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Arthur Sherbo

William Hamilton Reid (fl. 1786-1824):
A Forgotten Poet

The *DNB* devotes a little less than one column to a “William Reid (1764-1831), a minor poet,” born in Glasgow of humble parents. Nowhere is there any indication that Reid’s literary efforts were any other than some minor poems, a number of them being “humorous verse in Scottish dialect.” In the *British Library Catalogue* William Reid appears as “Bookseller, of Glasgow.” Curiously enough, there is another William Reid, William Hamilton Reid, well represented in the BL catalogue, overlooked by the compilers of the *DNB*, and tersely indexed in the old *CBEL* as “(fl. 1793-1816),” his sole recorded effort being a short prose piece on William Law in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* for 1800. One will look in vain for either Reid in the new *CBEL*. William Hamilton Reid is represented in the BL by a “copious account of the life and writings” of Hugh Blair, as well as by a life of and critical remarks on Archbishop Paley, a book on Napoleon’s *Conduct towards the Jews* (a title in Hebrew tentatively attributed to him), as well as *Memoirs* of Napoleon, a history of the Kingdom of Hanover to 1813, as well as *The Rise and Dissolution of the Infidel Societies in this Metropolis*, *Memoirs* of Colonel Wardle, as well as of John Horne Tooke, and “Hum! Hum! A new song,” and *Criticisms on the Rolliad* (with others). All in all, a fairly full and varied literary output. What is more, and what is of present significance, Reid contributed a large number of poems and prose pieces to the *GM* in the years from 1787 through 1824, displaying, among other things, a working knowledge of Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, French, Latin, Greek, Dutch, German, and Hebrew.

One has, then, two possible Reids. There is the DNB's William (1764-1831) and the *CBEL*'s William Hamilton who flourished from 1793-1816. It is well to repeat that William Hamilton Reid contributed a spate of poems and prose pieces to the *GM* from 1786 through 1824 and was a man of some erudition with a knowledge of several languages, classical as well as modern. With these facts in mind, one can now arrive at some information about, and some estimate of, the relative importance of William Hamilton Reid through analysis of his contributions to the *GM*. William Reid of Glasgow may be forgotten. The first of Reid's contributions were in June, July, September, and the Supplement for 1787—four poems, all clearly signed "W. Hamilton Reid." The first poem, "Moon-Light," with its opening line, "How sweet the Moon-light sleeps upon the ground," is obviously indebted to Shakespeare, who is invoked in the next line (p. 529). July's offering was a sonnet, the first of some fourteen, this one "Written upon the Remains of the Roman Camp near London" (p. 626). The third, entitled "An Elegy on the Unknown Author of the Ballad of Chevy Chase," has a footnote keyed to the Words "Untimely grand, Sublimely wild," descriptive of the unknown author's "lays." The footnote reads, "This alludes to an anachronism first pointed out by the author. See our Index Indicarius for February" (p. 818). In the index we find "W. Hamilton Reid does not recollect that the following anachronism in 'Chevy Chace' has ever been publicly noticed. In the beginning of this humorous ballad, it is said, the battle began immediately after dinner.—'And when they had din'd, the drovers went to rouse them up again.' Thus the affray began; but in the conclusion, 'this fight did last from break of day, till setting of the sun!'" (p. 152). The fourth of the poems in 1778 is an "Elegy on a Poetical Character, that was Shipwrecked," possibly inspired by Milton's "Lycidas," although it is not listed in Raymond Dexter Haven's monumental *Influence of Milton on English Poetry*, a matter to which I shall return. The "elegy" is followed by a notice to the effect that Reid was the "Author of a volume of 'Poetical Effusions' now publishing by subscription." The volume was almost surely never published.¹

Reid's poetry was also published in the *Universal Magazine* in 1787 and 1788. Indeed, there are nine poems there which do not appear in the *GM*. "Moon-light" was printed in the May *Universal Magazine* (p. 264), one month earlier than its appearance in the *GM*. However, the sonnet on the Roman camp appeared simultaneously in July, both periodicals printing a notice that a volume of Reid's poetry was soon to be published by subscription. The nine poems printed only in the *Universal Magazine* are "Sonnet to Flora" (May, 1787, pp. 264-5), "To Phoebus" (July, pp. 44-5), "Sonnet to Autumn" (Oct., p. 208), "Winter: An Elegy," "Sonnet Supposed to be written in a Mossy Dell,"

¹Raymond Dexter Havens, *The Influence of Milton on English Poetry* (Cambridge, MA, 1922), p. 690, conjectures a posthumous publication of Reid's poems.

“To Cynthia,” and an “Elegiac Sonnet” (all in the 1787 Supplement, pp. 365-6); “Sonnet, to Spring” (Feb., 1788, p. 98), and “Sonnet to April” (April, p. 211). There is nothing remarkable in any of these.

In any event, the *GM* published Reid’s “Deity, a Poetical Attempt,” i.e., an attempt to define deity, in February 1788 (pp. 158-9) and “Athenia, An Elegy, on the late J. Stuart, Esq.,” the following month, the latter poem followed by an editorial note, “The Author’s subscription, now on foot, was honoured by the name of the deceased.” James Stuart, known as “Athenian” Stuart because of his joint authorship of *The Antiquities of Athens Measured and Delineated* (1762) was a well-known painter and architect. There is no need, however, to suppose he was personally known to Reid. In July 1788 a correspondent to the *GM*. Who signed himself “N,” wrote a letter which, while interesting in that the writer compares Reid to Robert Burns, both “modern untutored bards,” affords little information about Reid other than that he was in straitened circumstances, N inclosing two guineas for him. The letter, however, elicited a long editorial note which must be quoted in its entirety.

In addition to the notices given of the poetry of W. Hamilton Reid, in the *Gazetteer* for Jan. 7, 1787, it appears, from authentic information, that his situation as a laborious mechanic, ignorance of prosody, want of reading, &c. are equally true. The Letter, however, must be confined to poetry only, as he is known to have been a mere book-worm in divinity ever since the age of 16, which was never diverted to a poetical channel till, contrary to the generality of bards, he manifested abilities for metrical composition! It was remarkable that, upon his first disposition for reading, after producing a few thoughts in verse, every idea of writing, of any kind, vanished till the year 1781, when he produced some letters in the *Gazetteer*, signed Philo-Veritas, against a methodistical adventurer, who, in the same print, had abused the Established Church by the most illiberal insinuations; and these letters, though extremely inaccurate in their orthography, were published without any alteration of their sense. But the discovery of his poetical abilities, in 1785, was by a circumstance which, as it were by collusion, excited the flame of this natural poet. A person of the same business had just produced an Ode to Masonry. Surprise, emulation, shame, &c. instantaneously vivified all the dormant seeds of poesy in Reid, and a similar disposition was communicated to him by a kind of electrical contact; which, in fine, produced those effusions so well received by the most respectable prints, and whose rapidity, diversity, harmony, &c. soon left him without a rival in the humbler walks of life. His discovery by the Editor of the *Gazetteer* was as accidental as his sudden impulse by the poetical furor. He purchased a paper whenever any poetry appeared he furnished it with. Want of employ, fatally the case every winter, had rendered this inconvenient. He requested, by a note, that a paper, on those occasions, might be allowed him, stating, the want of employ. This was followed in a few days by a notice from the Editor, expressing, that if W.H.R. would call at the office, he would find a letter from him. By which it appeared, he had mentioned him to the proprietors, who, in consideration of his merit, had begged his acceptance of a handsome acknowledgement, &c. This was succeeded by an interview, and a private gratuity from

the editor; and a subscription was afterwards opened, which, unfortunately, has not yet answered the expectation of this genuine son of the Muses. The fairness of his moral character can be attested by Mr. P---s, silversmith, in Hosier-lane, Smithfield, for whom he has worked nine years, and other reputable persons who can justify him from the too common charge of neglect of business. Candour will readily grant, that the means of adding distress to a wife and small family would be too insupportable to be indulged by a mind of sensibility. Besides, it is well known that Reid's productions were not the offspring of leisure, and its concomitant, want, where daily labour was depended upon, but were mostly written in the height of business, at those intervals of rest too often devoted by the vulgar to sottish stupidity. So true it is that ease (of mind at least) is the parent of Poetry.

Several important facts emerge from the letter and more particularly from the appended editorial note. Reid, resident in London, working for a silversmith in Hosier-lane, Smithfield, was self-educated, married with a small family, and in want. In February 1789, in a short letter to the *GM*, Reid expressed his concern at the number of youngsters who came to a bad end because of their preference for Smithfield market over their schools, avowing that "Many masters of charity-schools can well attest, that Smithfield has been the last resort of their most notorious truants." "These hints, Sir, I hope," he concluded, "may be improved by those in power: and I am confident that no philanthropist, or lover of his country, will neglect them on account of the obscurity of the channel by which they are conveyed" (p. 98). Earlier in the letter he had written of "the line I have moved in" as the vantage point from which he had observed these young offenders, giving rise to the belief that, as was stated in the 1788 *GM* editorial note, he may indeed have been a "laborious mechanic," and that his nine years of work for "Mr. P---s, silversmith, in Hosier-lane, Smithfield" was the "line he moved in." This would explain his reference to "the obscurity of the channel" by which his hints were conveyed. In the light of future discussion, it may be well to stress that Reid was "known to have been a mere [i.e. absolute] book-work in divinity," as many of his prose contributions to the *GM* will corroborate, a fact that makes more credible his seeming rise from the position of laborious mechanic to that of the well-read, lettered, even magisterial writer for the bookseller he was to become. For example, his second prose piece in the *GM*, in September 1788, published only two months after N's letter, opens with this sentence:

Observing a curious old prophecy, said to respect America, in vol. XXXVIII, p. 503, published from the papers of Sir Thomas Browne, author of the *Religio Medici*, by Dr. Tenison, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury, has induced me to submit the following remarks to your curious readers, upon the very same ground it was previously noticed, as respecting America, viz. from a manifest fulfilment of some other parts of the prediction.

After demonstrating how some of the predictions had been fulfilled Reid concluded, on a religious note and in a style seemingly incompatible with his humble station and lack of education:

As for the sceptical, who run into the same degree of extremes as their bigoted opponents, by denying the possibility of divine impulses upon the minds of men, and by determining on the conduct of eternity from the observation of an hour! if they will still say such is the result of conjecture, enthusiasm, &c. it is for them to account why such a regular set of conjectures, so distant from each other, and so divested of political design, has never arisen from any persons on their side of the question! (p. 787).

In 1781, seven years earlier, according to the editorial note appended to N's letter, Reid's letters in the *Gazetteer* were "extremely inaccurate in their orthography." Reid had evidently made great strides. And yet in the November 1785 *European Magazine* an editorial note states that his "late communications are so deficient in grammar that we cannot insert them. He should not suffer himself to be diverted from his proper employment by such pursuits" (p. 392).

Despite N's likening Reid's "eccentric abilities [as] unequalled by any of the modern untutored bards, except Robert Burns," a description more appropriate for William Reid of Glasgow, it is again obvious that the two Reids cannot be confused. And yet it was not long before a certain Philomela wrote a "Sonnet, Addressed to W. H. R. The English Burns" which appeared in the December 1788 *GM* (p. 1104) and which celebrates W. H. R.'s "native lays." None of these Burns-like "native lays" had appeared in the *GM*, and one wonders why both N and Philomela compared Reid to Burns. Among other reasons militating against such an identification were the three poems by William Hamilton Reid appearing in the July, August, and October numbers of the 1788 *GM*, for they were an "Ode to Reflexion" in octosyllabics (p. 636), an "Ode, On reading Poems by Miss Whateley; now Mrs. Dorwal, of Walsal, in Staffordshire" (p. 733), and "To Truth" (p. 915). All are polished, in the most pejorative sense of the word, full of classical mythology and personification, and in no way describable as "native lays" à la Burns. Recognition was soon to come, and in the April 1789 *GM*, when Anna Seward, the reigning poetess of Lichfield, divided modern poets, i.e., those from Milton to 1789, she included "Reid" (not needing further to identify him, it would seem) among "the unschooled sons of genius" with Burns and other (p. 292).

Perhaps it will be well to recapitulate somewhat before going on to examine the rest of Reid's poetry. He wrote some fourteen sonnets for the *GM* and another twelve for other periodicals, four of these being translations.² In addi-

²See Havens, *Influence of Milton*, p. 690, noting that I have added four sonnets and one translation to Haven's list for the *GM*. The additions will be found at 1791, p. 567; 1794, pp.

tion to the sonnets he contributed another twenty-two poems and twenty-six translations of poetry in Latin, French, German, Portuguese, Italian, Dutch, and Spanish.³ Many of these translations are of epitaphs or short epigrams; longer ones are “Stanzas (From the French of the King of Prussia)” and “The Nightingale and the Lark; a Fable from the German of Gellert.”⁴ In his original poetry he was indistinguishable from most of the minor versifiers of the last two decades of the eighteenth century. His themes were the conventional ones: the poor versus the rich, nature versus art, the country versus the city, the charm of older times, customs, ruined buildings. Not a little of his poetry was occasional, lamenting the untimely death of an infant, of “Athenian” Stuart, and of John Wesley. He wrote “Elegiac Lines to Young Lady on the Death of her Father” (1790, p. 163) and “Stanzas on the Festival of Christmas” (1790, pp. 70-1). That same year, he was given the honor of writing the prefatory congratulatory poem on the completion of another year of publication of the *GM*, surely a mark of success of some kind. The honor was repeated in 1801, for the poem on the verso of the title-page of the second part of the *GM*, signed Philo-Urbanus was his.⁵ The religious note is strong in his verses, mingled with classical mythology and couched in personifications. Here, as one example, is the concluding verse paragraph of his poem “The Reverie”:

But now, behold, the general God of Day,
 On Eastern cliffs pursues his radiant way;
 And, 'neath the horror of the pendant rock,
 The shepherd, see, attend his harmless flock.
 Lo, there the shelving wood, at each rude breath
 Of Eurus, seems to threaten the vale beneath:
 While, near at hand, the headlong torrent sweeps.
 The Fumbling flood adown the trembling steep.
 But here my ravish'd eyes can see no more,
 For Ocean copes the long-extended shore.
 Ah! See the beauteous face of Heaven o'ercast,
 And Furies ride upon the howling blast!
 Disturb'd, I start, the airy vision flies,
 And life's low cares once more unwelcom'd rise. (1790, p. 939).

745-6 (a translation from Petrarch); 1811, p. 264 (2 sonnets “Written in 1800”); 1824, p. 457.

³See 1794, p. 165 for translations in these seven languages.

⁴1791, p. 264 and 1793, p. 159.

⁵James M. Kuist, *The Nichols File of “The Gentleman’s Magazine”* (Madison, WI, 1982), p. 138.

Reid wrote in blank verse, heroic couplets, octosyllabics, and in various stanzaic forms, sometimes departing from traditional patterns.⁶ He even wrote a pastoral dialogue entitled “An Elegiac Fragment upon a Country Pastor” in which Morlan and Thyrsis mourn the death of Theron and sing his praises—but neither in Scots dialect nor in the language of Spenser (1794, p. 165). Perhaps his “Sonnet on Viewing an Ancient Fortress, Armory, &c” may serve as an example of his abilities and interests.

These princely towers, majestic in decline,
 To some may give a retrospective eye
 To the proud times of ancient chivalry,
Or when the goblets foam'd with gen'rous wine.

Targe, helm, or battle-axe, th' aspiring mind
 May with a noon-tide fervency inspire,
And feats of those long since to dust consign'd
 In souls congenial wake a kindred fire;

But who from life is wean'd by long distress,
 Pleasures more calm and soothing shall beguile;
He most the vestiges of Time shall bless,—
For that he'll think the hands that rais'd this pile,
Sorrow and anxious cares no more await,
Beneath the wail of woe, above the reach of fate. (1791, p. 759).⁷

Whatever one thinks of Reid's gifts as a poet, there can be little doubt that the evidence militates against any description of his as an untutored genius piping his native lays. More startling, in light of the description of him in the editorial note in the July 1788 *GM* earlier quoted, is the evidence of the prose pieces he contributed to that periodical.

From the poetry one learns that Reid was well read in a number of languages, that he wrote in traditional forms, that he was of a strongly religious nature,⁸ and that he was fairly well known in London (his “Monody on the late

⁶In his last sonnet, the first quatrain rhymes abba, while the remaining ten lines follow the Shakespearian sonnet form. See 1824, p. 457.

⁷See also the two “Sonnets written in 1800,” in 1811, p. 264.

⁸See especially *The Shechinah, A Sacred Poem, After the Manner of Pope's Messiah*, 1790, pp. 1128-9. “Shekinah,” according to the OED, is “The visible manifestation of the Divine Majesty, esp. when resting between the cherubim over the mercy-seat or in the temple of Solomon; a glory or refulgent light symbolizing the Divine Presence.”

Rev. Mr. J. Wesley" was "Recited at the Great Room in Cornhill").⁹ His last contribution to the *GM*, the sonnet in 1824, is signed as from "Hoxton," i.e. Hauxton in Cambridgeshire where, one assumes, he had retired. Much more of a biographical nature emerges from his prose contributions to the *GM*. Indeed, given the diversity of his interests and the areas of his knowledge, it is remarkable that so little notice has been taken of him. When the full extent of his contributions to the *GM* and other periodicals is realized, particularly his role in what seems to be an almost forgotten part of the history of the Jews in England (and more especially in London),¹⁰ he will emerge as a figure who deserves to be much better known.

Reid almost surely was a Londoner, one who spent most of his life in that city. Unfortunately, except for the "Hoxton" place designation in 1824, he never indicated where he was writing from, as so many other contributors to the *GM* did. But his knowledge of London, both past and present, was intimate, as witness one item in the *Index Indicatorius* for November, 1788: "One of the oldest private houses in London, he is told, is in Catherine-wheel Alley, Bishopsgate Street: It is built of wood, and at present used as a school. There are two ancient paintings in the taproom of the Paul Pindar's head, in the same street, relating to the comparative state of the Rich and Poor, which have not been publicly noticed" (p. 1007). And while it is too lengthy for quotation, his footnote on "an alehouse near a place they call Moorfields," in his translation of a French account of England under Charles II, must be read in its entirety (1791, p. 928). Elsewhere too in his contributions to the *GM* this knowledge of London is displayed in incidental fashion. In 1802 he could claim "an acquaintance of twenty years duration with nearly all sorts of conditions of religious persuasions" (p. 221), almost certainly in London.

As part of the controversy surrounding the efforts of the London Society for promoting Christianity among the Jews,¹¹ in which controversy Reid took an active part, a certain spokesman for the Society who contributed to the *GM* under the pseudonym Perseverans, wrote of him:

Your next Correspondent upon this subject is Mr. W. Hamilton Reid, who has favoured the publick with two papers, and who, like his friend Mr. Thos. Witherby, appears to be remarkably in the confidence of the Jews. Mr. Reid is said to be a gentleman who writes for Booksellers. . . . But, if this information is correct (and I had it from a Jew who knows Mr. Reid), is it very improbably that in writing these papers, he is in the employment of the Jews?

⁹See the *Scots Magazine* (Sept. 1791), pp. 444-5.

¹⁰It goes virtually unnoted in Cecil Roth's *History of the Jews in England* (Oxford, 1964), for example.

¹¹Announced as "recently established" in the April 1810 *GM* (p. 377).

Perseverans also wanted to know if Mr. Reid could “understand a sermon delivered” in Hebrew. At another point he inquired, “what church does Mr. Reid belong to and how long is it since he has left off attending the Unitarian Meeting at Hackney?” He also refers to an incident that remains a mystery. “It is happy for Mr. Reid,” he writes, “that in his unfortunate loss he met with some charitable Jew who, without any views or expectations that he would write for them against the London Society, so handsomely assisted him.” And as part of his conclusion Perseverans stated that he “might term Mr. Reid a modern Infidel, an advocate for Buonaparte, a Jacobin, and many other opprobrious terms” (1811, pp. 529-34, *passim*). The reference to a “modern Infidel” was to Reid’s book, “The Rise and Dissolution of the Infidel Societies in this metropolis: including the origin of modern Deism and Atheism” (by no means the whole title), published in 1800. “A Jacobin . . . is the result and combination of three kinds of depravity,” wrote the Abbé Barreul, as translated and reviewed in the January 1798 *GM* “Of Deism, or Atheism, as the particular or general enemy of religion; of the hatred of monarchy; and, finally, of the hatred of all social order, and moral restraint upon the passions of men” (p. 39). Reid reacted strongly against these charges.

Reid replied to Perseverans in August of the same year (1811), stating that neither he nor anybody else was hired by the Jews “as their advocate against the London Society” and that although he had known “but very few of them” he believed the Jews loyal and peaceful subjects (1811, pp. 132-3). He returned to the attack in September, beginning by claiming to live amicably with all believers of any kind, adding, “When very young, I was in the habit of hearing Messrs. Romaine, Madan, and other popular preachers” but he had abandoned “the doctrine of justification by faith alone.” William Romaine, a Methodist and a Hebrew scholar (1714-95), began preaching in 1748; Martin Madan (1765-90) was much influenced by Romaine. His preaching was during the years 1750-1780. Incidentally, in a short contribution on William Law (1687-1761) in the November 1800 *GM*, Reid wrote that “many years since, I was acquainted with some of his admirers,” adding that a cheap edition of Law’s *Case of Reason Stated* would be valuable in counteracting the “predilection” the public entertained for the “French goddess of reason” (pp. 1038-9). In answer to another of Perseverans questions Reid replied,

I do not know that Dr. Hirschell always preaches in Hebrew; if it be so, I am not ashamed to say I should not understand him; for though the Hebrew and other *dead* languages have occupied much of my time, not without some profit, yet with respect to the European which I profess, I have found *the living dog better than the dead lion*.

In answer to another question he stated that it was nearly three years since he had left off going to the Hackney Unitarian Meetings and that his “whole attendance there never exceeded three or four sermons.” He responded angrily to

the assertion that he had been handsomely assisted in his unfortunate loss, but also wrote, "of some handsome assistance I received from the *Literary Fund*, I have certainly made no secret," because "there is a species of approbation and encouragement, which cannot be obtained without a character in other respects irreproachable, as well as for some literary ability."¹² Reid stated that he was a "stranger" to Mr. Thomas Witherby and retorted sharply to the charge that he was a Jacobin, saying that "to hint this against one who has hazarded his personal safety by his repeated exposure of Jacobin principles, particularly in 1800¹³ and 1801, argues extreme ignorance of the character" Perseverans had "assailed." Finally, he told Perseverans that if he wished to continue the controversy he should reveal his identity and advised him to read "Kings and Kingdoms the Subjects of Prophecy" in "page 627 of your Supplement, to which I also ought to have attached my real name" (1811, pp. 231-5, *passim*).

Reid, signing himself Anti-Mercator, wrote about the second coming of Christ in the Supplement to Part I of the 1811 *GM* (pp. 627-32). Incidentally, another writer on the Jewish question praised Reid highly, stating:

Every writer (with the solitary exception of Mr. W. H. Reid) has fallen into many gross errors concerning the Jews; indeed I must give to Mr. Reid (the learned author of 'The New Sanhedrim; or, Causes and Consequences of the French Emperor's conduct to the Jews') my mite of gratitude; for he has indeed been 'an advocate for the house of Israel,' and has done ample justice to the Continental Jews as well as English ones.

The praise, in a contribution signed An Unconverted Jew and Englishman, appeared in the September 1810 *GM* (pp. 235-7).

Further to the matter of Reid's occupation: in a contribution of December 1792 he began by writing, "Since it has been part of my business to translate some of the papers in the Low Dutch language for a morning print, I could not help observing an advertisement in the *Haerlem Courante* of October 2" (p. 1082). Earlier that year, in September, he wrote, "Since I have had some acquaintance with the German, I met with the description of London written in that language, and published at Hanover in 1736" (p. 808), further evidence of his linguistic abilities and his interest in London. He seems to have been sufficiently well known so that when "a house was pulled down near Aldgate, and some papers found between the floor and ceilings of one of the upper stories, all in manuscript and principally poetical" the MSS were "communicated" to him "from a carpenter, who, hearing that I had some taste for poetry, &c. thought

¹²Begun in 1790.

¹³I assume this is a reference to his *Rise and Dissolution of the Infidel Societies*, published in this year. The 1801 reference is probably to the "religious publication" of that year.

they would afford some amusement" (p. 556). In a later contribution Reid revealed that he had been engaged "in the original plan of a religious publication in the commencement of 1801" in which "the department" he had taken soon called for "a better acquaintance with the originals of the *Sacred Writings*" (1802, p. 924).

In his capacity as writer for the booksellers and for the morning prints, as well as in his participation in more than one periodical publication, Reid saw, handled, and read many books. I am not sure, on the basis of the following, whether he may be termed a bibliographer or a bibliophile—or neither. In addition to those works already noted, something of the range and diversity of Reid's reading will be suggested by a few titles of works quoted or cited in his contributions: Constantin François de Volney's *The Ruins, or a Survey of the Revolutions of Empires*, in its 1795 English translation (1802, p. 811), mentioning in the same piece Voltaire's *Philosophical Dictionary* and his *Letters on the English Nation*. In 1794 he took occasion to comment on some letters written by the late Professor Frederick Sneedorf, author of *De Hymnis veterum Græcorum* (1786); following this is another piece in which he asked "whether a small volume, intitled 'Fausten, or the Age of Philosophy,' has appeared in English since 1780?" adding that he had "another charming work in German, viz. The Travels of a very intelligent Prussian through several parts of England in 1782; which has gone through four editions that I know of at Berlin" (pp. 217-18, 435). He owned or had access to a rare small tract, "Account of the Duke of York's (afterwards James II.) visit to the city of Amsterdam in 1681, from the remarks of William Carr, Gent. then Consul for the English nation. Printed in English in Amsterdam, 1688," which he quoted in its entirety (1789, pp. 688-90). He translated some "striking anecdotes [from] a miscellaneous French work . . . Amititiez, Amours, & Amourettes, by a M. Le Pays" (1690) for the September and October, 1791 issues of the *GM* (pp. 815-16, 928). Two years later he called attention to a "pamphlet, published on the continent, intitled, 'The Remarkable Life, Death, and Character of French Reputation'" (1793, pp. 893-4). Evident from most of these titles is Reid's knowledge of works printed on the continent, almost surely a by-product of his work for the booksellers. Possibly he may more properly be termed a Grub-street hack, one who handled many works primarily from necessity and only secondarily for sheer love; possibly this is to do him an injustice.

Although most of Reid's contributions to the *GM* breathe an air of sweet reasonableness, he could adopt a more rancorous tone. In December 1792 he wrote about a book in the Low Dutch language whose author's name and title he translated as "W. de Britain, the Englishman, upon the *Prosperity of Things*," a book he claimed also to have seen "in the German language in several sizes and editions" (p. 1082). Somebody wrote that Reid was mistaken and that the book was no other than the well-known "de proprietatibus rerum, of

the property of things,” by “Bartholomeus de Glanville, an English author.”¹⁴ Reid replied in the February 1793 *GM*, labeling the assertion of the anonymous critic “ignorant and unqualified” although it came in the “questionable shape” (a gratuitous bit of Shakespeare) “of superior learning, extensive reading, and the like” and hence deserved an answer. Reid likened his adversary to “the poor man, who raved about Alexander the Coppersmith, while his antagonist was talking of Alexander the Great!” (p. 124). Reid himself was taken severely to task by another correspondent, in the August 1793 *GM*, for having displayed “so much acrimony and so little judgement” in his answer to his anonymous critic. Since the writer in the August *GM* clearly proved Reid to be in the wrong, he wisely held his peace. His exchanges with Perseverans, already discussed, also bristle with sarcastic remarks. But Reid could admit to error, as a footnote to one passage at arms in the London Society controversy clearly demonstrates, for the note reads

Mr. Reid has very handsomely acknowledged, both personally, and by letter, that the conclusions he adopted and expressed in his letter to Mr. Urban, pp. 12, 13 concerning some passages in Mr. Atkins’s pamphlet, were prematurely formed from the perusal of a partial Review of it, previous to his having seen the Work itself” (1810, p. 239).

Reid’s familiarity with the Bible, particularly with the New Testament, is everywhere evident. His knowledge of English history is manifest in a question he posed in the *Index Indicatorius* for November 1788:

Since it is well known that the Talbots were successively Earls of Shrewsbury ever since John Talbot, Marshal of France, was created Earl of Shrewsbury, by Henry VI. 1442, by what authority is it asserted in Camden’s *Life of Queen Elizabeth*, translated in 1675, p. 37, that Francis Talbot was the first Earl, when, on the supposition that John Talbot was the first, he must be the fifth? (p. 1007).

It was in this same *Index* that Reid noted that if there were “no biographical traits extant of John Sage [*sic*, for John Sergeant; the book is signed J. S.], the antagonist of Mr. Locke, and the author of ‘Solid Philosophy asserted against the Ideists’, ‘The Method of Science farther illustrated,’ &c. he has some scraps of information for a future day.” Since his letter to the *GM* on William law contained more than a few scraps of information about that individual, and since among his published works there are biographies of Hugh Blair, William Paley, Colonel Wardel, Napoleon, and John Horne Tooke, one cannot but be convinced that he was fond of that genre. I believe the only

¹⁴I quote Reid’s piece, as his reference to the attack appearing “p. 1082 of your [the *GM*’s] late *Supplement*” is wrong. The attack is not in the 1792 *Supplement* nor elsewhere in the *GM* that I have been able to find.

references to biographical writings in his *GM* pieces are to Boswell's life of Johnson (1802, p. 221) and to events in Milton's life (1788, p. 784).¹⁵

Reid, it is abundantly clear, is a writer who, although his work, both as poet and prose writer, is of a minor order, must be accorded a certain degree of attention. He and his work were sufficiently suited to contemporary taste as to command the attention that he has not been paid since the first quarter of the nineteenth century. But when the history of Grub Street is written to include the years up to 1825, his is a name, and his are works, which will deserve, at the very least, some lengthy mention. I have pointed out omissions of mention of his writings in Raymond Haven's *Influence of Milton on English Poetry* and in Cecil Roth's *History of the Jews in England*. He may similarly have been forgotten by students of other matters about which he wrote. Nor should it go unnoted that there are other forgotten William Hamilton Reids, buried in the pages of the *GM* and other periodicals, awaiting resurrection.

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¹⁵John Nichols attributes a piece by "An Occasional Correspondent, and Searcher After Antiquities," with the title "Account of a Grocer in Wood Street, Cheapside, who preserved himself and Family from infection during the great Plague of 1665" (which he quotes in its entirety) to Reid (Kuiet, p. 138).