current of Enlightenment trends, and the draw of popular conceptions and prejudices. On the one hand, one may identify him as having been an enduring, and even an unyielding proponent of religious conservatism, who harboured a greater sense of suspicion towards the Catholics, and consistently perceived the Jews as threatening and unprincipled troublemakers. Yet, on the other hand, it is recognisable that he was, by no means, an unreasonable reactionary, nor a bigoted Protestant and a rabid anti-Semite, as he persisted in declaiming against extreme and credulous forms of piety; was constant in his disapprobation for acts of violence and hostility that had been committed against the Jews and papists; and was able to treat with sympathy and benign approbation certain pagans and Catholics. Moreover, he never relinquished his hold upon the virtues of tolerance and amicability.

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112 It may be tempting to set aside the thought of Goldsmith having had such unabating and even increasing tendencies by positing that he was merely attempting to present narratives agreeable to his readers. However, the anecdotal evidences, and the personal quips and the notable ‘deletions’ he made in his histories strongly suggests that it was also a deeply personal matter.
Fundamentally, one can posit that Goldsmith was a worldly Christian and Protestant: a thinker who could not escape from the religious confines that he found himself in, but was concerned for the well-being of man, who, regardless of whatever mask of faith he wore, was understood to be underneath a feeling and thinking entity, a subject whose pains and errors were shared by all. He had no rigidly detailed theological system by which to gauge human existence, but was buffeted by common prejudices, conventions and an inclination towards good-will and reason. In other words, he was a writer who had a varied and open-ended attitude towards matters pertaining to religion. Based upon such a perception of Goldsmith, it is possible to consider afresh how he may have approached the figure of Dr Charles Primrose from his canonical work, *The Vicar of Wakefield*; a topic that has intrigued several notable scholars, including Robert H. Hopkins, whose in-depth study of this novel still carries weight, despite it having been challenged by others.\(^{113}\) According to Hopkins, Goldsmith had primarily intended to use the character of the vicar as an object of satire: to present him as a hypocritical moraliser; an unreliable narrator prone to self-adulation; an expert in theological trivia; and a materialistic snob.\(^{114}\) Undoubtedly, Dr Primrose’s obsession with the ‘Bangorean’ and later, in the second edition, the ‘Whistonian Controversy’, and philosophic pedantries were designed to reflect poorly on his person. However, as Goldsmith was enduringly conservative, it is difficult to believe that he had sought to merely use his protagonist, who was a servant of God, as the source of satirical mirth. It is likely that Dr Primrose’s devotional qualities and his desire to help his fellow inmates become industrious members of society were meant to be regarded with respect. Also, given that Goldsmith was strongly inclined to see past the facades of men to recognise them as suffering beings, it is probable that he desired the vicar to be treated with sympathy in his many travails; to be accepted, in part, as a ‘hero’ who had united in himself the ‘three greatest characters upon earth’: that of a ‘priest, an husbandman, and the father of a family’.\(^{115}\)

As such, Goldsmith approached the figure of the vicar from multiple perspectives, made possible by the relative openness and diverseness of his religious

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\(^{113}\) For an example of a challenge presented against Hopkin’s reading of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, see D.W. Jefferson’s ‘The Vicar of Wakefield and Other Prose Writings: A Reconsideration’, in *Art of Oliver Goldsmith*, pp. 17-32.


outlook. Consequently, it is possible to jettison the notion proposed by Hopkins that the novel was principally a work of satire. Yet, neither can we return to the older evaluation of it as being, essentially, an entertaining homily, a position that was expressed in the May 1766 edition of the *Monthly Review*, wherein a critic had lauded the *Vicar of Wakefield* for its ‘moral tendency’ and, in particular, its ability to recommend and enforce the ‘great obligations of universal BENEVOLENCE’.\(^{116}\) Moreover, while it may be tempting to make a parallel between Dr Primrose and Job — as had been first done by Martin Battestin in *The Providence of Wit* (1974) — such a comparison should be avoided as it can unwittingly mislead one to believe that Goldsmith had attempted a grand, religious project, wherein he had sought to give new life to an ancient, biblical tale.\(^{117}\) Instead, it is necessary to accept and admire the work as a frank portrayal of a devout man caught up in the vicissitudes of life, not unlike Goldsmith himself. Perhaps, the air of worldly, yet religious, flexibility that Goldsmith imparted to it accounts for the enduring interest with which the character of Dr Primrose has been held.

However, before concluding this chapter, it must be emphasised that Goldsmith’s middling posture towards issues related to piety and religion was not born from a sense of irresolution or indecisiveness. Behind the seemingly diverse and contradictory approaches towards the problem of faith, sectarianism and anti-Semitic sentiments, a single, core motivating spirit is identifiable in his histories: that he ultimately desired for social cohesion and strength. His later, stronger tendency to adopt the position of a conventional believer and Protestant, and his enduring suspicion for the Jews points to the possibility that he was inclined to believe that a community bounded by a single religion, that of Protestantism, would be desirable. Yet, it is arguable that he was not willing to push this matter too explicitly, as he realised that to do so would be counterproductive to his longing to see the stabilisation of British and Irish life. For this reason, he had continued to espouse the cause of reason and called for amicability and tolerance amongst the adherents of the different faiths and lambasted acts of violence that had erupted between them. It is likely that Goldsmith, in 1771, had come to firmly hold onto the notion that an admixture of devotion towards Christianity,

Protestantism and a healthy dose of good-will would help ensure the realisation of a happy ending for the larger community; not unlike that found in the improbably romantic finish to *The Vicar of Wakefield*:

As soon as dinner was over, according to my old custom, I requested that the table might be taken away, to have the pleasure of seeing all my family assembled once more by a cheerful fire-side. My two little ones sat upon each knee, the rest of the company by their partners. I had nothing now on this side of the grave to wish for, all my cares were over, my pleasure was unspeakable. It now only remained that my gratitude in good fortune should exceed my former submission in adversity.\(^{118}\)

Conclusion: Goldsmith, the Grounded Patriot

Oliver Goldsmith’s histories are an important part of his oeuvre. Rather than being spiritless endeavours undertaken merely for the sake of bread, they were compiled carefully and disclose much in the way of Goldsmith as a thinker. In contrast to the popular notion that Goldsmith was primarily a sentimental stylist or a utopic cosmopolitan, the histories reveal that he was an author who had, with great vigour and circumspection, reflected upon the health of the greater sphere of Irish and British life. Indeed, it has been shown that he was increasingly committed to embodying the role of an objective and trustworthy historian and of warning his readers against the impending dangers of unbounded commercialism, luxury and empire building and the over-dependence upon foreign treaties. It has also been discussed how he had pressed for the need to reorganise the distribution of wealth so that the useful members of society could obtain their fair share of it. Additionally, it was recognised that, whilst comfortably wearing the garb of an Anglicised author, he had carefully presented — what was likely for him — a modest case, in the History of England, for the equal treatment of Ireland as a reliable and natural partner to England; that the Irish were worthy of their neighbour’s trust and respect. Furthermore, it has been revealed how he had persistently declaimed against untoward ‘enthusiasm’ and sectarian and anti-Semitic violence, whilst shifting ever closer to the established religious sensitivities of the time. Far from being an opportunistic hack, he was an author who invested every stroke of his pen, as a historical compiler, towards encouraging the people of England to work amongst themselves and with their near neighbours as a cohesive unit. In other words, he was, first and foremost, a grounded patriot; as one who never radically or abrasively veered from the conventional mode of thinking, but, nevertheless, grappled with the larger problems of society that were perceived by him to have immediate relevance to the people in both his native and adoptive countries.

The acknowledgement of Goldsmith as a grounded Anglo-Irish patriot jostles awkwardly with many interpretations of the author that has been extant since the late eighteenth century. More importantly, however, it provides some grounds to approach with caution the more recent discussions upon his worldly outlook. As has been noted in the introduction and the preceding chapters, valuable research has been conducted as
of late towards establishing Goldsmith as a writer with a strong inclination towards his Irishness. While these studies have done much to dispel certain erroneous and overly simplistic perceptions of Goldsmith, the investigation that has been conducted here warns against taking these newly flattened paths too far. Notably, one must not allow the notion that Goldsmith had never forgotten his native homeland to overshadow his commitment to the greater entity of a co-existing Britain and Ireland. By no means was Goldsmith a revolutionary comparable to the likes of Theobald Wolf Tone. Rather, much like his fellow Irishmen, such as Charles O’Conor and John Curry, he accepted the defeat of the Stuarts and the increasingly close ties between England and Ireland. Goldsmith was not one inclined to sift through, and become embroiled in, the finer details of political debates and controversies but kept his eye firmly upon the larger picture. His interest lay in reflecting upon and promoting a happier and stronger Anglo-Irish community, based upon a relatively realistic and malleable understanding of and acquiescence with the present circumstances.

As such, there is an urgent need to remind readers of the popularity of Goldsmith’s histories into the nineteenth century and to reintroduce them as vital texts that can expand his image as a patriotic, Anglo-Irish thinker who had dispensed corrective prescriptions to his readers, whilst never straying far from the accepted turn of thinking; that he was a loyal and sober citizen of both Ireland and Britain who wished to further improve their condition as a cohesive political and social unit. Whether the modern reader can now accept Goldsmith as having been a historian of the first class, as Samuel Johnson had generously described him as being, cannot be surmised by the author of this thesis. However, one must now confront him as having stood as a serious and reflective historical compiler with great polymathic talents. Upon such an understanding of him, new investigative outlets with much potential can be opened. One such promising horizon lies in the study of his status as a writer who had received medical training, a subject matter that has received very little attention. Indeed, it has become commonplace to tacitly dismiss his status as a physician upon the biographical ground that he had had not much success in this field.¹ Other than his early book reviews, the histories are a treasure trove of information that may be able to turn

¹ Intriguingly, as of late, there has been at least two opinion pieces published in the *Irish Medical Times* that has referred to Goldsmith. However, with titles such as, ‘Oliver Goldsmith: more flamboyant than physician’ (2010) and ‘Oliver Goldsmith: A wonderful writer, but a pathetic physician’ (2007), a more constructive approach is still wanting.
such an outlook on its head. The *Letters from a Nobleman*, the *Roman History*, the *History of England* and the *Grecian History* all contain medical and scientific reflections that, despite being short in length, can potentially help the future Goldsmith scholar determine the extent to which his training as a physician had an influence upon him as an author.\(^2\) In turn, such a study may instigate interest amongst the wider Enlightenment scholarly community to take a closer look at other eighteenth-century writers who were also doctors of some description; a list that would include a number of Goldsmith’s acquaintances, including Tobias Smollett.

Moreover, by accepting that Goldsmith’s histories are a source of legitimate intellectual interest, it is hoped that his other extended works of compilation may be approached with renewed inquisitiveness too. Specifically, it is the opinion of this author that Goldsmith’s *A History of the Earth, and Animated Nature* (1774) and *A Survey of Experimental Philosophy, Considered in its Present State of Improvement* (1776) deserve to be brought out into the limelight. While there has been some sympathetic words posited towards the former by a limited number of early and mid-twentieth century biographers and scholars, their remarks have largely fallen on deaf ears.\(^3\) And the latter has been for a long while dismissed as a work of negligible value and quality — granted, there does appear to be stylistic inconsistencies in this text that suggests that Goldsmith was not able to revise it completely — and, subsequently, has either been ignored or acknowledged only in passing.\(^4\) That it is high time for a reconsideration of them can be gleaned, not only from his journalistic outputs and book reviews, but also from his histories, which contain passages that appear to betray an enduring fascination with nature and the budding sciences.\(^5\) As such, there is yet much

\(^2\) For an example of such, see Goldsmith’s remark upon the effects of poison found in the *Letters from a Nobleman*, I, 114 and the *Roman History*, II, 136. Also, see Goldsmith’s reflection upon the cause of George II’s demise, brought on from a burst ventricle, detailed in the *History of England*, IV, 410 and expressions of acquiescence towards the theory of miasma observable in the *Grecian History*, I, 116, 224-27.

\(^3\) A. Lytton Sells managed to squeeze in a kind word or two regarding Goldsmith’s *A History of the Earth and Animated Nature* in his biographical work. While — as noted above — lambasting the histories as being nothing more then ‘well-written pot-boilers’, Sells cautiously opined that ‘one may perhaps put in a caveat in favour of An History of Earth and Animated Nature’, as ‘nothing so compendious then existed in English’ and because ‘Goldsmith was genuinely interested in the subject’. See Sell’s *Oliver Goldsmith*, pp. 368-76.

\(^4\) Wardle described *A Survey of Experimental Philosophy* as being just ‘another compilation’ and ‘by far the least successful that Goldsmith ever wrote’. See Wardle’s *Oliver Goldsmith*, p. 287.

\(^5\) For an example of such, see Goldsmith’s reference to Francis Bacon found in the *History of England*, III, 153-55.
new ground to cover in the field of Goldsmith scholarship. It is the ardent wish that this
study has been able to provide a modest, but convincing, step forwards in this direction.
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