"The pleasure of writing is inconceivable": William Hutton (1723-1815) as an Author

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Abstract: William Hutton started life as a child labourer, but rose to become a bookseller, stationer, and wealthy paper merchant. Like many autodidacts, he longed to be an author and published 15 popular books. This article examines Hutton's remarks on 'writing', which reveal his motives, methods, and goals of authorship. It also gauges his impact on the literary marketplace by analysing 65 periodical reviews of his works. Hutton's books were based on personal experience, and mixed memoir and biography with historical, topographical, and travel writing. They suited the nation's thirst for entertaining formats and established him as a new kind of writer, who produced lively, unlearned books for a commercial age. Hutton's breach of polite norms and opinionated style horrified the literary establishment. But they also attracted readers lower down the social scale, who enjoyed irreverent views on political, religious, economic, and social issues. Hutton thus had an impact on two contrasting groups of readers and put Birmingham and northern regions on the national literary map. Together this author and his critics offer a portrait of the evolution of authorship, the spread of knowledge and taste, and the creation of cultural identity in a time of literary change.

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In 1780, William Hutton composed the preface to his first book, *An History of Birmingham.* 'As I am not an author by profession', he wrote*,* 'it is no wonder if I am unacquainted with the modes of authorship' ([1783] v-vi).[1] By his death in 1815, however, Hutton had become a celebrated writer of 15 books.

Hutton assumed that writing was a distinct profession with accepted methods and norms. Yet this did not deter him from plunging into the literary marketplace. Nor would he beg for the 'indulgence of the public'. 'The judicious world', he knew, 'will not be deceived by the tinselled purse, but will examine whether its *contents* are sterling' (ix). Neither would he slavishly follow conventions of town chronicles, but would 'quit the regular trammels of history' (xiv) and offer opinions on topics he enjoyed. He would also write about 'men of mean life', for they were equal to those who served in the senate (xv). 'Every author has a manner peculiar to himself', he insisted. 'Nor can he well forsake it' (xiv).

Hutton's birth into abject poverty and lack of formal education boded ill for a career as an author. Nonetheless, he rose in the world, and became a wealthy bookseller, stationer, and paper merchant through his own hard work. He had suffered

[1] All references are to the 1783 edition (reprint, E. Ardsley: EP Publishing, 1976).

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great hardship as the youngest child labour in a Derby mill. Then he was apprenticed to a Nottingham stockinger, but he hated the drudgery and the frame. In 1749 he settled in Birmingham with a basket of second-hand books as his stock in trade. The town of 24,000 inhabitants was the booming hub of England's metalworking trades. It would soon become the driving force of the nation's industrial revolution.[2]

Birmingham offered Hutton the opportunity to become a wealthy bookseller, paper merchant, and owner of a circulating library. He also held public office and purchased land at cheap prices both inside and out of town. Like many autodidacts, he longed to become an author, and wrote his 15 books late in life. He married and had two children and became heavily involved in local affairs. But in 1791, his shop and house were destroyed in the Priestley riots. Birmingham let him acquire money and status, but its mob snatched them away. Hutton's last years were spent defending his reputation through his many popular writings. 'The predominant features of my life' he claimed, were 'writing poetry, from [ages] 24-29, reading to 56; writing history to 69; and from thence to poetry again' (qtd. in Sumner 105). His greatest accomplishments, wrote his daughter, were the books he composed (BCL MS 168/49). Later, descendants collected his manuscripts and reverently called him 'William Hutton, the Historian'.[3]

Hutton based his books on personal experience, and mixed memoir, poetry, and biography with historical, topographical, and travel writing. They suited the nation's thirst for entertaining formats and useful information, and established him as a new kind of author who produced lively, unlearned books for a commercial age. Yet Hutton's rise to fame complicates the traditional model of authorship that depicts a shift from a literary culture based on patronage to a profession marked by the commodification of writing. Critics including Dustin Griffin, Jody Greene, Mark Rose, Adam Rounce, and Martha Woodmansee have challenged this teleological tale. Nonetheless, their criticisms remained focused on London and conventional types of authors and audiences.

In contrast, Hutton's career opens a window on provincial memoirs, histories, and travelogues penned by self-educated authors writing later in the century, when a mass readership was emerging with new literary needs. Hutton believed that history and literature belonged to everyone, not just to the elite, and his work appealed to an expanding middle-class audience. His promise of self-improvement at low prices was accompanied by interesting accounts of manners, customs, and recreations, as well as broad themes about society that expanded the scope of historical writing. New consumers and powerful periodical reviewers read his work and gave him serious attention.

Still, it was a time of uneasiness between writers, critics, and readers, who were coming to terms with the commercialization of literature. Despite his fame, Hutton could never claim membership in the leisured, literary elite. In their eyes, he was a

[2] Birmingham Central Library (BCL), MS 3166/D/16, Birmingham in 1748 (1898); Benjamin Martin, 'Description of Birmingham in 1759', *General Magazine of Arts & Sciences*, (1759):133-43; W. B. Stephens, ed., *A History of the County of Warwick*, Vol. VII: The City of Birmingham (University of London, 1964).
[3] Documents in the Birmingham Central Library are endorsed with this expression.

perfect example of the dreaded rising author, who might 'encourage the Spirit of writing for Money; which is a Disgrace to the Writer, and to the very Age'.[4]

This article examines Hutton's remarks on 'writing', which reveal his motives, methods, style, and goals. Indeed, Hutton was preoccupied with the concept of authorship and he constantly discussed it in his writings. His impact is assessed by analysing 65 reviews of his books. Hutton's critics were distinctly divided, either admiring or loathing his work. Together this author and his critics offer a portrait of the evolution of authorship, the spread of knowledge and taste, and the creation of cultural identity outside London in a time of social, economic, and political change.

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We can see how Hutton wrote *An History of Birmingham* (1782) by examining his private notebooks, public autobiography, correspondence with publishers, and prefaces to his books. Though there was little in print, Hutton had access to parish, church, and manorial records. His greatest assets were 30 years of town residence, and relationships with aged inhabitants, antiquarians, lawyers, printers, and booksellers. Another advantage was the knowledge he gained running a bookshop and circulating library in the 1750s, though he left them for greener pastures of selling paper and buying land.

Hutton wrote his *History* to publicize the success of Birmingham (and himself). 'To venture into the world as an Author without a previous education', he admitted, 'was a daring attempt'. 'Fearing my ability, I wrote with dread' (*Life* 1998, 65).[5] Yet the *History* reveals a confident writer, who refused to write a dedication or 'polish up a … title-page, dignified with scraps of Latin' (vi). His true dedication was to Birmingham's inhabitants, who fed him when he was hungry, gave him drink when he was thirsty, and accepted him as a stranger (viii). 'It is remarkable', he opined, 'that one of the most singular places in the universe … never manufactured an history of herself, who has manufactured almost everything else' (x).

Hutton's *History* cost 7s. 6d. and contained 280 pages, a town plan, and handsome plates. Though its statistics might err, Hutton produced 'a spirited portrait of a great commercial and industrial town in the most vigorous phase of its growth' (*Oxford DNB*). His style was to mix humour and blunt asides with opinionated digressions about his favourite topics. Instead of noting landed estates, he praised Birmingham's workers, 'who spread our tables and oil the wheels of our carriages' (71). They 'lay a stronger claim to civilization than in any other place' (62). Birmingham was not just a dirty, industrial workplace. Blessed with skilled artisans and entrepreneurs, it was the seat of 'civility' and 'happy abode of the smiling Arts' (63, 153). Hutton proudly chose words to describe his town: 'grand, populous, extensive, active, and humane' (23).

[4] Quoted in Rose (1993) 104. John Dalrymple argued in the House of Lords that perpetual copyright would have this effect upon literature.
[5] All references are to the 1816 edition (reprint, Studley: Brewin Books, 1998).

The *History's* subscribers included 12 members of the nobility, 28 esquires, 11 clergymen, 4 book societies, Overseers of the Poor, the dissenting minister, Joseph Priestley, and the industrialist, Matthew Boulton (BCL MS 3597/42). The second advertisement identified Hutton as the author, and he supervised the corrections and printing (Jewitt 337). Before publication, he supped with a large company at the Bull and Gate. 'Rollason, my bookseller, was there', Hutton recalled, 'and spoke highly of my history'. When Rollason showed the book to Dr. William Withering, a member of Birmingham's august Lunar Society, he called it 'the best topographical history he had ever seen' (*Life* 65).

Rollason acquired the copyright for 75 copies, from which Hutton reaped £40 (*Life* 65). But though his books earned money, he denied he wrote for cash, thus elevating himself above hack writers. 'Authors are of two sorts', he insisted, 'those who write for bread, and those for amusement' (*Scarborough* 7). Then he placed himself in the latter group: 'I never wrote for profit … for the pleasure of writing is inconceivable' (*Life* 142). Actually, Hutton was a well-known miser, who grubbed for money in trade. Still, the exalted pursuit of authorship had to be conducted with dignity, for it ultimately brought the status and respect that he craved.

Hutton's public recognition as an author came suddenly, when he was unexpectedly made a fellow of the Scottish Society of Antiquaries. 'A man may live half a century', he quipped, 'and not be acquainted with his own character. I did not know I was an Antiquary until the world informed me, from reading my History … The Antiquarian Society at Edinburgh chose me a member; and sent me an authority to splice to my name, F.A.S.S.' *(Life* 66*).*

Hutton's ties to the antiquaries reveal the expanding networks between Birmingham and enlightened Scots. But the Scottish Society was overshadowed by the Society of Antiquaries in London, which would never make Hutton a fellow. One of its members, Mark Noble, railed against Hutton's *History*, for his own work on Birmingham was not yet published: 'It is rather a jest book than a piece of topography'. 'The author came … a beggar and [cannot] … spell three words'. [6] Hutton thanked Noble in the *History's* preface for 'generously contributing materials' (Jewitt 341). The two men, nonetheless, remained rivals.

Their enmity reveals tensions between antiquarians and popular historians, which constantly marked reviews of Hutton's work. Indeed, distinctions between authors with different skills and goals were still emerging at this time. One divergence was that untrained writers like Hutton often wrote in an emotional way. Thus he publicly imagined how his *History* would sound to others: 'Pleased as a fond parent, I … had the whole by heart. Frequently … in the night I have repeated it in silence for two or three hours … without … missing a word' (*Life* 65). No antiquarian would reveal such intimate feelings.

Hutton's style clearly reflected his lack of formal education and his need to find a structure for acquiring and interpreting ideas. In short, he wrote the way he learned and

[6] Bodleian Library MS Eng. Lett. B.13, f.150, M. Noble to G. Allen, 18 May 1782.

obtained the books that filled his shop – one volume at a time. The result was a spontaneous and easily accessible prose that embraced the vogue for sentimental writing. Instead of rigorous evidence and high rhetoric, Hutton was more concerned with the impact on the sensibilities of the reader. Though scholars and antiquarians reacted to his style with horror, Hutton's *History* brought status to a man who had none before he mastered literacy. Its five editions, two reissues, and five abridged versions confirmed Hutton's success *(Oxford DNB).*

Contemporary book reviews allow us to assess the *History's* reception. By the 1780s, powerful periodical critics not only publicised books, they tried to impose standards and shape public taste (Donoghue 46-7). In 1785, Hutton anticipated their influence as he walked through London: 'I cannot see any of the monthly reviewers; They are confined to their garrets, like the high priests to their altars, making ready to sacrifice; perhaps, I shall *feel* them' (*Journey to London* 20).

When his *History* appeared, critics praised Hutton's initiative. Still they condescendingly viewed him as a provincial writer of lesser ability than a metropolitan author. The *Monthly Review* admired the 'industry and fidelity' of a man whose residence afforded advantages, which 'a stranger even of superior talents cannot … attain' (67 [1782] 258). 'To the subject of his narrative', added the *Critical Review*, 'he everywhere discovers that laudable attachment, which generally actuates provincial and local historians'. A barb at the end cut the author and his beloved town down to size: 'He sometimes assumes such a pomp of style, as might, perhaps, better suit the ancient splendor of Rome or Athens, than the most flourishing state of Birmingham' (53 [1782] 297-8). The critic expected only inflated views from a history of an industrial town.

Nonetheless, reviewers welcomed a first book on a neglected topic. If the execution was imperfect, that was only to be expected. Yet its errors and disdain for scholarship antagonized educated writers. Professional standards were still developing, and the emergence of authors and readers without classical training had destabilizing effects. Fears about unlearned rivals who wrote for money therefore subtly underpinned reviews.

The *History's* coverage in national journals gave Hutton confidence to write his second book. A summons to give evidence in court led to *A Journey from Birmingham to London* (1785). Hutton's tour of the capital mocked institutions like Westminster Abbey and the British Museum, and addressed authorship in its preface: 'There is not one promise, either in the New Testament, or old, which confers a blessing upon authors … This class of people have done the world more service than any other and are less rewarded … The improvements in knowledge of every kind … is owing to them' (2-3). Hutton publicly endorsed higher status and pay for authors. He was clearly an advocate for the commodification of literature.

From the beginning, reviewers were sharply divided regarding Hutton's 'peculiarities', a term repeatedly used. Learned critics looked for erudition not biased opinion, politeness not singularity, and expected a polished style. Yet what some saw as dangerous provocation, others perceived as wit. Thus the *European Magazine, and*

London Review praised 'the strongest proofs of sound intellect, variegated with frequent effusions of that peculiar humour, by which we have been so entertained in Mr. Hutton's *Journey to London*' (45 [1804] 447). In contrast, the *Critical Review* reacted negatively to that same 'peculiar humour' (60 [1785] 477).

This criticism failed to stop Hutton from writing his next two provocative works: *The Courts of Requests* (1787) and *A Dissertation on Juries* (1789). Though he tried unsuccessfully to become a Justice of the Peace, Hutton served 19 years as a Commissioner of Birmingham's Court of Requests, which recouped debts under 40 shillings. After explaining the new Court's powers and practice, Hutton summarized 99 cases with himself as the central character. Their role was to prove that courts, which stressed equity, were superior to those that operated with juries. Yet Hutton's views challenged accepted legal practices and the morals of his nemesis, William Blackstone.

The *English Review* endorsed Hutton's arguments and commended his public service (14 [1789] 69-70), but the *Analytical Review* and *Monthly Review* attacked him. In defense, he produced a 60-page appendix entitled: *Dissertation on Juries, with a Description of the Hundred Court.* The *Monthly Review* condemned Hutton's savage critique of Blackstone and his own hatred of juries. The latter, Hutton claimed, were 'directed by craving leeches who suck the deepest … blood'. Yet reviewers mistrusted the Courts of Requests and their '*arbitrary determination* by a set of men who may be incapable of deciding on any subject whatever'. Lower-class commissioners were 'sapping the foundation of what, notwithstanding Mr Hutton's Philippic, we are still willing to style that valuable prerogative of Englishmen—a jury' (3 [1790] 435-6). Social and political tensions were increasing in Birmingham. Hutton's confrontational writings inflamed them.

His *Battle of Bosworth Field* (1788) provided a safer subject and went through three editions. Hutton had studied the topic for 18 years and proved it by inserting a list of books he had read. All of them, he claimed, lacked on-the-spot observations (Preface 30). His would be different. Hutton contacted the *New London Magazine* before its review was published, and it soon praised Hutton's book along with his 'eccentricity': He 'is more than an antiquarian—he is an enthusiast on the subject … He has surveyed this favourite object of his researches with an attention, an ardour, and a perseverance, never before displayed by any English historian or antiquary' (4 [1788] 600-1).

The *Critical Review* and *Gentleman's Magazine* also found Hutton '*eccentric*', but they used the term negatively. His arguments lacked evidence, his language was unpleasantly provincial, and his stories were 'low'. Lists of incorrect words and provincialisms proved their points. The zinger was in the final sentence: 'We do not find Mr. H's name in the list of the [London] Society of Antiquaries' (GM 58 [1788] 726-8). 'Mr. Hutton's observations', the *Critical* added, are of such a kind that we need not remark their peculiarity' (CR 66 [1788] 218). Whether 'peculiar' or 'eccentric', these code words revealed displeasure, which subscribers instantly understood. Hostile critics used the fluidness of categories like 'antiquarian', 'historian', or 'author' to thrust Hutton downwards into an inferior ranking. Social and educational background mattered in determining authorial status.

Negative comments also focused on Hutton's emotional writing and heightened sensibility. Yet some readers responded positively, for Hutton's work exemplified a style that would dominate literature in the Romantic era. His determination to express his feelings and speak intimately to his audience was an attraction for some readers and an annoyance for others. Hutton could write no other way and was appealing to new consumers with tastes similar to his own. The catharsis he found in sharing private thoughts was part of the 'inconceivable' (*Life,* 142) pleasure he drew from writing.

Hutton's *A Description of Blackpool* (1789), a developing spa, also attracted three editions. It was the first of many publications that recorded holidays with his family in search of health. Hutton had the foresight to describe emerging developing spas that were 'too young to be noticed at a distance' (29). Instead of measuring archaeological remains, Hutton visited farmers and questioned tourists he met on the road, like a sociologist conducting a survey. Then he presented himself as an accomplished travel writer, who had seen what others had not yet discovered. 'Wherever the people in high life take the lead', he pronounced, 'the next class eagerly follow[s]' (2).

Hutton was the first to record the foibles of Blackpool's northern holidaymakers and the boarding houses in which they lodged (49-51). His travelogues thus encouraged middle-class tourism and highlighted the nation's changing social structure. Some critics responded with snobbish remarks. Yet *Blackpool's* three editions demonstrated readers' enjoyment and changes in literary taste.

In his *History of Derby* (1791), Hutton returned to the model of his first book based on intimate knowledge of the town of his birth where he was a child labourer in Thomas Lombe's silk mill. He dedicated it to Derby's Mayor Francis Ashby, and asked John Nichols, a key London bookseller, to become his next publisher (W. Hutton to J. Nichols, 3 Oct. 1789). Hutton was developing new views on historical writing. 'No topographical history can be complete till its detached parts are investigated', he insisted. 'This task is the most likely to be correct when performed by a resident'. Hutton declared two prime requisites for a historian: 'The assiduity in collecting materials [and] selecting them with judgment'; and the ability to write 'in a pleasingly manner' (v-vi).

Hutton was fascinated with the author James Pilkington's *The Present State of Derbyshire* (1789), written 'in a manner perfectly new'. 'I have made free with many passages', Hutton confessed, 'without directing the Reader to the source whence I drew them, that I might not break the line of his attention, by removing his eye to the margin'. 'Had his production seen the light a little sooner', he claimed, 'mine would forever have been hid'. In truth, Hutton's book 'was too far advanced, for the pride of an Author, to be given up to destruction' (vii-viii).

Today we would call this plagiarism, but, previously, literary borrowing was routine. Legal decisions about copyright, however, had recently expanded authors' property rights.[7] Hutton therefore decided to publicly acknowledge his debt to Pilkington. Codes of conduct that involved writing for money were still developing. Simultaneously, authors like Hutton were trying to write 'delightfully' in a more easily

[7] For example, Donaldson v. Beckett (1774).

understood prose. Anxieties caused by this competitive situation may be sensed in some negative periodical reviews.

Thus, the *Literary Magazine and British Review* questioned Hutton's status as a historian. His evidence was speculative and his style unpolished; even worse, he attacked the Anglican Church for punishing nonconformists. 'A powerful church is a powerful oppressor,' Hutton wrote, and called 'that ignorant doctor, Ralph Barns, bishop of Litchfield and Coventry' a 'bigot' (7 [1791] 216, 219). Unfortunately, Birmingham's churchmen were also angered, along with the reviewers.

Hutton's *Derby* appeared during the same year as the Priestley Riots, when a mob destroyed the property of Birmingham's leading dissenters, including that of Hutton. Yet his confrontational writings and smug views of authorship are rarely seen as causes of his victimization. When they are placed alongside his wealth and his religious and political views, we see book reviewers were not Hutton's only critics. In fact, authorship brought Hutton personal persecution as well as literary fame.

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Thus ended the first half of Hutton's belated writing career. After the riots, he closed his books and vowed never to enter public life again. But the joys of authorship were too exquisite for him to cease forever. 'As an active mind, condemned to silence, becomes a burthen to itself', he noted, 'I took up the poetical pen' (*Edgar and Elfrida* preface). *The Barbers: or, the Road to Riches* (1793) was followed by *Edgar and Elfrida: Or the Power of Beauty* (1794) and *Poems, Chiefly Tales* (1804). More poems appeared in periodicals;[8] others in his books. Still more were indexed in an unpublished notebook (BCL MS 3408). Hutton fearlessly wrote across many genres in both poetry and prose.

The Barbers, a 34-page octavo pamphlet, cost 1s.[9] Hutton asked Nichols 'for 20 or 30 copies for friends'; if the poem did not sell, he would repay him (W. Hutton to J. Nichols, 19 Apr. 1793). Its subtitle publicized Hutton's own career and social mobility: *'The modes of Poverty despising, we'll comment upon those of rising'.* Hutton wrote glowingly about authorship as a profession:

> Should authorship engage your skill,
> The trump of fame awaits your will.
> Your essays, odes, our pocket fleeces,
> You cut the critics all to pieces,
> Your pen producing sterling pages
> Perpetuates your name for ages.
> For writing gives you room to hope
> To rise like Churchill, Pindar, and Pope (Qtd. in Jewitt 379). [10]

[8] See indexes to the *Gentleman's Magazine.*
[9] It appears 'almost entire' in Jewitt, 378-89.
[10] Hutton is referring to Charles Churchill and John Wolcot (Peter Pindar) who are now neglected authors.

Though Hutton compared himself to successful authors, the *Monthly Review* was savage: 'A slattern has had the assurance to impose herself on Mr. Hutton for one of the celestial NINE! inducing him to believe that … the doggerel of *Hudibras* will succeed without Butler's original and witty conceptions … He must allow us to caution him against a similar mistake in future' (14[1794] 348).

Yet Hutton immediately published his 62-page *Edgar and Elfrida.* It described the downfall of King Edgar's evil minister, who treacherously took Elfrida for his wife, instead of giving her to the King.[11] There is no record that any one read it, and no reviews exist.

Hutton waited ten years for Nichols to publish *Poems, Chiefly Tales* (1804) for the copyright and 10-20 guineas (W. Hutton to J. Nichols, 27 Sept. 1799). Hutton sent instructions for the size and position of letters in each line: 'A crowded print is forbidding to a reader. We must try to invite him' (W. Hutton to J. Nichols, 2 May 1804). He would pen no sublime odes that only authors could understand: 'My poems, like myself, are in the stile of the last generation … If the modern flowers of rhetoric do not flourish here, I have substituted something preferable—*Truth'* (*Poems* preface).

Even Hutton's adoring biographer admitted: 'As a poet, Hutton does not shine very brilliantly' (Jewitt 422). 'There are some good lines in them', his daughter, Catherine confessed, 'but my father was not a poet' (Catherine Hutton to J. Bowyer Nichols, 9 Aug. 1817). 'After much yawning, many sour faces and several attacks of nausea', fumed *The Poetical Register: and Repository of Fugitive Poetry,* 'we arrived at the end of this formidable octavo in a state of weariness truly pitiable. We had rather try one of the labours of Hercules than encounter such another book' (4 [1806] 486).

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Ever a realist, Hutton quickly changed course. He saw that travel writing, in which he excelled, accomplished several goals. It neatly paid expenses, while he and Catherine enjoyed themselves and satisfied public demand. Four tales of journeys to Hadrian's Wall, North Wales, Scarborough, and Coatham (1802-10) made him a celebrated author.

The History of the Roman Wall (1802), cost 7s and underwent three octavo editions. Hutton insisted on illustrations, for the purchaser should have pictures for his money (W. Hutton to J. Nichols, 6 Oct. 1801). The engravings, mileage chart, and 8-page index showed the commercial eye of an author wooing a middle-class audience. After consulting books by Camden, Horsley, and Warburton, Hutton claimed he was the first author to travel the wall's length. At age 78, he walked 600 miles in summer heat in the same pair of shoes (x, xli). With a book in hand and 'an ink bottle at my bosom', some thought him an excise man; others a rent collector (157).

> I was dressed in black, a kind of religious travelling warrant … and had a budget of the same colour … much like a …postman's letter-pouch in which were deposited the maps of Cumberland, Northumberland, and the

[11] Hutton based it on a story by William Mason (1724-97).

> Wall … taken out of Gough's edition of the *Britannia*; also Warburton's map of the Wall, with my own remarks etc. To this little pocket I fastened with a strap, an umbrella in a green case (108-9).

Hutton wanted 'to prove that the nation's history belonged to everyone…not just those who chose to lock it up in impenetrable prose and Latin quotations' (Sweet, 313-4). Thus he presented the wall in terms of his personal experience, 'as something living rather than dead'. Dazzled by the wall at night, for example, he was 'unable to proceed; forgot I was upon a wild common, a stranger, and the evening approaching. I had the grandest works under my eye, of the greatest men of the age in which they lived' (*Wall* 200-1). He told the wall's story like a gothic novel filled with 'every species of cruelty that one man can practice to another' (4). Hutton presented himself as a wise, modern observer exposing past savagery.

'The entertaining, interesting, and novel manner, which this worthy veteran author adopts in his topographical writing, must be pleasing to almost every class of readers', wrote the *Annual Review*. It followed his journey 'with sympathy', and shuddered at his view of degraded human nature (1[1802] 468-71). Hutton thus achieved his goal of forging empathetic links with readers and contrasting past barbarism with his own improved age.

Remarks upon North Wales being the Result of Sixteen Tours … (1803) contained maps, index, and folding plates of the forms of Wales's mountains. Hutton had devised a popular way to offer history and literature by inventing his own patchwork genre. It mixed archaeology and antiquarianism, with personal diatribes, original poems, and old tales, some of which he researched, while others were told to him on the road. There was no attempt to unite his colourful impressions; his mission was to entertain. As narrator, Hutton, was comfortable in every situation, always practical, pleased with himself, and never afraid.

'There appears no difference between the gentry of Wales and those of England', he joked. 'Except that the former may have a little more pride, and a little more poverty; and the lower class, a little less knowledge, less poverty, and more hospitality' (12). This example shows how Hutton satirized both countries in a jovial way that took away the sting. Interested in social mores and manners, he used Wales' backwardness to highlight his own region's progress.

Hutton also created magical sights, like the view from Mount Snowdon. He made readers feel what it was like to 'have got above the world' and experience wonder, grandeur, and terror (152-4). His motto for every tour enthroned the senses: 'I would have you travel with me, though by your own fire-side; would have you see, and feel, as I do; and make the journey influence your passions, as mine are influenced' (vii).

The *Monthly Review* enjoyed Hutton's stories. His account atop Snowdon displayed 'an animation which many accomplished men of letters would attempt in vain to equal' (53 [1807] 314). Yet the *Annual Review* found *North Wales* lacked fresh information. 'New books', they insisted, 'should develope something useful, interesting or

entertaining, otherwise the purchaser is not only robbed of his time, but of his purchase money' (2 [1803] 417).

This division in critics' reactions continued with Hutton's *The Scarborough Tour in 1803* (1804). Hutton believed the author as traveler should record the minutiae of everyday life: 'Great incidents are easily told … But if that subject be small, he must, like the bee, possess the art of drawing sweetness from the meanest flower' (9-10). *Scarborough's* index shows his attention to commonplace topics with entries for debtors, coachmen, epitaphs, harmony, and 'hints on authorship' (308-13). Hutton also mocked reviewers, who merely read prefaces, then found nothing useful in a book (5-7).

Despite the repetitive re-packaging of earlier travelogues, the *European Magazine* praised Hutton's intellect and enjoyed his 'peculiar humour' (45 [1804] 447). *The Annual Review*, however, angrily disagreed: Hutton 'commits every idea to paper … exactly as they flow from his pen without attending to such things as grammar, perspicuity, or even propriety … To be under the necessity of reading such books as this, is among the most painful tasks of our occupation' (3 [1804] 381) .

For the Tory *British Critic*, grammatical problems paled beside Hutton's attacks against religion (23 [1804] 569). His claim that 'the Christian system has, perhaps, done more mischief than all the religions in the universe' (4 [1805]181) also drew protest from the *Imperial Review*. Though Hutton urged tolerance, he showed disrespect for Church and King at a time of high political tension. His skepticism of all creeds is evident in his writings.

Hutton's final travelogue, *A Trip to Coatham: A Watering Place in the North Extremity of Yorkshire* (1810) offered a 7-page index, 5 plates, Hutton's journey overlaid on Jeffreys's map of Yorkshire, and a list of his previous publications. His son advised printing some quarto volumes with large margins 'to suit the Library of Gentlemen' (W. Hutton to John Nichols, [1810]). But Hutton would rather please the many than the few and sell more books.

The *European Magazine* did 'not discern … the slightest symptom of [Hutton's] decaying intellect (57 [1810] 378), whilst the *Lady's Magazine* published long extracts (42 [1811] 20-2). Even the *British Critic* forgave the 'venerable writer' (36 [1811] 90). Later publications credited Hutton with introducing the small northern spa to the world (Gentleman's Magazine [1849] 176). Hutton's books let readers watch people like themselves in boarding houses where the polite would never tread. Just as Samuel Richardson taught people 'how to think and act' at mid-century, Hutton served as a guide for later middle-class readers.[12]

The Life of William Hutton, F.A.S.S … (1816), a posthumous autobiography, was a guide on how to travel the everyday roads of life. It included *'A Particular Account of the Riots at Birmingham … to which is subjoined the History of His Family, written by himself, and published by his daughter, Catherine Hutton'*. The simultaneous publication of three narratives was a brilliant device. First, Hutton's life drama was re-enacted with himself

[12] [Samuel Richardson]. *Letters Written to and for Particular Friends, on the Most Important Occasions* (1741): Preface, A2v

as the central actor. Then, the riots were described from *his* viewpoint. He was thus able to defend his reputation, which had been tarnished by the riots. Finally, seven generations of Hutton's family history were presented in a format similar to genealogies of landed dynasties. These three tales were his badge of hard-won authorship.

Hutton again discussed authors and defended his use of the first person 'I'. He would have disagreed with Michel Foucault, who questioned the role of the intentional author.[13] Though Hutton pledged 'no manoeuvres' (xxv), he adroitly led readers to expect the unvarnished truth. Then he chronicled the stages of his roller-coaster life in the form of a yearly journal. We see him rise from child labourer to apprentice stockinger, then from bookseller to paper merchant. The abrupt climb levels off and becomes richly-textured as Hutton enters politics and buys land. Finally, he stands atop his man-made mountain and falls to life's lowest depths. In his last years, he used his authorship and celebrity to publicly tell his story in his 'peculiar' voice. [14]

The text beneath his own name in his family history conveyed satisfaction: 'My life differs materially from the lives of my ancestors, --as rising to greater elevation … and being an Author have brought me to the public stage' (196). Hutton's longing for status, authority, and respect strongly motivated him to write books.

Reviewers of Hutton's *Life* praised his Herculean achievements. The *Monthly Review* compared it to earlier autobiographies from Saint Augustine to Gibbon. Previously, life-writing lacked practicality, but Hutton's served 'as a light-house of direction, as a spur to emulation, as a cordial against despondence'. 'This peculiar specimen of biography … will amuse those classes … engaged in commercial pursuits … who can follow with steady interest the gradual footsteps of a climbing prosperity' (82 [1817] 203, 208). Fears that 'peculiar' authors would encourage dreams of social mobility were fulfilled in this review. Even the *Asiatic Journal & Monthly Register for British Residents* (1816) announced the publication of Hutton's *Life* (1 [1816] 578).

'As a model of biographical composition in the form of a journal, it is not exceeded even by the … memoir of Ben Franklin', wrote the *New Monthly Magazine* (6 [1816] 51). *The Monthly magazine, or, British register* deemed it 'one of the most instructive pieces of Biography, for the use of the lower and middle classes, which exists in our language'. 'Its simplicity, artlessness, and humility, may offend the pedant, or man of fashion', but new readers would experience 'heartfelt pleasure' (42 [1817] 628-9).

Hutton's *Life* 'ought to obtain a place next to the Memoirs of Dr. Franklin', said the *Edinburgh Magazine,* 'in the libraries of all aspiring young men who are entering upon business, or active life'. 'If they find nothing very elegant in the composition of these volumes …or very great and striking in the incidents themselves, --they will be pleased and edified by the truth …that 'honesty, economy, and perseverance' can achieve 'independence and respectability' (1 [1817] 413). Long before Samuel Smiles' *Self Help*

[13] Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', *Partisan Review*, 42 (1975): 603-14.
[14] See James Amelang. *The Flight of Icarus: Artisan Autobiography in Early Modern Europe*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998.

(1859), Hutton showed that a person of low origin and inferior education could write books, sell history, and prove himself as an author.

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To conclude, Hutton's writings had an influence on the diffusion of knowledge and taste. Like other autodidacts he used his literacy as a foundation for a career based on reading and writing. Though his style was crude and stressed entertainment, Hutton informed and inspired others. Even so, he has not been recognized as a new kind of author. Earlier historians emphasized classical forms and elite politics. But Hutton used his knowledge of *all* ranks to produce commercially-centred histories for a trading nation. Since he understood human nature and economic drives, he brought David Hume and Adam Smith down to the level of unlearned readers. He personifies a shift in history-writing that expanded its scope to social life and commerce in an age of sensibility. Unsurprisingly, he owned Hume's *Essays,* William Robertson's *History of Scotland*, and sentimental works by Tobias Smollett, Lawrence Sterne, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (BCL MS 331070, ff.16-30).

Hutton's longing to become a writer was a cornerstone of his life. He wished to describe the economic and social development of Britain, and his writings reminded readers that the country was changing. He walked hundreds of miles in developing areas recording unknown social mores of the middling- and lower-classes in far-flung towns, spas, and villages. His travelogues depicted a changing social structure, far from London, as seen through the eyes of a keen observer. His readers were thus able to observe the socio-economic forces that were sweeping over the nation.

Naturally, anxieties rose as authors entered the literary marketplace without education or social status, yet ready to write for money. Critics bemoaned low standards, but untrained writers still attracted new readers. Backed by powerful periodicals, their accessible prose led to alternate yardsticks of literary taste.

This shift was in keeping with the innovative industry and technology that transformed eighteenth-century Birmingham. Born at the confluence of the industrial revolution and provincial enlightenment, Hutton witnessed how they were intertwined with each other. The result was a new cultural identity for readers outside London, hidden under the layers of polite society. Hutton's writing exposed a provincial literary world that was tied to the capital's publishers and periodicals. He also helped to put regional writing on the national literary map.

Hutton's wealth enabled him to declare that he did not write for money. Yet his self-education and life-time of hoarding riches meant that he could never be mistaken for a leisured literary gentleman. His life and letters reveal shifting modes of authorship and cultural change in eighteenth-century Britain.

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