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## Public Reading and Lyric Pleasure: Eighteenth Century Elocutionary Debates and Poetic Practices

Jacqueline George

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# PUBLIC READING AND LYRIC PLEASURE: EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ELOCUTIONARY DEBATES AND POETIC PRACTICES

BY JACQUELINE GEORGE

## I.

Awaiting the birth of his son, during the suspension of a heated debate over engineering, the father of the eponymous hero of *Tristram Shandy* decides to pass the time by reading. As he, his brother Toby, Corporal Trim and Dr. Slop have “nothing better to do,” he bids Trim—a seasoned orator—to recite a sermon on the “abuses of conscience”:

Corporal Trim laid his hand upon his heart, and made a humble bow to his Master;—then laying down his hat upon the floor, and taking up the sermon in his left hand, in order to have his right at liberty,—he advanced, nothing doubting, into the middle of the room, where he could best see, and be best seen by, his audience.<sup>1</sup>

Sterne sets this scene of reading in order to send it up, his narrator describing at length the stature of Trim’s body, bent forwards at “an angle of 85 degrees and a half upon the plain of the horizon,” and his countenance: “frank,—unconstrained,—something assured,—but not bordering upon assurance.”<sup>2</sup>

Yet for all its farcical features, Sterne’s description of this public oration sheds light on the multiple manifestations of the late-eighteenth-century reading subject, each of which holds a particular orientation to the text. The illustration accompanying this scene is rooted in contemporary elocutionary treatises, showing Trim standing, fully exposed, in the middle of the room. Shandy’s father and Toby sit by the fireplace smoking pipes, the former looking at Trim and the latter looking away. And Dr. Slop sits slumped in a nearby chair, his eyes staring over his rotund chest and focused, seemingly, on Trim’s feet. As this illustration makes clear, the readers and listeners in public scenes of reading encountered the text from positions that were separate and disparate. At the same time, these positions are interchangeable; one person

could occupy multiple positions in relation to a text, encountering it in numerous (and sometimes oppositional or contradictory) forms. In this essay, I will make clear these multiple roles and locations by demonstrating how, in late-eighteenth-century Britain, public reading called into question the notion of a unitary entity called the reader by distributing reading among several different roles.<sup>3</sup> These roles were quite fluid and, when put into the context of the private scene of reading, could be present within a single person.<sup>4</sup>

Public reading combined elements of the theater with social decorum, creating multiple reading roles, each with its own conventions of performance. A reader of scripture would have delivered his text differently from, say, a father reading to his family, yet all readers were charged with delivering their texts in ways that would be most appropriate and useful to their audiences. At the same time, the experience of public reading required an appearance of authenticity; readers were charged with reading convincingly as well as correctly, conveying veracity even as they followed rules of correct speech. By formally cultivating this kind of double consciousness, in which readers performed naturalness, the elocutionary movement did more than just regulate the oral delivery of texts; it also fashioned readers who, in private, would be fully prepared to engage in the imaginative arena of lyric poetry.

That is to say, private reading in the eighteenth century was not so much the opposite of public reading as a corollary of it—an imaginative arena in which readers were made aware of their intellectual orientation to the text at hand and in which they found pleasure in this awareness. Using Charlotte Smith's widely popular *Elegiac Sonnets* as an example, I will illustrate how a method of reading that makes readers conscious of their multiple orientations to the text works in tandem with lyric poetry, a genre that both demands and rewards the kind of reading that can be developed via participation in the scene of public reading. Smith's work is a particularly appropriate illustration of the ways in which lyric rewards self-conscious reading because the fragmented persona that Smith creates for herself in *Elegiac Sonnets* mirrors the fragmentation of the eighteenth-century reader into multiple identities, each with a different relation to her poetry. Smith constructed a poetic persona out of her actual life, and in doing so occupied the roles of both author and character. Readers, too, could engage with Smith's text by combining their personal responses to the poetry with an awareness of the choices they make as readers. They can respond emotionally to Smith's work while acting, consciously

and necessarily, in a way specific to it, a phenomenon that I will call readers' "self-conscious participation" in Smith's text.

## II.

Critical work by Patricia Michaelson, James Raven, and Peter DeBolla has dispelled the myth that the dominant model of reading in eighteenth-century Britain was that of the silent, solitary reader.<sup>5</sup> On the contrary, a growing dissatisfaction with the quality of church services engendered an elocutionary movement that would redefine rhetoric and come to popularize all kinds of public speaking, reading, and the teaching of reading.<sup>6</sup> This movement distinguished itself by breaking from Cicero's classical system of rhetoric, a system defined by an integral wholeness of oration, made up five major procedures—*inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, *memoria*, and *pronuntiatio*—that cover both the development of discourse and its delivery. Proponents of the British elocutionary movement, however, began to associate rhetoric solely with delivery, dropping its ancient affiliation with style, disposition, and invention.<sup>7</sup>

Elocutionary proponents selected the term "elocution" in order to indicate their revision of classical terms.<sup>8</sup> By redefining elocution to signify the equivalent of Cicero's *pronuntiatio* and its sub-category, *actio*, the elocutionists indicated in bold strokes that, when it comes to speaking, "manner and matter can be separated."<sup>9</sup> For the elocutionists, persuasion was most effectively achieved by the expression of emotion, as opposed to mere language. Because the elocutionists, unlike the Ciceronians, did not compose that which they read, their efforts were completely concentrated on the art of verbal delivery; they strove to convince others to believe in the authenticity of their speech purely by the way they uttered it. In this way, the elocutionists advocated a method of speaking that differs somewhat from more classical notions of oratory, which focuses on ethos, logos, and pathos. The elocutionists educated readers in a kind of speech whose goal was primarily to persuade listeners that speakers really believed what they said not through character or language but through delivery alone. A convincing delivery, the elocutionists argued, would compel listeners to feel the same way the speaker appears to feel and, by extension, believe that what he said was true.

By restricting the art of oratory to the delivery of others' texts, the elocutionists fashioned the public speaker as, fundamentally, a reader, charged with delivering language in a persuasive manner. To

instruct others in the art of reading, then, meant that the elocutionists needed to articulate a relationship between person and text. Since they relinquished their control of the text by ignoring composition, the elocutionists could only speak about this relationship in terms of the reader, or vehicle of delivery. The reader must be at once self-consciously constructed and perfectly natural, adhering to the proper rules for reading—pronunciation, pitch, pauses, gestures—without revealing his reading to be a performance as such. This does not mean, however, that the elocutionists were completely unconcerned with texts. Any deficiency in skill or impression of affectation, the elocutionists argued, would ultimately compromise the text, for the text depends upon the reader for its existence and for its transmission: “the Art of Reading consists in conveying to the Hearer the whole meaning of the Writer . . . converting Writing into Speech, the Relation which the living Voice bears to the dead Letter.”<sup>10</sup> The reader, first and foremost, must do justice to the writer and to the content of the text.

One arena where the stakes of delivery were high was in the church, and the rise of the elocutionary movement is traditionally attributed, in part, to the state of religious services of the Church of England in the eighteenth century. In particular, elocutionists sought to address a marked deficiency in the clergy’s ability to deliver the liturgy with persuasiveness and enthusiasm.<sup>11</sup> Because services “consisted so much more basically in readings from the *Book of Common Prayer*, than of original preachings and exhortations,” Wilbur Howell argues, “the theory of *pronuntiatio* in ancient rhetoric began to seem especially pertinent to the early training of English pulpit orators.”<sup>12</sup> Actor-turned-elocutionist Thomas Sheridan advocated a systematized method for the delivery of the church service in his inaugural tract, *British Education* (first published in 1756):

The church service, according as it is either well or ill administered, must excite great emotions, or set people to sleep; it must give delight, or occasion disgust; it must carry conviction of truth with it, or appear fictitious. And indeed nothing can contribute more strongly to make the latter opinion prevail, than hearing its doctrines delivered in tones and accents quite foreign from nature and truth.<sup>13</sup>

The church service must be read with conviction and style if it is to stir parishioners and awaken in them a spirit of religious faith. For Sheridan, persuasion stems not so much from the word of God as from the delivery of the word; truth becomes contingent on performance. The aim of the clergyman is to create an impression that gives “delight”

to his parishioners, convinces them of the strength of his convictions, and keeps them awake. This, the elocutionists believed, was the way to ultimately rekindle religious devotion in the hearts of British citizens who were put off by clergymen whose dull delivery made unfavorable impressions upon their parishioners' sensibilities.<sup>14</sup>

Because persuasion was such a matter of outward appearances, the efforts of the elocutionary movement—the inauguration of which is traditionally attributed to John Mason's *Essay on Elocution* (1748)—were concentrated on voice:

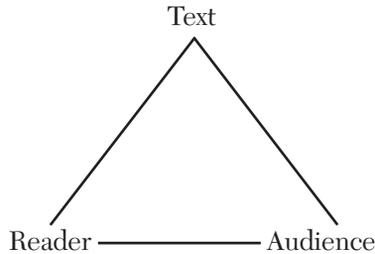
By *Pronunciation*, the Antients understood both *Elocution* and *Action*; and comprehended it in the right Management of the Voice, Looks, and Gesture. To the former of these the present Essay is chiefly confined; *viz.* The right Management of the Voice in reading or speaking; which is differently called by us, *Elocution* and *Pronunciation*.<sup>15</sup>

While Mason's initial concern was with voice, the elocutionists who followed in his wake eventually turned their concern to the use of gesture as well (a skill in which the English were believed to be especially lacking). In his *Elements of Elocution*, John Walker identified gesture as “the language of nature in the strictest sense,” and laments that the “force of custom” in Britain has made it such that “we find few . . . that are hardy enough to put in practice.”<sup>16</sup> Because elocutionists needed to eradicate the customary reserve of Englishmen in order to transform them into eloquent performers of language, their treatises consistently emphasize the appearance of the reader.

Although the elocutionists began their enterprise in the church, the movement eventually “sought to intervene at every juncture in the life of the public,” affecting the character of the British reader more generally.<sup>17</sup> Because of the elocutionists' understanding of elocution as a visible mark of British character, a good deal of their work was designed to improve the manner in which public affairs were conducted, and elocution became an art to be learned by other public speakers such as politicians and barristers.<sup>18</sup> Gilbert Austin's *Chironomia* (1806), for example, contains an entire chapter devoted to reading's different forms within the context of the public sphere. “Intelligible” reading, with its “good articulation, proper attention to pauses, and accents, and sufficient effort of voice to render [the reader] audible,” is a necessarily skill for public clerks and others engaged in “humble literary employments.” “Impressive” reading, on the other hand, is necessary for the delivery of scripture and the liturgy, requiring “expression of countenance, direction of the eye, variety of manners as to the rapidity

of delivery, and rhetorical pauses.” Sermons, eulogies, and the solicitation of alms, however, require “rhetorical” reading, which adds to the qualities of impressive reading “such a degree of acquaintance with a subject as that it shall be nearly committed to memory, and that it be also accompanied with gesture to a certain degree, and more decided expression of the eyes and countenance.”<sup>19</sup>

Austin’s treatise demonstrates how, for the elocutionists, different skills were required for different reading tasks; but in every case of public reading, we can identify a basic triangular structure:

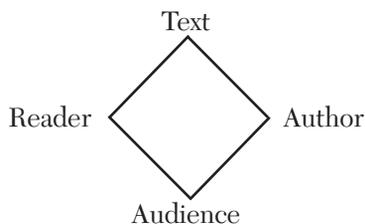


Whether the text is an edict or a liturgy, the reader is charged with delivering it in the way that will serve his audience best.<sup>20</sup> In all cases reading is a performance in which the reader must be aware of the relationships between himself, the text, and his audience, and fashion himself accordingly.

This exercise becomes more complicated, however, when readers engage with fiction and poetry—texts that are clearly composed by others, and as such require a distinct imaginative leap on the part of listeners to consider what is read as the subjective effusion of the reader. This was precisely the situation when literature began to be read aloud in public and at home. As elocution began to be taught in schools, the tenets of the elocutionary movement began to make their way into the home via schoolbooks. In particular, elocutionary theories were incorporated into lessons on the *belles lettres*, believed to be the best material upon which students could practice natural speech.<sup>21</sup> This generic shift created new relations between reader and listener. In the case of reading literature aloud at home (what I will call domestic public reading), reading is not so much about information to be conveyed or truth to be proven but instead about entertainment. In the reading of literature, the domestic public reader is charged with making “the Words and Sentiments of the Writer his own” and with persuading an audience to imagine that the reader is the source from which the

text comes.<sup>22</sup> In the reading of literature, the audience's feelings are paramount; listeners' enjoyment stems from a sympathetic response to the reader and about feeling for him as an embodiment of the text and ultimately of the author whose text he recites.

When we direct our attention to scene of reading literature specifically, the elocutionists' emphasis on delivery raises an important question: if the words that a reader recites are not his own, and his energies in reading are concentrated on delivery, then what is the relationship, exactly, between reader and text? For in the public reading of literature the reader recites not his own words (as in Ciceronian rhetoric), nor the word of God (which a clergyman would deliver as a truth of which he is personally convinced), but the words and sentiments of others—even fictional characters—with which he may hold little, if any, affinity or sympathy.<sup>23</sup> Because the reader is clearly distanced from that which he recites, the triangular structure I illustrated earlier changes somewhat in the reading of literature. Here, the reader does not so much perform the text but performs himself as the originator of the text:



In the reading of literature, the audience realizes from the start that the reader and the author are two separate people. At the same time, the reader seeks, in Rice's words, to "enter into the Spirit" of the author, even though the experiences described and the words used to describe them are not actually the reader's own.<sup>24</sup> Because of the presence of the author, the notion of persuasion in the art of reading literature is more about emotion and imagination than truth. The success of the public reader of literature relies on a blending of feeling and reason that is more akin to the theater than the church, and requires imaginative work on the part of an increasingly participatory audience.

### III.

At first glance, the project of Sheridan and the other elocutionists who advocated elocutionary education seems to be to create a broad, autonomous group of men, all schooled in the proper mode of delivery. Theirs is a revolution predicated on a uniform set of rules laid down by experts. It is important to note, however, that despite Sheridan's emphasis on elocutionary instruction, he was actually quite skeptical of the notion that a system of rules could successfully be devised that would teach the correct method of reading. The best means of instruction, he argued, consisted of imitation and practice, and necessitated the live presence of teachers devoted to instructing their pupils:

Practical rules differ much from those which are merely speculative; nor will informing the understanding in some cases, by any means produce right execution, without other assistance. Can any one be taught to sing, or to dance, without the aid of masters, and patterns, for imitation? Why should we suppose then, that the use of regular tones and gesture, which are of the same nature, and founded upon the same principles, can be acquired in any other way?<sup>25</sup>

The problem, as Sheridan viewed it, was that such "masters" were not yet available for imitation, and so his plans for ideal instruction were not yet feasible. This creates a conundrum for Sheridan, for in order to train qualified teachers a system of rules must be devised.<sup>26</sup>

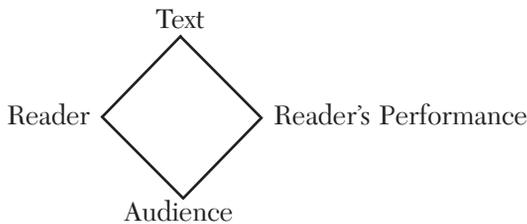
This dilemma marks both the idealism of the elocutionary movement and its central paradox. For as Sheridan and his fellow elocutionists sought to create an ideal speaker by restoring "a natural manner of delivery," they began to realize that such naturalness would need to be codified in order for the movement to get off the ground.<sup>27</sup> In endeavoring to find a way to teach naturalness, however, the elocutionists inevitably taught a kind of artifice—an acquiescence whose ramifications, we will see, become most visible in the elocutionists' anxiety about the emotional state of the reader, his relationship to the texts he reads, and, ultimately, the effects of this systematized naturalness on audiences.

In order to appear less artificial, some elocutionists—a group Shortland identifies as the "natural school"—subordinated rules of pronunciation and emphasis to an overall prescription that the orator must believe what he or she says in order to stave off any appearance of affectation. Yet as Shortland rightly points out, and as we have already seen in Sheridan's dilemma over practical precepts in *British*

*Education*, “the defining features of the ‘natural’ school of elocution include a general reluctance to establish regulations which would permit good delivery to occur.”<sup>28</sup> A “natural” approach obviates the kind of nationalistic homogenization behind the efforts of Sheridan and others: How can there be a standard when everyone is just speaking in what he believes to be a natural manner?

The elocutionists’ response to this dilemma was for speakers to achieve a balance between a natural embodiment of the text and an artificial, over-regulated recitation of it. Many counseled speakers to create the pretence of a natural delivery, using the natural pose more as a theatrical mannerism than an actual manifestation of feeling.<sup>29</sup> This became the dominant approach taken by the elocutionists, and reading became an imitative art: “it is sufficient, that the Reader recite what is written in such a Manner, that the Auditors, at the Time of Hearing, might conceive it then first spoken by the Person reciting; or at least in such a Manner as the Person, first speaking it, would naturally have uttered it.”<sup>30</sup> Thus matters of reading became matters of performance, as readers were counseled not to experience the language they recite as if it were their own but to act it as such.

While this method was applicable to all kinds of speaking, it becomes especially pertinent to reading literature, where the division between reader and text is most apparent. Thus the elocutionists recognized a distinction not only between reader and author, but between reader and his performance:



In this case, the fourth element in the public scene of reading is not so much the author as it is the reader’s performance of the author. The author drops out of the picture, becoming an abstract ideal in the reader’s mind—one that he will attempt to emulate but which is not actually present.

Walker’s *Elements of Elocution* articulates the approach taken by the natural school, and its instructions for reading demonstrate how the elocutionists treated naturalness as theatrical mannerism. Walker’s

volume presents instructions for the modulation of voice and the employment of gestures while reading, incorporating passages from William Shakespeare designed to illustrate each precept. While the first portion of the text includes general matter on the definition of elocution and the articulation of words, the latter chapters are devoted to the delivery of certain emotions, such as love, pity, hope, and hatred. Walker explains that his work is “an attempt to reduce the whole doctrine of rhetorical punctuation to a few plain simple principles, which may enable the reader, in some measure, to point for himself.”<sup>31</sup> Unlike Sheridan, who advocated the tutelage of live instructors, Walker attempts to encapsulate the basic rules of delivery in one ambitious volume:

When we read to a few persons only in private, . . . we should accustom ourselves to read standing; that the book should be held in the left hand; that we should take our eyes as often as possible from the book, and direct them to those that hear us. . . . When anything sublime, lofty, or heavenly, is expressed, the eye and the right hand may be very properly elevated; and when anything low, inferiour, or groveling is referred to, the eye and hand may be directed downwards: when anything distant or extensive is mentioned, the hand may naturally describe the distance or extent; and when conscious virtue, or any heartfelt emotion, or tender sentiment occurs, we may as naturally clap the right hand on the breast, exactly over the heart.<sup>32</sup>

*Tristram Shandy's* Corporal Trim is an embodiment of Walker's directions, encapsulating both Walker's precision and absurdity. By relying on clichés, Walker attempts to direct readers into a natural, recognizable pose, but this results in a semblance of naturalness that appears phony.

Walker seems to be aware of this contradiction, and attempts to account for his method by arguing that the alternative—just acting according to what one feels at the time—is not practical, since the job of the reader is to convey the sense of the author, and to never compromise the integrity of the text. And because one cannot simply call up a feeling at one's whim, one runs the risk of misrepresenting the text. (What happens, for example, when a poem calls for sadness, and the reader is not sad?) Instead, Walker argues, readers must acquire the skills necessary to convey those passions that are demanded by the text, whenever and wherever they are required:

Our natural feelings are not always to be commanded; and when they are, stand in need of the regulation and embellishments of art: it is

the business, therefore, of every reader and speaker in publick, to acquire such tones and gestures as nature gives to the passions; that he may be able to produce the semblance of them when he is not actually impassioned.<sup>33</sup>

Walker's volume attempts to train readers by describing the passions individually, quantifying the particular characteristics of body and voice associated with them, and providing examples of verse upon which readers may practice.<sup>34</sup> For Walker, and for the other elocutionists of the natural school, passion elicits bodily response; in order to accurately portray a text, readers must act, corporally, as though a passion were affecting them. And discerning this passion, an audience would infer the spirit of the author of the text that is being read and form a sympathetic response to it.

Because what elocutionists like Walker were going after was not truth or intellectual persuasion but instead an emotional response, their endeavor is more akin to that of actors than clergymen or other public readers. Both domestic public readers of literature and actors sought to elicit emotion, and measured their success in the kind and intensity of emotion felt by their audiences. They also, we will see, relied on a degree of audience participation in order to achieve this goal. In fact, the marked similarity between these two acts raises the question of what difference, if any, lies between reading and acting, given the elocutionary movement's emphasis on imitation and on naturalness as a performative construction? If, as Walker argues, the art of reading is cultivated by the imitation of naturalized passions that correspond to the manner of the author or character with whom the text originates, then what is the relationship between the reader and the text at hand, if not that of actor and script?

#### IV.

Eighteenth-century debates about the art of acting intersect with the elocutionary movement in interesting ways, as ideas about the relationships between actor and character reemerge in treatises on the relationship between reader and text. One point of contention in the acting debates centered upon whether performance is predicated upon the expression of universalized gestures, codified into a kind of stage language, or instead results from the embodiment of a unique character, to the point that actors truly feel the emotions their characters are supposed to experience. The former view, epitomized most famously in Denis Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le Comédien*, is akin to Walker's emphasis

on rules and on universal gestures that correspond to the passions that appear in texts. Like Walker, Diderot contends that vocal and bodily expression gives rise to the full communication of feelings, and that these expressions constitute their own kind of language.<sup>35</sup> The alternative method, articulated in print by John Hill and epitomized on the stage by David Garrick, more closely resembles Sheridan's emphasis on "grace." Hill defines "sensibility" as "a disposition to be affected by the passions," and one of the essential characteristics of an actor:

All the art in the world can never supply the want of *Sensibility* in the player; if he is defective in this essential quality, all the advantages of nature, all the accomplishments he may have acquired by study, are thrown away upon him; he will never make others feel what he does not feel himself, and will always be as different from the thing he is to represent, as a mask from a face.<sup>36</sup>

An actor's ability to portray accurately a character, Hill argues, is dependent upon both his capacity to feel and his life experiences. Actors who are "naturally amorous," for example, are the only ones who should play parts of lovers, and he who is "past that period of his age in which loving would be proper in real life" should not attempt those parts which require a disposition to love and tenderness.<sup>37</sup> For Hill, acting is about particulars: the particular characteristics of an actor as a person and the particular requirements of a given part. For Diderot, acting is about human nature and consists of the "imitation of some ideal type."<sup>38</sup> Actors do not feel the emotions they portray but instead render the "outward signs" of these emotions—a technique that ensures an invariable reflection of reality and a performance that is always marked with "the same precision, the same strength, the same truth."<sup>39</sup>

The achievement of persuasion, for both schools, requires what James Boswell identified as a "double feeling"—a balance of artifice and reality that requires a steadfast awareness on the part of the actor.<sup>40</sup> Whereas Diderot's distinction between actor and character is quite pronounced, even Hill acknowledges that actors of sensibility must also know how to blend natural feeling and artful strategy:

The principal thing the actor has to observe . . . is that he does not strain his voice, so as to render it incapable of carrying him thro' the rest of the piece. We should with great justice laugh at the man engaged in a race, who wou'd throw out his legs to their utmost speed at the setting out, and by that means render'd them incapable of carrying him to the end of the course.<sup>41</sup>

Even as he experiences the emotion he attempts to depict, the actor must remain conscious of himself as an actor. Boswell writes, “the feelings and character which [the actor] represents must take full possession as it were of the antichamber of his mind, while his own character remains in the innermost recess.”<sup>42</sup> This kind of double consciousness is also required of the public reader, and treatises on reading advocate a consciousness on the part of the reader as a reader. In *Elements of Elocution*, for example, Walker explains how the mere appearance of a passion may be enough to evoke response in a person. This phenomenon is favorable to a reader who seeks to move his audience via his performance, but it can also serve as a danger to the reader himself:

Certain sounds naturally produce certain bodily agitations, similar to those produced by the passion; and hence musick has power over the mind, and can dispose it alternately to joy or sorrow; to pity, or revenge. When the voice, therefore, assumes that tone which a musician would produce in order to express certain passions or sentiments in a song,—the speaker, like the performer on a musical instrument, is wrought upon the sound he creates; and, though active at the beginning, at length becomes passive, by the sound of his own voice on himself.<sup>43</sup>

A reader who accurately portrays a passion, Walker argues, might actually elicit that passion in himself, inducing a kind of emotional self-hypnosis that leaves him just as passive and suggestible as his audience. In order to assist readers in navigating the potentially dangerous terrain of emotional performativity, elocutionists such as William Cockin published texts designed to instruct readers in the proper method of reading, from accent and intonation to the employment of physical gestures, all the while retaining a sense of self as a reader.

Cockin’s text, *The Art of Delivering Written Language*, is a particularly useful example of how the elocutionary movement attempted to train readers to preserve their sense of self—to keep from becoming an embodiment of the text they recite—while still delivering an entertaining performance. Not surprisingly, Cockin begins by advocating a conscious detachment of the reader from the text. “The reader is found to be exactly in the situation of a *repeater*,” Cockin writes, “if we are directed by nature and propriety, the manner of our delivery in reading ought to be inferior in warmth and energy to what we should use, were the language before us the spontaneous effusions of our own hearts in the circumstances of those out of whose mouth is

it is supposed to proceed.”<sup>44</sup> In other words, we should not throw our whole selves into the experience accounted on the written page; we need to reserve a piece of ourselves in order to keep the text in check and to avoid being drained of all “warmth and energy.”

This is not to say, however, that the reader should not “feel his subject,” Cockin says, but that he should “preserve a proper ease and masterliness of delivery [in order to] guard against discovering too much emotion and perturbation.”<sup>45</sup> For Cockin, mastering the art of reading goes beyond mere proficiency in pronunciation; readers must also master the text, controlling it so that the text does not emotionally overwhelm them. While the necessity for this “masterliness” stems from propriety, Cockin’s method also gives the reader a sense of control over his self via his control over the text. Public reading demands a self-conscious, constructed sensibility that at the same time is predicated on naturalness. As much as the reader attempts to be like the author or character presented in the text, he is also aware of his role and the self-fashioning it entails. While readers must give the impression of delivering sentiments as though they were their own, they must personally temper such delivery so as not to confuse those sentiments with their own feelings.

The art of public reading thus requires a blending of appropriation and detachment—of making others’ words one’s own, but only in appearance. Despite the elocutionists’ focus on the reader, however, the overall success of public reading depends not on readers alone, but on listeners as well. Listeners must complete the experience by answering the question: was this a persuasive performance? Both public reading and acting rely on the sentiments of the audience, highlighting an ever-present rupture between method and response. Techniques cannot ensure a successful performance, which is predicated upon how audiences interpret it. The ways in which listeners react is by no means assured, as their interpretation also consists of a performance: that of an audience playing the role of audience. That is, like readers, members of the audience also participate in a performance that blends natural sympathies with the self-conscious construction of a character. Members of an audience choose to recognize readers as embodiments of the texts they recite, even when they know this is not the case, and even as they sympathetically identify with them. This performance works in tandem with that of the reader, as all the participants in the public scene of reading rely on the emotional and imaginative choices made by one another.

The norms and conventions of eighteenth-century public discourse have consequences for the ways in which we theorize reading during that period. As the public scene of reading makes clear, reading is not a purely subjective experience; the presence of a reading audience places the reader in a unique, intermediary position in which he both acts and is acted upon. The reader controls the reading experience insofar as he delivers the text to his audience; he leads others through a text via his own interpretation of it (articulated by his gestures and voice). The members of the audience, however, act upon the reader by objectifying him and reading his performance (or, perhaps, by refusing to listen at all). As a result, conventions of public performance and private experience can bleed into one another; any notion of a reader's mastery of a text (to use Cockin's term) becomes complicated by the audience, which itself forms a bond with the text.

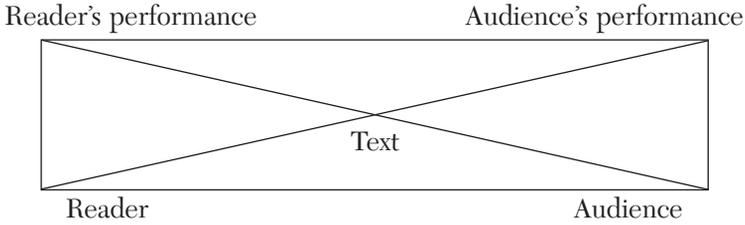
The audience, receiving a text via another reader, occupies an ambiguous position, for it cultivates a relationship with the text that is at once very public and wholly private. They receive the text in a public setting, yet they occupy a position akin to that of the solitary reader as they silently cultivate relationships to the text in their own minds—not unlike the (imaginary) personal identification one might share with a character onstage, despite one's (physical) location as a member of a collective audience. At the same time, listeners in a public scene of reading constitute the audience of an oral recitation and must act according to norms and protocols of decorum that are absent in the private reading experience; manners dictate that they must listen respectfully (or at least give the appearance of doing so). Like the reader, the manner in which the audience performs is not always apparent, since much of the work is done in members' own imaginations and does not always correspond to appearance. In this way, as the public reader delivers an author's words, his authority and control over the scene of reading can be both reinforced and undermined by his audience.

One place where this kind of audience performativity has been detected is in scenes of domestic public reading in which women participated. Because many of the elocutionists were concerned primarily with improving the manner in which public affairs were conducted, their treatises were written by and for the improvement of reading by British men. As the elocutionary movement spread into schools and the larger community, however, its precepts began to affect the social conventions governing reading aloud and women's practice of reading

aloud in the domestic sphere.<sup>46</sup> Generally speaking, at home, women read to their husbands or to other women, while in mixed company men read aloud.<sup>47</sup> As such, the reading of literature in the domestic sphere could be interpreted, as Michaelson has argued, as a patriarchal enterprise in which men could practice the art of reading in such a way as to mitigate the bad effects that reading was believed to engender in women: because (private) reading was such an antisocial enterprise, and because, left alone, women read badly (choosing the wrong texts and misinterpreting what they read), men protected women by doing the reading for them.<sup>48</sup>

On the other hand, not all scenes of domestic public reading entailed a re-inscription of female subordination, even when men read to women. On the contrary, public reading in the domestic sphere could afford women a certain amount of control not only in how they read texts, but also in how they received them, upsetting the hierarchal structure of reader and audience.<sup>49</sup> Women could, for example, refuse to listen. A variation on this tactic, employed by Frances Burney and in fiction by Jane Austen, was to instigate a reading in order to gain a bit of peace from a disagreeable man. "M. La Blancherie . . . nearly wears us out with his visits," Burney remarked in her journal. "Of late we have agreed, since we cannot get rid of him, to make him read. He has given us Corneille's *Rodugune*, which I found less exquisite than when I read it with my Susan. . . . This is surely the best thing we can do with the man."<sup>50</sup> Burney not only experiences the text differently with different readers, she performs her role as audience in a specific way by deciding how (or not) to listen to *La Blancherie*. Similarly, in Austen's *Emma*, when Mr. Elton distracts Emma from her drawing of Harriet, "fidgiting behind her and watching every touch," Emma asks him to read: "Mr. Elton was only too happy. Harriet listened, and Emma drew in peace."<sup>51</sup> For the women in this scene, listening is a choice; Harriet chooses to pay attention, while Emma chooses to work as if Elton were not there. Elton is rendered virtually absent by reading, but only because Emma chooses to experience him as such.

These episodes illustrate my fourth and final rendering of the public scene of reading and the different identities and dynamics it entails. When we take into account the audience's performance, relations among the participants in the public scene of reading are quadrangular, mediated by the text and determined by participants' various engagements with it:



Listeners, as well as readers, play roles in scenes of public reading; their identities are multiplied as their performances are coupled with their real selves, creating the kind of double consciousness that the scene of public reading demands. Readers, listeners, and the performances they stage intersect with each other and with the text as it circulates via the voice of the reader, moving through and between all these entities. Through this process, any notion of a unitary reader is dissolved, allowing for the blending of the public and private experience. As a collective audience, listeners are subject to a reader's address and receive the text through it; but as individual silent readers, they are poised to engage imaginatively with the text on their own terms and in their own imaginations.

Public action, performance, and decorum intersect with the audience's private, personal, and imaginative engagements with the text to the point where one may become confused with the other. Cockin illustrates this situation in his set of directives about the judicious employment of eye contact while reading:

In ordinary discourse, when we are particularly pressing and earnest in what we say, the eye is naturally thrown upon those, to whom we address ourselves. And in reading, a turn of this organ now and then upon the hearers, when any thing very remarkable or interesting falls in the way, has a good effect in gaining it a proper attention, &c. But this should not be too frequently used; for if so, besides its having a tendency to confound the natural importance of different passages, it may not be altogether agreeable to some to have their own reflexions broke in upon by a signal, which might be interpreted to hint as their wanting regulation.<sup>52</sup>

Interpretation is a balancing act that the (speaking) reader maintains by employing the kind of restraint advocated by Cockin and others in the art of reading. Listeners' private engagement with the text—what Cockin calls “reflexions”—carry a kind of value that can deteriorate

when the reader who is speaking identifies too closely with the text at hand and attempts to embody the author. A gesture such as eye contact, for example, can be misinterpreted as a gesture of reproach if the audience believes that they have been reprimanded by the reader.<sup>53</sup> The reader must retain a sense of self, reserving emotional response so as not to become one with the text; the audience realizes that he is actually a separate person, and as such should preserve “a proper ease and masterliness” that guards against “too much emotion.”<sup>54</sup> At the same time, the reader regulates his audiences’ experience of the text, influencing their experience of it as all participants in the public scene of reading work to perform their roles effectively.

The scene described by Cockin raises the question of just who, exactly, controls the reading experience (the text, the reader, or the audience?) while at the same time demonstrating what can happen when one participant exerts too much control. If, however, we consider the relationships between text, reader, and audience not in terms of power but of pedagogy, we discover that the collective experience of being part of an audience—as well as acting the part of an audience—is not antithetical to a reader’s effectively powerful delivery, nor is it that much different from the private, individual experience of encountering a text. On the contrary, all the elements present in the public scene of reading depend on one another, and the experience of occupying different identities in relation to a text ultimately instructs readers in how to cultivate a conscious reading practice, no matter when, or how, they read.

## VI.

This schooling in private reading via the conventions of public reading goes some way in explaining the pleasure of reading lyric poetry in late eighteenth-century England. The precepts of the elocutionary movement, so prevalent in eighteenth-century middle class culture, educated readers in an art of reading that was particularly appropriate for the theatrics of volumes such as Charlotte Smith’s extraordinarily popular *Elegiac Sonnets*. First, readers became accustomed to receiving literature through a third party who was not directly associated with the composition of the text or the experience described therein. Second, the objective distance between self and text advocated by elocutionists can be carried over, imaginatively, into the realm of silent reading. Third, just as audiences perform in the public scene of reading, they can perform privately, in the theater of their own imaginations,

by manipulating their positions in relation to a given text. In this final section I will look closely at one of Smith's poems that dramatizes this kind of reading and rewards the reader who chooses to self-consciously participate in Smith's text.

The preface to the sixth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* consists of an account of a dialogue between Smith and Bryan Edwards. The conversation is reprinted, Smith writes, as "an apology for that apparent despondence, which, when it is observed for a long series of years, may look like affectation."<sup>55</sup> By transcribing this conversation, Smith aims to authenticate her art by making it seem more real, at the same time creating a character of herself. Edwards cautions Smith that perpetually sad sonnets "may not be so well received as if you attempted, what you would certainly execute as successfully, a more cheerful style of composition."<sup>56</sup> His remarks are the impetus for Smith's passionate defense of her unhappy tone, which is quoted in full, and in which she eludes to her real-life troubles. The entire dialogue is a strange amalgamation of fact and artifice, in which Smith literally dramatizes her life, refashioning herself as a character on the page in order to demonstrate, paradoxically, her authenticity. As soon as Smith represents herself on the page, she becomes a character in her own text.

One could also say that this character becomes the text that (oral) readers deliver and with whom listeners identify, but whose author is a projection of the reader's imagination. In this way, Charlotte Smith, the person, becomes the conduit of Charlotte Smith, the persona, not unlike how a public reader would deliver another's text, or an actor her lines. What makes the sonnets unique, however, is that the line between fact and fiction is not always easy to identify, for in creating a persona of herself, Smith asks readers to identify with a person who both is and is not her—readers could choose to identify the poems with the character Charlotte Smith, or they could not. I'm not arguing that audiences didn't sympathetically identify with Smith, or that her poems did not elicit an emotional response; only that there is an awareness that accompanies the sympathetic bond between author and reader, actor and audience. Smith's readers were not duped into thinking Smith's sentiments and words were really her own; they chose to imagine them as such because that is what brought them pleasure.

The melancholy quality of the *Elegiac Sonnets* stems, often, from expressions of loss. Moreover, the reading relationships cultivated within the poems can become perceptible once we begin to look for what is lost and how the speaker copes with this loss. For example, in sonnet 39, "To Night," we discover a methodology for reading that

dramatizes the dynamics of Smith's performance and reception and the amount of subjectivity that is relinquished in the act of emotional identification. "To Night" appeared in Smith's novel *Emmeline*, where it is written and recited by Godolphin, a character who is secretly in love with the novel's title character.<sup>57</sup> Emmeline loves Godolphin as well, but for reasons too complicated to explain here, neither can confess his/her love to the other, and so they are miserable. Godolphin, a pessimistic character of profound sensibility and an active imagination, is especially miserable. He imagines that everything Emmeline says and does signals her indifference to him, and he is quick to indulge his sorrow; he, not unlike the persona Smith puts forth in her preface, cannot move beyond his personal pain—nor does he seem to want to.

In the novel Godolphin recites "To Night" one evening while traveling on a ferry. He is not aware, however, that Emmeline is nearby and hears him:

I love thee, mournful, sober-suited Night!  
 When the faint moon, yet lingering in her wane,  
 And veil'd in clouds, with pale uncertain light  
 Hangs o'er the waters of the restless main.  
 In deep depression sunk, the enfeebled mind  
 Will to the deaf cold elements complain,  
 And tell the embosom'd grief, however vain,  
 To sullen surges and the viewless wind.  
 Tho' no repose on thy dark breast I find.  
 I still enjoy thee—cheerless as thou art;  
 For in thy quiet gloom the exhausted heart  
 Is calm, tho' wretched; hopeless, yet resign'd.  
 While to the winds and waves its sorrows given,  
 May reach—tho' lost on earth—the ear of Heaven!<sup>58</sup>

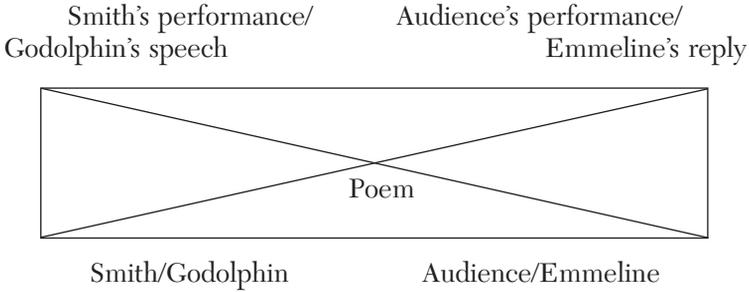
If we read this poem as an effusion of Smith's personal sorrow, we might notice that Smith turns toward night, and away from her reading audience. This gesture, argues Sarah Zimmerman, actually heightens the sonnet's rhetorical capacity: "[Smith] found that a lyric speaker could win readers and hold their attention precisely by appearing to ignore them, by seeming absorbed in thought."<sup>59</sup> Readers have the pleasure of "eavesdropping" on Smith, Zimmerman continues, which leads to the possibility that they might actually lose themselves in the speaker's experience. Drawing on the work of Michael Fried, Zimmerman creates an analogy between reading Smith and being absorbed in a painting: "The illusion of being ignored has an unexpected side effect—the beholder may experience the sensation of entering the

picture, precisely because he or she is not made self-conscious in the act of watching, an awareness that can produce resistance.”<sup>60</sup>

While Smith’s poem certainly opens up the possibility for sympathetic identification, I resist the notion that Smith’s gesture to night serves to absorb the reader, precluding him/her from being a self-conscious observer. One need not “enter” the poem in order to enjoy it, and, as the dynamics of public reading have shown us, the notion of realizing a performance and enjoying it are not mutually exclusive. Cockin’s treatise argues that “in order to acquit himself agreeably in this article of expression, it will be necessary that every reader should *feel* his subject as well as *understand* it.”<sup>61</sup> Readers understand that they, as well as Smith, are engaged in an exercise that is, in part, a performance.

Much like Emmeline, who overhears Godolphin’s words on the ferry, readers interpret the sonnet by choosing what kind of response to generate in relation to the sonnet speaker. Although in “To Night,” the speaker thinks he speaks to no one, once the sonnet is printed, Smith’s audience occupies the position of addressee. The audience’s role mirrors that of Emmeline; both are the recipients of language that, at least ostensibly, is meant for nobody. This quality of Godolphin’s/the sonnet speaker’s speech opens up room for imaginative experimentation and, ultimately, a fragmentation of the listener/reader. Godolphin addresses his words to the vast space of the night, opening with “I love thee.” Whom he really loves, however, is Emmeline, who, unbeknownst to Godolphin, is the poem’s actual recipient. Just as Godolphin addresses Emmeline as if she is not there, Smith’s sonnets are represented in the prefaces to *Elegiac Sonnets* as solitary musings of unaffected sorrow, composed as if the reader were not present (despite, of course, all evidence to the contrary). This peculiar subject position, in which readers are both the literal objects of Smith’s address (the book-reading public) and the imaginary eavesdroppers on Smith’s words, need not engender the involuntary absorption Zimmerman describes. On the contrary, Smith’s audience is asked to negotiate their literal position as audience with the imaginative work demanded by the poem, all during the same reading experience.

By recontextualizing her own poem, Smith grants readers the choice to determine its reception, a choice that is also illustrated in the novel. Emmeline’s identity becomes fragmented, much as a reader’s identity becomes distributed across different roles:



Will Emmeline understand Godolphin's sorrow and, instead of letting his lamentation become "lost on earth," will she receive it sympathetically? The novel's plot rides on her reply, not unlike the way in which the success of the sonnet rides on the reader's reception of it. Will the reader engage Smith's performance, imagining Smith in the role of Godolphin, a character just as hopelessly miserable and in need of sympathetic identification as Charlotte Smith? For Smith's readers, the payoff of such an engagement consists of an emotional satisfaction that does not come at the expense of one's entire sense of self.

In the end, all Godolphin seems to want is a reasonable audience for his grief. He addresses his words to night, but there is a sense that he really does not know what is out there, "veil'd in clouds, with pale uncertain light." He complains to "deaf cold elements," indulging his sorrow but finding "no repose" in the unresponsive night. His sorrows are literally lost in the night air, with no apparent living soul to receive them. Smith, too, indicates in her prefaces that her sorrow lacks a fit audience. She states that her poems once suffered from oblivion but now, through publication, they may find an "indulgent" public that accepts all that Smith is "able to achieve."<sup>62</sup> But Smith's sonnets, just like Godolphin's sorrows, cannot create this fit audience on their own; they need the active participation of an unknown recipient. Emmeline resolves Godolphin's pain by acting on his words and revealing her love for him. The audience also acts on Smith's words by imagining her as the poem's origin and engaging in a kind of sympathetic identification, all the while aware of the actual circumstances of the production.

Readers, like Smith, enact a "double performance," grasping "both reality and artifice, actor and character."<sup>63</sup> They keep Smith's lamentations from being perpetually lost in the night air by recognizing, and appreciating, her performance. This self-conscious participation constitutes the ideal reading of lyric poetry in which readers neither fully identify speaker with author, nor prohibit themselves from imag-

ining such a connection. Because they can occupy multiple positions in relation to the poem, both real and imaginary, readers are afforded the opportunity to participate in the sonnets by making their private reading as much a performance as the intersecting dynamics of the public recitation of a text.

In recent years, scholars of English language and literature have researched and theorized the act of reading, developing new terms and methods with which we might begin to study the relationships between texts and people. *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790–1832* by Jon Klancher; *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism* by Lucy Newlyn; and *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* by William St. Clair, in particular, have investigated relationships between reading and national culture during the romantic era.<sup>64</sup> A consideration of how conventions of public discourse connect with and influence private experiences of reading is an essential component of this critical landscape, both within the scope of romantic criticism and in the study of reading more generally—which, as Andrew Elfenbein recently demonstrated, has moved beyond literary studies and into the scientific arena of cognitive psychology.<sup>65</sup> Such a multidisciplinary approach is appropriate, as the multiple historical, material, cultural, and hermeneutic variables that converge in the act of reading warrants a broad consideration of many different acts of reading. The British elocutionary movement and its effects on reader subjectivity is an important piece of this puzzle.

*State University of New York at New Paltz*

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1978), 91.

<sup>2</sup> Sterne, 98–99.

<sup>3</sup> By public reading I mean, broadly speaking, the oral delivery of texts by a reader to an audience. While my primary concern in this essay is the delivery of literature by middle- and upper-class persons to their friends and family members, public reading can and did include exercises such as the delivery of the liturgy by the clergy or the reading of proclamations in a court of law. This essay will trace the shift of public reading from the public to the domestic sphere, where it had the greatest influence on people's encounters with literature.

<sup>4</sup> Private reading, in this essay, will refer to the silent reading of texts by a solitary reader.

<sup>5</sup> See Patricia Michaelson, *Speaking Volumes: Women, Reading, and Speech in the Age of Austen* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2002); Peter De Bolla, *The Discourse of the Sublime* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989); and James Raven, "From Promotion to Proscription: Arrangements for Reading and Eighteenth-Century Libraries," in *The*

*Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, ed. Helen Small, Raven, and Naomi Tadmor (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> While eighteenth-century elocutionists identified themselves as “elocutionists,” the term “elocutionary movement” was developed by scholars to describe the work of Thomas Sheridan, John Holmes, Gilbert Austin, and other British elocutionists who published texts on the subject between 1702–1806.

<sup>7</sup> The break from Cicero’s precepts is especially represented in Holmes.

<sup>8</sup> Wilbur Samuel Howell traces the troublesome semantics of the elocutionary movement and suggests that the elocutionists might have chosen the term “elocution” because it would have two advantages as the technical name for their conceptualization of rhetoric: “First, it was descended from the same root that had produced the word eloquence, itself a term for excellence in oratory” and “secondly, there was a seventeenth-century English precedent for calling oral presentation in rhetoric by this new name” (*Eighteenth-Century British Logic and Rhetoric* [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971], 150–51).

<sup>9</sup> Michael Shortland, “Moving Speeches: Language and Elocution in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” *History of European Ideas* 8 (1987): 641.

<sup>10</sup> John Rice, *An Introduction to the Art of Reading*, ed. R. C. Alston (1765; repr., Menston: Scolar Press, 1969), 194.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Steele identified the need for training of the clergy in reading in the 18 August 1711 issue of *The Spectator*: “The well Reading of Common Prayer is of so great Importance, and so much neglected, that I take the Liberty to offer to your Consideration some Particulars on That Subject: And what more worthy your Observation than this? A thing so Publick, and of so high Consequence. It is indeed wonderful, that the frequent Exercise of it should not make the Performers of that Duty more expert in it. This Inability, as I conceive, proceeds from the little Care that is taken of their Reading, while Boys and at School, where when they are got into *Latin*, they are look’d upon as above *English*, the reading of which is wholly neglected, or at least read to very little purpose, without any due Observations made to them of the proper Accent and manner of Reading; . . . The only way that I know of to remedy this, is to propose some Person of great Ability that way as a Pattern for them; Example being most effectual to convince the Learned, as well as instruct the Ignorant” (*The Spectator* [1711; repr., Cincinnati: Applegate, 1859], 197).

<sup>12</sup> Howell, 154.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Sheridan, *British Education*, 2nd ed. (London: Edward and Charles Dilleys, 1769), 91.

<sup>14</sup> Howell notes that, for Sheridan, the British Constitution would survive “only as the spirit of dedication to the Christian religion exists among the British citizenry,” and “the art of oratory is the only effective means of inducing citizens to maintain their dedication to that religion” (223).

<sup>15</sup> John Mason, *An Essay on Elocution*, 4th ed. (London: J. Buckland and J. Waugh, 1757), 5.

<sup>16</sup> John Walker, *Elements of Elocution*, 2nd ed. (Boston: D. Mallory, 1810), 302.

<sup>17</sup> Shortland, 640.

<sup>18</sup> As the art of reading shifted from an emphasis on delivering the word of God to delivering the words of other men, treatises on elocution also began to take on a strong nationalistic tone. Rice, in *An Introduction to the Art of Reading*, argues against “Patavinity or Provinciality of Dialect, which is merely local and transitory, interfering with an Art, established on the fundamental Principles of Language” (3). In *Lectures on the Art of Reading*, Sheridan introduces his method for teaching the alphabet by

arguing that “whole countries and counties, that now speak a corrupt dialect of English, might have their pronunciation in a short time reformed” (30). The alphabet, just like the British nation, will be “united in words,” creating a “harmony arising from the combination of those words in sentences, or their arrangement in verse” (Sheridan, *Lectures on the Art of Reading*, 32).

<sup>19</sup> Austin, 190, 193, 199–200.

<sup>20</sup> I use the masculine pronoun here because the elocutionists were men writing to a predominately male audience. Michaelson attempts to account for this circumstance by noting that “elocution excluded women because it occurs in the public sphere; the elocutionists focused on speech in the public realms of the senate, the pulpit, and the bar” (48). While I will argue later in this essay that women participated in elocution in the domestic sphere, it is clear that the early proponents of the movement were concerned solely with those venues in which public affairs were conducted. Interestingly, Michaelson also identifies the standardization of English in the eighteenth century more generally as a “gendered phenomenon” that affected all forms of spoken discourse: “For many years, English and other Germanic languages had been considered too consonantal, too rough. But sometime during the eighteenth century, this ‘rough’ quality was reinterpreted as manly and positive; the vowel-laden Romance languages became the proper study for accomplished women, but lost their stature in the linguistic hierarchy” (31).

<sup>21</sup> See Michaelson, 142.

<sup>22</sup> Rice, 4–5.

<sup>23</sup> This concern about authenticity is, of course, pertinent to the movement more generally, since the elocutionists, as a rule, did not concern themselves with the matter, or invention, of language. As Howell notes, “the practices which the elocutionists encouraged inevitably led to declamation without sincere conviction and earnest feeling, as students recited discourses devised and organized by somebody else” (145). Yet the eighteenth-century response to accusations of artificiality in speaking actually played a large role in the cultivation of rules and techniques designed specifically for reading literature. That is, the arguments and methods designed by the elocutionists to offset charges of affectation became the basis upon which rules for reading poetry and fiction were formulated.

<sup>24</sup> Rice, 5.

<sup>25</sup> Sheridan, *A Course of Lectures on Elocution*, 144.

<sup>26</sup> For Sheridan, elocution consists of “two great articles”: force and grace. While force of speaking is a kind of proficiency that stems from correct pronunciation, pitch, pausing, etc., grace in delivery is a more natural kind of beauty in speaking that, together with force, makes for the correct and convincing speech toward which the elocutionists were working toward. While force, for Sheridan, can be attained by acquiring correct habits (the details of which are easily articulated in his rules for speaking), grace can only be obtained through the emulation of those who are gifted in the “ornamental parts of delivery” (*Lectures on Elocution*, 145). But because the “masters” of elocution are yet to be found (or at least found in large enough numbers to be installed in British schools), Sheridan must content himself with elaborating on the rules of delivery, as opposed to its more natural component: what he calls grace. For even though “nature can do much without art; art but little without nature,” grace cannot be found in books (*Lectures on Elocution*, 144).

<sup>27</sup> Sheridan, *Lectures on Elocution*, 144.

<sup>28</sup> Shortland, 646.

<sup>29</sup> See Shortland, 646.

<sup>30</sup> Rice, 8–9.

<sup>31</sup> Walker, 304–5.

<sup>32</sup> Walker, 304–5.

<sup>33</sup> Walker, 309–10.

<sup>34</sup> Concerning “sorrow,” for example, Walker writes: “Sorrow is a painful depression of spirit, upon the deprivation of good, or arrival of evil; . . . In moderate sorrow, the countenance is dejected, the eyes cast downward, the arms hang loose, sometimes a little raised, suddenly to fall again; the hands open, the fingers spread, and the voice plaintive, frequently interrupted with sighs. But when this passion is in excess, it distorts the countenance, as if in agonies of pain; . . . it wrings the hands, beats the head and breast, tears the hair, and throws itself on the ground” (337).

<sup>35</sup> Although Denis Diderot’s text was not published until 1830, its arguments are contemporaneous with Walker’s work. Diderot wrote *Paradoxe* in the 1770s.

<sup>36</sup> John Hill, *The Actor* (London: R. Griffiths, 1750), 14, 16.

<sup>37</sup> Hill, 115, 125.

<sup>38</sup> Diderot, *The Paradox of Acting*, trans. Walter Herries Pollock (London: Chatto & Windus, 1883), 9.

<sup>39</sup> Diderot, 15, 9.

<sup>40</sup> James Boswell, “Remarks on the Profession of a Player,” in *The London Magazine* 40 (1770), in *On the Profession of a Player: Three Essays by James Boswell, Reprinted from the London Magazine for August, September and October 1770* (repr., Suffolk: Elkin Mathews & Marrot, 1929), 17.

<sup>41</sup> Hill, 46.

<sup>42</sup> Boswell, 18.

<sup>43</sup> Walker, 311.

<sup>44</sup> William Cockin, *The Art of Delivering Written Language; or, an Essay on Reading* (London: J. Dodsley, 1775), 7–8.

<sup>45</sup> Cockin, 86.

<sup>46</sup> See Michaelson, 61.

<sup>47</sup> See Jacqueline Pearson, *Women’s Reading in Britain 1750–1835* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), 172.

<sup>48</sup> Michaelson writes: “As listener, rather than reader, a young woman was another step removed from the text. She experienced the text in a mediated form, interpreted by an authority figure who might interrupt his reading to comment on the text . . . and whose reading itself necessarily involved interpretation. Domestic reading, as influenced by the elocutionary movement, could thus be understood as protecting women against potentially dangerous texts while it reinforced the bonds of intimacy and discipline that characterize family life” (156–57).

<sup>49</sup> Although my concern in this section is with women as audience members and how they performed their roles, it is worth noting Michaelson’s argument in *Speaking Volumes* regarding what could happen when women read to one another. Michaelson demonstrates how, at home, women were also reading aloud to each other, enacting complex characters via their reading of texts that go beyond gendered stereotypes. The novel in particular served as a kind of manual, Michaelson argues, that instructed women in the performance of speech and offered them the opportunity to practice different forms of speech: “while the elocutionists developed methods for training orators . . . they showed little interest in realms of speech available to middle-class women. Conduct book writers, on the other hand, tended to direct their efforts toward keeping these women silent. The question to be addressed here, then, is the role that fiction may have played in the discourse about women’s speech and, specifically, how

eighteenth-century women may have utilized literature to practice the various strategies required for linguistic competence" (*Speaking Volumes* 181). Michaelson's text illustrates the ways in which the reading of novels allowed women to experiment with different voices and different styles of speech, cultivating speaking skills that were denied them by the elocutionary texts and by gender norms more generally.

<sup>50</sup> Frances Burney, *Journals and Letters*, vol. 1, 95–96, quoted in Michaelson, 170.

<sup>51</sup> Jane Austen, *Emma*, ed. Fiona Stafford (London: Penguin, 1996), 74.

<sup>52</sup> Cockin, 95–96.

<sup>53</sup> The situation that Cockin describes is akin to the phenomenon described by Michaelson when fathers read to their daughters. Even as fathers read others' words, they retained the authority of both parent and orator, and "because the position of the reader represented a kind of authority, domestic reading could reinforce the patriarchal relationship" (Michaelson, 156).

<sup>54</sup> Cockin, 86.

<sup>55</sup> Charlotte Smith, *The Poems of Charlotte Smith*, ed. Stuart Curran (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), 6.

<sup>56</sup> Smith, 6.

<sup>57</sup> In addition to sonnets written in the voices of fictional characters from her novels, Smith's collection includes translations of others' poetry. Sometimes Smith overtly ventriloquizes other characters, as in her translations of four sonnets by Petrarch, and in the five sonnets "supposed to be written by Werther" (*Poems*, 26). At other times, she disguises a poem's fictional origin with an exceedingly authentic title. (Sonnet 67, "On passing over a dreary tract of country, and near the ruins of a deserted chapel, during a tempest," for example, was originally published in Smith's *Montalbert: A Novel*, where it is composed by the hero, Sommers Walsingham). In addition, the sonnets feature countless quotations of other poets' works—a characteristic that, as Adela Pinch has noted in *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1996), puts into question the notion that the feelings and experiences Smith describes are really her own. Yet one need not even be familiar with Alexander Pope, John Milton, William Shakespeare, or the other writers that Smith quotes in order to detect her use of their work; Smith oftentimes footnotes her poetry, acknowledging lines borrowed from other authors. For more about Smith's self-conscious performativity, see Jacqueline Labbe, *Charlotte Smith: Romanticism, Poetry and the Culture of Gender* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2003).

<sup>58</sup> Smith, 39.

<sup>59</sup> Sarah M. Zimmerman, "'Dost Thou Not Know My Voice?': Charlotte Smith and the Lyric's Audience," in *Romanticism and Women Poets*, ed. Harriet Linkin and Stephen Behrendt (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1999), 102.

<sup>60</sup> Zimmerman, 109.

<sup>61</sup> Cockin, 85.

<sup>62</sup> Smith, 6.

<sup>63</sup> William Worthen, *The Idea of the Actor* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1984), 3.

<sup>64</sup> See Jon Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790–1832* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1987); Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000); and William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004).

<sup>65</sup> See Andrew Elfenbein, "Cognitive Science and the History of Reading," *PMLA* 121 (2006): 484–500.