POETICS OF CHARACTER

This study of character in a comparative context presents a new approach to transatlantic literary history. Re-reading Romanticism across national, generic and chronological boundaries, and through close textual comparisons, it offers exciting possibilities for rediscovering how literature engages and persuades readers of the reality of character. Historically grounded in the eighteenth-century philosophical, political and cultural conditions that generated nation-based literary history, it reveals alternative narratives to those of origin and succession, influence and reception. It also reintroduces rhetoric and poetics as ways of addressing questions about uniqueness and representativeness in character creation, epistemological issues of identity and impersonation, and the generation of literary value. Drawing comparisons between works from Alexander Pope and Cotton Mather through Robert Burns, Jane Austen, John Keats, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller and Herman Melville, to George Eliot and Henry James, Susan Manning reveals surprising metaphorical, metonymic and performative connections.

SUSAN MANNING (1953–2013) was Grierson Professor of English Literature and Director for The Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities at the University of Edinburgh. She published many books, book chapters and journal articles, including most recently *Transatlantic Literary Studies, 1660–1830*, eds. Eve Tavor Bannet and Susan Manning (Cambridge, 2012), and *Character, Self and Sociability in the Scottish Enlightenment*, eds. Thomas Ahnert and Susan Manning (Palgrave, 2011).

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POETICS OF CHARACTER

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Foreword

Susan Manning died of a massive stroke, suddenly and shockingly, on January 15, 2013, not long after she submitted a completed draft of this book for Cambridge Studies in Romanticism. Her death was a terrible blow, felt far and wide, by family and friends, students and colleagues. She was both dignified and unpretentious, at once smart and learned and wise, energetic even in the face of illness. Her presence graced any gathering she joined and elevated any enterprise to which she lent her great gifts. Our loss is enormous, but *Poetics of Character* is some small consolation.

The seeds of this remarkable book can be found much earlier in her work, especially in her comparatist-transatlantic study of 2002, *Fragments of Union*. *Poetics of Character*, however, is a much more ambitious book, in both its range and approach. To use a term that Susan herself deploys for the work of Burns and Emerson, the brilliantly coupled writers in whom her argument culminates, *Poetics of Character* is 'provocative'. Its challenge derives from the fact that she is trying to think something quite unusual in this book, and to think it in an unusual way. One might say that she seeks to produce an account of transatlantic literature in the decades that follow the first stirrings of the Romantic period, but without relying on the historicist and philological methodologies that were themselves generated in that period. She relies instead, very self-consciously, on a pre-Romantic conjuncture of moral topics and comparative procedures that she rightly associates with two large discursive constellations of the Scottish Enlightenment: the discourse of analogy and the discourse of character.

These two concepts, analogy and character, may not seem intuitively to go hand-in-hand. Susan integrates them by reference to a broader framework of Scottish Enlightenment moral thinking, where, as she persuasively shows, they are powerfully imbricated. In particular, she invokes a

Scottish Enlightenment notion of human character as a formation that takes shape in relationships of sympathetic correspondence, a notion elaborated by thinkers from David Hume to Dugald Stewart. These sympathetic correspondences, she shows, ultimately depend on relationships of similarity, what Hume called 'resemblance', and thus are necessarily involved in processes that she wishes to call 'analogical'. To solidify this connection, she further mobilises the considerable resources amassed by the field of rhetoric in its glorious Scottish Enlightenment heyday, especially the contributions of Adam Smith and Hugh Blair, who became so important for what we might call the development of 'humanities' on both sides of the Atlantic. Thinking of literary relationships in a rhetorical field, rather than in a historicist chain of causation, proves to be productively revelatory for the writers she discusses in these pages, and this is partly so because of their own residual commitments to the Scottish Enlightenment paradigm she excavates here.

In recent years, many scholars (and not just in Scotland) have been pressing for the Scottish-Enlightenment origins of this or that feature of modernity, and of literary modernity in particular. Susan herself notes more than once that Hugh Blair's course in rhetoric and *belles lettres* became standard for the educational formation of many of the authors she considers here, especially the American ones. No less a self-reliant American than Emerson is a recurring case in point. The importance of this underlying argument about the cultural influence of her Scottish Enlightenment paradigm in Britain and America probably means that her method ultimately shares something of the historiographical impulse that she polemically dismisses. But the fact of Emerson's reliance, as it were, on Blair is only part of this book's story. Its deeper purpose is to establish a large-scale field of reference among her writers in which the 'poetics of character' seems to trump all other considerations: the 'original character' of Melville's elusive Confidence Man, Keats' account of the chameleon poet as a figure of 'no character', the 'characterless women' in Margaret Fuller's problematically transcendentalist writings, the redoubled character of Poe's William Wilson, the emblematic characters of Emerson's own 'representative men'.

Susan's notes and observations from this constructed field of reference energise this book, and they will fuel new work for years to come. Further, studying nineteenth-century transatlantic literature as a massive rhetorical field this way, with character centrally at stake, including and especially 'national character', she has remapped this

enormous body of writing by the logics of contagion, sympathy, correspondence and analogy. The result is not just a different map, but a different kind of map, and a different kind of book, one we ought to be very grateful that Susan completed.

JAMES CHANDLER
GENERAL EDITOR, CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN ROMANTICISM

Acknowledgements

Many people have helped me to understand Character, the Scottish Enlightenment and Transatlantic literary history. At points when I was doubtful, Ian Duncan and James Chandler believed that this could be a book; their guidance, lightly offered, has consistently sharpened my attempts to understand connections.

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Working with colleagues and Fellows at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities has been an education and a pleasure. I owe a great deal to Anthea Taylor, Donald Ferguson, Pauline Phemister and Jolyon Mitchell.

Erin Atchison, Jim Peacock, Deirdre Shepherd, Maria Filippakopoulou, Lise Sorensen and Linda Anderrson Burnett have all given resourceful and efficient research assistance at different points in the making of this book. I'm particularly grateful to Linda for heroic help with the final stages of preparation. Linda Bree and Anna Bond have offered patient, expert guidance from the earliest to the latest stages of the publishing process.

Earlier versions of some parts of Chapters 3 and 4 appeared in *Symbiosis* and *Partial Answers*. Part of Chapter 7 was published as a chapter in *Scotland and the World*, eds. Gerald Carruthers, David Goldie and Alistair Renfrew (2012).

The book is dedicated to all my women of character, aged three to eighty-three.

Prologue

'Is analogy argument?' The challenge is issued by a character in Melville's novel *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* to a representative from the 'Philosophical Intelligence Office'.[1] His scepticism is based on a suspicion that analogy may be no more or other than a form of punning with ideas. Likeness – of the present to the past, and the future to the present; of our experience of assessing a new object, event or feeling in relation to something familiar – was the predominant form of induction throughout the eighteenth century in the Anglophone world. Theological and epistemological arguments from analogy flourished, broadly, in the period between Joseph Butler's *Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature* (1736) and William Paley's *Natural Theology, or Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity collected from the Appearances of Nature*, published (1802), where the celebrated 'watchmaker analogy' was expounded as a stage in a teleological argument for the existence of God. Though he disputed fideist conclusions derived from such reasoning, David Hume's sceptical epistemology established empirical understanding of the world on principles of correspondence and analogy. Describing our knowledge of personal identity as dependent on principles of association and contiguity, Hume announced in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) that '[a]ll kinds of reasoning consist in nothing but a *comparison*, and a discovery of those relations, either constant or inconstant, which two or more objects bear to each other.'[2] His was an approach to knowledge based on probability rather than a priori reasoning: the likely resemblance of the future to the past in our predictions of where the sun will rise (for example) determines our capacity to construe connected experience; personal identity is a product of associations produced by memory and imagination.

Arguments from analogy have fallen into disfavour, as has the explanatory value of associative thinking. Recovering the philosophical and rhetorical understanding of the principles of analogy that form the basis for comparative study is my prelude to identifying 'likeness' in the verbal

texture of prose and poetry in Anglophone transatlantic writing. Transatlantic literary studies have blossomed in recent years, but we still lack a sufficiently complex comparative poetics to describe the literary dimensions of a situation (documented by studies of the internationalism of nineteenth-century print culture) where the 'network of influences', as Edward S. Cutler has put it, 'becomes so interlaced as to be almost indeterminate'.[3] From its eighteenth-century coinage 'trans-Atlantic' has itself been a term with complex rhetorical associations from the Greek crossing trope 'metaphor' to the cultural baton-passing implied by the Latin *translatio studii et imperii*. Invoking versions of a 'transatlantic dynamic' across pairs and groups of texts, I propose forms of comparison not driven by sequential narrative and nation-based assumptions that have predominated since the early nineteenth century. The argument is not historical or philosophical in a disciplinary sense; I argue rather that 'history', 'rhetoric', 'poetics' and 'nation' were mutually imbricated in post-Enlightenment (that is, 'Romantic') literary history, and that historically and philosophically informed close reading may elicit forms of comparison submerged in predominantly chronological analysis.

Poetics of Character aims, then, to explore the potential of an alternative (perhaps complementary) literary history alert to nuances of connection and comparison. Rhetorical forms of analogy such as metaphor, metonymy, simile, repetition and *prosopopoeia* current in eighteenth-century pedagogical texts offer a new approach to comparative literary history. Character is at the centre of my concern with representation because character was at the nexus of Enlightenment epistemology, ethics, pedagogy and understanding of social relations; recovering the range of its continuing allegorical implication with writing (the 'character' as letter or textual mark) and the comparative force of its rhetorical assumptions, literary-historical practice is able to re-engage analysis with affect. Character itself needs in literary contexts to be read as a rhetorical figure, by which I mean that literary character reveals itself in patterns of textual relationship; these may be articulated as much through a poetics of correspondence in the prose as through narrative acts of comparison. I argue for the value of recovering underlying structures of connection in character and correspondence as, respectively, ethos and practice. Arabesque patterning, metaphorical chains and networks of analogy may, that is, be revitalised as forms and expressions of ethical judgment. Though it draws on all of them, *Poetics of Character* is not a history of literary character, a history or sociology or psychology of reading practice, or an investigation into the construction of the modern self. The intention, combining the resources of literary theory and the

history of rhetoric, is rather to argue that character as allegory and metaphor – intrinsically *relational* forms of ethical representation – may shape literary comparison in a transatlantic context.

Analogies are by their nature not identities: similarity necessarily also implies difference, as correspondence implies distance. Both causation and coincidence are reductive pseudo-explanations that foreclose critical comparison. Literary criticism offers instead the opportunity to ask questions about the nature of the bridge which similitude offers between two or more works: if all judgment is comparative, as Samuel Johnson put it, what is the 'texture' of likeness in a particular case? How is it compounded of similarity and difference, and what are the rhetorical markers of resemblance? When and how is analogy an effective critical tool, and how may we judge? In literary terms significance depends on establishing meaningfulness in conjunctions that might otherwise be dismissed as random or fortuitous; such meanings themselves involved and involve issues of probability, but also of the conviction a critic's particular reading can carry with another reader. That is to say, they are necessarily contingent rather than absolute: imagination and memory of previous instances are as involved in their formation as reasoning or the kind of information that history may supply.

Editorial Note

In the very sad circumstances of Susan Manning's sudden death, I agreed to steer her volume through the production process. Fortunately she had revised the manuscript in response to peer-review reports, and hence the copy-editing required hardly any changes in her prose and none in her intended meaning. The greater share of the work on the copy-edited manuscript was done by my colleague Linda Andersson Burnett, who generously persisted in getting the endnotes and bibliography in final shape at a time when she had much else to do. Eve Tavor Bannet provided indispensable advice on the copy-editing of the entire manuscript. To improve on my own proofreading, four people kindly proofread parts of the book: Betta Adams, Catherine Jones, Sophie Manning, and Eve Tavor Bannet.

Tony La Vopa