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### **Negotiating independence: manliness and begging letters in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Scotland**

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## Negotiating independence: manliness and begging letters in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Scotland<sup>1</sup>

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To the modern reader, begging appears an unmanly act. The association of modern manliness, and indeed the modern individual, with independence, self-sufficiency, ‘breadwinning’ or ‘provision’, and equality and fraternity locates the dependency of the beggar in unmasculine, even feminine, territory. Relying on another, the beggar is placed as unable to help himself, affirming his ‘lack’ and his subordinate place in the social hierarchy. Such a positioning of the self is challenging for modern historians who, as individuals, resist dependency, seeing it as a threat to autonomous selfhood. Whilst feminist and postmodernist scholars challenge such discourses of autonomy, celebrating the benefits of embracing the other to our sense of identity and to understanding historical selves, we still find it difficult to apply such analysis to deeply hierarchical relationships, where one self appears so vulnerable, so reliant on the benevolence – the exercise of power – of the powerful. As feminists, we resist the implication that dependency (so closely tied to femininity) is ‘negative’, that reliance on the other makes us less; yet, we seem drawn to place more emphasis on agency, on resistance, on negotiation, than on the ways that dependency shapes the self.<sup>2</sup>

Reflecting this, the history of beggars has not viewed them as entirely helpless. Begging has been located amongst a range of strategies that men and women used to make ends meet, to survive in times of economic downturn, or to further their families’ social mobility.<sup>3</sup> As Tim Hitchcock notes, begging in the eighteenth century was an acknowledged social practice that located beggars within the community and endowed them with particular rights.<sup>4</sup> In this framework, begging was less a form of debasement of the self than a method of negotiation within particular power structures.

Understanding begging as a social practice is useful for a study of early modern and modernising Britain, where social and political equality was far from the idealised social structure. By the late eighteenth century, there was growing emphasis on individual character and independence as the basis of economic and political rights, supported by a tolerance of the socially mobile and the spread of democratic ideals. Yet, this should not be overstated. Allegiance to hierarchical social structure and belief in its importance to social stability was mainstream.<sup>5</sup> The fulfilment of paternal responsibility towards the less fortunate remained a key evidence of patriarchal manhood and the right to bestow patronage endured as a central privilege and benefit of landownership, political power, wealth and particular occupational and civil service roles.<sup>6</sup>

While understandings of social order, and masculinity in relation to social order, underwent reformulation, there remained a considerable space for begging in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain, especially when conceived broadly to embrace not only the requests of the very poor but those seeking patrons to find them work, positions in the military, apprenticeships for children, and similar.<sup>7</sup> Here ‘beggar’ incorporated not only those who sought alms on the street or at doors, but also those making petitions for patronage and charity from individuals and institutions.

Individual charity and patronage was particularly important in Scotland, where the poor relief system was less institutionalised than south of the border. While parishes had a legal obligation to support the poor, the definition of the poor, levels of support, and who was expected to pay the bill remained contentious issues across the eighteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Until the mid-nineteenth century, poor relief was commonly funded by voluntary and charitable payments, rather than regular taxation.<sup>9</sup> Begging on the street – particularly by vagrants, or those without parish residence – was criminalised and discouraged by early policing. At times of economic downturn or poor harvest, this system was particularly problematic as demand

for relief exceeded available funds. During such periods, the poor were given permission to beg in the streets of their own parishes, whilst the charitable and voluntary nature of the system encouraged personal approaches to landowners and other wealthy individuals to intervene with aid for the needy. Such frameworks for charitable giving and patronage reinforced traditional power structures well into the nineteenth century, requiring both patrons and beggars to invest in a particular form of social hierarchy. As R.A. Houston notes, charitable social relationships were played out in begging letters, where Scottish petitioners were less likely to use the language of rights than their English counterparts.<sup>10</sup> Whilst it was a system that placed those asking in a subordinate role, patronage operated reciprocally to vest power in the patron, reinforcing the mutually beneficial nature of the relationship.

Given this, how men constructed their 'self' in the begging letter raises interesting questions. In an English context, Alannah Tomkins demonstrates how devastating the disability brought by illness and injury could be to male paupers' sense of masculinity, and charts the traces of psychological distress they displayed in the letters that they wrote to poor boards. Yet, illness also provided a language to justify their need and to defend against their failure as providers and so as men.<sup>11</sup> Joanne Bailey notes the importance of provisioning to male and female identity in English pauper letters (challenging the notion that this was an exclusively masculine ideal for the labouring classes), as well as noting how they drew on a language of sensibility to locate themselves as loving, nurturing parents.<sup>12</sup> Whilst these men were unable to achieve economic independence, affectionate fatherhood provided another outlet for the display and performance of masculine identity.

These studies provide insights into how men articulated their manliness in particular contexts, but both focus on how men resist being labelled 'unmanly' through their 'positive' or defensive articulations of themselves as men and as fathers. Such discussions disentangle particular components of men's begging practices as articulations of masculinity within an

act that is either explicitly or implicitly assumed to be unmanly. Part of this may be due to a tension that lies between masculine ideals (sometimes articulated as models of hegemonic masculinity) versus male behaviours and social practices that do not or cannot conform to the ideal.<sup>13</sup> Yet, no society has a single ‘ideal’ for masculine behaviour, with models influenced by social class, religion, and sexuality as well as personal choice. In hierarchical societies, it makes little sense for masculinity to be patterned on one form of values or behaviours, given that broader social expectations relied on people ‘knowing their place’ and performing to that place, through behaviour, dress and other forms of consumption, education and social values.

It is more helpful to think about masculinity in terms of performance or social practice, where all male behaviour becomes implicated in the construction of masculinity – although not all performances may be perceived either by the actor himself or those around him as successful.<sup>14</sup> Such an approach encourages an exploration of not only behaviours that are perceived as ‘positive’ assertions of maleness, but also those that challenge hegemonic ideals, opening up insights into the multiple and complex ways that men construct their sense of self and allowing reflection on, and rearticulation of, the ‘ideal’. It allows for a more sensitive rendering of power relations between men and between men and women, with its focus on the operation of power not just at the level of representation, but in everyday life.

This chapter explores begging as an arena for the performance of manly identity with a particular focus on men’s use of the language of deference and gratitude in their requests for aid from other men. As is discussed below, such performances required the use of rhetorical strategies that explicitly recognized the hierarchical social relationship between those giving and receiving help. The chapter reassesses this language and explores its implications for the masculine identities of both writer and recipient. It places a particular emphasis on the word gratitude, as a key emotional concept used to articulate and perform a particular mode of masculinity. This is not to say that gratitude did not appear in letters

written to or received by women negotiating a patronage relationship, but it appears that gender played an important role in how writers constructed their claims for help.<sup>15</sup>

### **The ‘begging’ letter**

A historiography of the pauper begging letter is now well established in an English context. Historians have demonstrated the utility of the source not only as evidence for the operation of poor relief, but as a source for poor people’s general experiences, including those of unemployment, ill-health, medical practices, disability, and family relationships.<sup>16</sup> Aware of the paucity of sources for the voices of the poor, they have been keen to explore a source that is at least written by or for them, rather than about them. Yet, historians of the poor have been more anxious than most historians of the letter in trying to disentangle the rhetoric of the begging form from the ‘authentic’ feelings and experiences of the poor themselves – a concern heightened by the fact that a number of these letters were written by scribes, whether literate family members or officials. It is now almost ubiquitous to begin a work using such sources with a disclaimer that we can only access the ‘mediated voices of the poor’, or more optimistically that ‘a few pauper letters raise issues of “authorship”’, or even ‘rhetorical elements must not be regarded in any way interfering with their “true” substantive message’, a focus which has placed considerable emphasis on the analysis of form.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, we know that it was typical of pauper letters to poor relief overseers to combine some variety of polite and deferent entreaties for help from those in authority, with specific details of illness or circumstances, veiled threats to return home or to become a greater burden on the parish, assertions of moral or legal rights to relief, and promises to not bother the recipient in the future.<sup>18</sup> It is also evident that rhetorical strategies were shaped by gender, age, and region, and that people shared successful strategies with each other to improve their

success rates.<sup>19</sup> Given that many of the claims made by the poor in these letters were investigated by benefactors and their agents, it is also clear that what was stated about their circumstances was largely true and that some groups regularly had successful outcomes.<sup>20</sup>

These findings situate this branch of the historiography easily within the latest work on letter-writing as a historical source that emphasise the genre rules that guide its form and the ways that writers were educated to use them.<sup>21</sup> Yet, while this has implications for the ‘authenticity’ of voice within any letter, historians of the letter (rather than the poor) are less concerned with the role of form in mediating experience. Rather than viewing this as a question of ‘authenticity’, letter-writing is located as a social practice. The letter is not (and could never be) the free expression of the soul, but a performance that is shaped by the context in which the letter is written, the genre rules that inform writing in that context, as well as the writer’s relationship with the reader. It becomes a space to construct identity, whether that is as a man, a father, a provider or a beggar; that construction always involves more than one person, with identity informed by the reader, wider society, and, where appropriate, those that aid in writing the letter.<sup>22</sup>

Most of the literature on begging letters draws on the papers that survive for English poor relief boards or charitable institutions.<sup>23</sup> A notable exception is Houston’s *Peasant Petitions* that compares petitions from tenants to their landlords across the United Kingdom. His work provides a comprehensive introduction to this source and its uses in the making of rural class relationships. This chapter similarly uses letters written to private individuals, mostly Scottish landowners or other wealthy elites, by those seeking various forms of help, from alms to more sophisticated forms of patronage, between c.1760 and 1830. These letters survive as part of estate papers, collated either in separate files as collections of petitions and begging letters, or interspersed amongst general correspondence.<sup>24</sup> It is apparent that some individuals, perhaps a considerable number of the Scottish elites, were regularly sent requests

for help and treated them seriously as part of the responsibility that went with their social role.<sup>25</sup> Landowners typically received letters from those that lived on their estates and nearby towns, urban dwellers from the local poor. Both received letters from those with whom they had previous relationships, such as merchants, servants, and political clients, as well as random requests from across Britain – a group that were often viewed suspiciously as ‘professional beggars’ or ‘frauds’.<sup>26</sup> Whilst these categories could include kin, this chapter focuses on relationships where fulfilling familial obligation was not the primary mode of persuasion used by the writer.

Letters asking for help were written by a range of social groups, including paupers, the elderly and ill, tenants, merchants and other middling people. What they had in common was their need for patronage from the elite, who often filed their letters together – how social distinctions played out in letter-writing will be explored below. As the letters were written between named individuals, rather than from the poor to social institutions, writers needed to take account of the identity of the recipient and to create or rejuvenate a personal relationship with her or him. This was particularly notable in Scotland, where Houston observes that references to a personal service relationship between petitioners and landlords was a distinctive petitioning strategy.<sup>27</sup>

### **I rest your humble and obedient servant**

Begging letters to the Scottish elites generally took two forms: the official petition and the personal letter. By the late eighteenth century, both genres had established rules that determined structure and content, and which were taught widely in school and through the circulation of formal conduct books.<sup>28</sup> The petition was a widely used form, where individuals or groups sought aid or intervention from the powerful. Political petitioning was a



key form of democratic engagement for the disenfranchised, acknowledged as a legitimate form of expressing political opinion.<sup>29</sup> Personal petitions were more narrowly conceived, usually desiring intervention for individuals, whether that was a reprieve from a criminal sentence or aid for a starving family. Yet, they can be situated with formal political petitioning, both in adopting the same structure and in acting as a commentary on contemporary affairs.

Structurally, the petition differed from a letter in that the opening was usually centred on the page (rather than set to the left), addressing the full name and title of the patron, and introducing the petitioner. Finlay McDiarmid opened his, 'To the Right Hon<sup>ble</sup> the Earl of Breadalbane The Representation and Petition of Finlay McDiarmid, late Servant & Now Cottar in Murlagan beg of Glenlochry'.<sup>30</sup> This was followed by 'Humbly Sheweth', usually set alone, and sometimes in the margin, with a space above and beneath. The petition then followed, normally but not always in the third person. At times, the petition was written by a scribe, who sometimes made observations on the case; at others, the petition moves between the first and third person, suggestive of the tensions of telling a personal narrative in this form. Generally in Scotland, the document introduced the petitioner's circumstances and need, and their relationship to the patron (and why they are the appropriate patron), before proposing the desired solution. Petitions concluded with the phrase 'he will forever pray &c.'<sup>31</sup>

Personal letters were similar and some adopted the structure of the petition within the frame of a letter. Letters written to men typically began 'Dear Sir', unless another title was required due to rank, such as 'My Lord Duke'. People used the expected form taught within conduct manuals for formal letter writing.<sup>32</sup> Internally, letters varied more than petitions, depending on the relationship between the writer and reader. Where there were few pre-existing ties, personal letters resembled petitions in content and structure. Where a previous

relationship existed, there might be references to past or ongoing conversations, the well-being of mutual friends and acquaintances, business, and the sharing of local news or gossip. Unlike petitions, letters were written in the first person. Authors usually finished with some version of 'I remain your grace's most dutifull and very humble servant', 'your lords most obedient and very humble servant', 'your obligd Humble Servant'.<sup>33</sup>

Formal addresses and subscriptions were not mere formalities, but, as argued elsewhere, actively shaped the dynamics of the relationship between reader and writer.<sup>34</sup> Petitions were generally written by people in desperate circumstances, who needed basic aid to survive, whether that was food, money or accommodation (typically in the form of rent relief). They had little to offer the recipient other than prayers in return for their charity, and the signature 'he will forever pray &c' acknowledged that (at least at that time) they could not even provide the service offered by the 'humble servant'. The petitioning format formalised their requests for help, whilst the use of the third person distanced their claims from personal requests giving them weight as 'truthful' or 'factual'. This was often reinforced by character references from local notables, kirk elders or poor law officials.<sup>35</sup> In petitioning, the poor claimed the authority that the petition held within the British polity, demanding the reader take it seriously. Not all petitions were granted. Yet, if archival practices can be used as evidence of their significance, the Scottish elites, or their representatives, like those south of the border, gave serious consideration to such requests, often citing the reasons for refusal briefly on the petition and in some cases sending factors to investigate claims.<sup>36</sup> It appears that petitions, and so petitioners, could not simply be ignored.

The offer to pray is worth commenting on further. As Houston notes, prayer involved both bodily posture and a 'submissive heart'; it was a form of aspiration and an expression of thanks that transformed 'political dependence into the humility of religious reverence'.<sup>37</sup> Within a Catholic context, such prayers had active utility in speeding the movement of the

dead from purgatory to heaven, or, for the living, in reducing their time in purgatory later. Prayer was an act of charity towards the dead and viewed as a reciprocal exchange between the praying poor and the patron, although the benefits to the latter accrued in the afterlife. Protestants rejected purgatory and with it prayers for the dead, although the latter continued in practice.<sup>38</sup> Prayers offered by the poor in this context were for the continued wellbeing and success of the patron and his family in the present; prayer was intended to ensure the continuing social order.

In offers to pray was an implicit, and sometimes explicit, acknowledgement of a commitment on the behalf of the petitioner to remain in their subordinate role. John Campbell of Edramucky finished his: 'May it please your Lordship to take the promises in consideration and order the Petitioner such Relieff and assistance as to your Lordship shall appear reasonable, and he will forever pray &c'.<sup>39</sup> Although perhaps unintentional, this run on sentence suggested that Campbell's prayers were the reward for the Earl of Breadalbane's 'Relieff and assistance'. Alexander Loutit noted: 'It shall ever be my study and care, to continue deserving of your humane patronage, and in duty bound I shale for ever pray'.<sup>40</sup> Loutit's prayers arose from a duty that patronage bound him within. Without such patronage, there was no such duty. By locating this social relationship within a religious context, writers placed their call for aid within a Christian framework where the rich man was rewarded for charity through God's mercy, giving moral weight to the duties that bound men together.

Personal letters were also written by the poorest in society and could contain promises to pray for patrons. William Sinclair concluded his letter 'may god kepe your honer long well and may he allwais find his faver'.<sup>41</sup> Yet, the formal subscription of 'I rest your humble and obedient servant' that was the expected closing for such letters suggested a slightly different dynamic. As a subscription, 'I rest your humble and obedient servant' was used widely in a great range of relationships, from business partners to siblings to strangers requesting help.

Its broad usage has led to it being dismissed as little more than polite rhetoric, ‘artifice, flattery and deference’.<sup>42</sup> The range of people that described themselves as ‘humble servants’ cautions against reading this subscription as entirely sycophantic.

The service relationship was not limited to master-servant, but an expected component of all ‘friendships’, where ‘friend’ incorporated a broad range of social ties.<sup>43</sup> The use of ‘servant’ was a simple acknowledgement that affective social relationships – whether between spouses, kin, business partners or wider friends – incorporated practical, often economic, duties or ‘services’. The adjective ‘humble’ reflected the esteem, real or pretended, in which the writer held the recipient. ‘Humble’ held two meanings – one was ‘low; not high; not great’ and was generally used to refer to the poor. The other meaning, the first meaning in Johnson’s dictionary, was ‘not proud; modest; not arrogant’ and was a key Christian virtue.<sup>44</sup> Christian humility required people to ‘esteem others better than yourself’, to show love and charity for neighbours, to show appropriate sociability.<sup>45</sup> It required an ‘act of submission’ of the self in its displacement of pride and selfishness, but it was not expected to undermine social relationships, rather to impress people with their duties and responsibilities towards their fellow man. This meaning was reinforced when coupled with the word ‘servant’, which suggested the shared Christian community of God’s servants.<sup>46</sup> ‘Humble servants’ embedded themselves within a complex set of social relationships that demanded mutual fulfilment of duties, charity and care, according to social position.

When those writing begging letters used this subscription, they were declaring themselves part of this broader affective community, not effacing the self in any simple way. That the poor interpreted their relationships with the elite in this way was also evident in references to charity and service within the body of the letter. A common rhetorical strategy by men and women was to locate their appeal for help as a request for charity and to emphasise the spiritual and temporal benefits of charity to the patron as well as the poor. This

often incorporated significant flattery of the patron that reminded him of his duty to be charitable. The poor widow Elizabeth Glas's observation to the Duke of Buccleuch that 'constantly hearing that your exalted noble character is blessed with every humane generous feeling has emboldened me to venture to lay my situation before your grace' was not dissimilar to the recent medical graduate P. MacDermott's comment that:

I was reading in the newspapers some pleasing anecdotes of your generosity so well becoming the heir of a splendid fortune, therefore I am led to hope that my request will be graciously considered by the representative of the noble House of Buccleuch, the members of which have always been highminded and generous.<sup>47</sup>

Or indeed from the university student Charles Clark's 'knowing that your Grace is the Patron of that which is generous liberal and good and being a distinguished nobleman of Scotland'.<sup>48</sup>

John Campbell felt assured that the Earl of Breadlbane would 'in your well known humanity, deem him a proper object of commiserations and charity', whilst Dr William Sinclair of Lochend was challenged about his generosity when Donald Ogg angrily wrote: 'I rely thought that there was more Charity in your heart till now'.<sup>49</sup> Patrons were reminded of their reputations for 'generosity', 'humanity' and 'charity', as well as that of their kin, locating their charitableness within a range of activities that provided glory and status to the broader family and themselves. Charity brought reciprocal benefits to both parties.

Charitable behaviour did not just enhance the giver's reputation amongst the poor, but provided real spiritual and temporal benefits that were refracted along gendered lines. A number of women called upon their patrons to 'take up the Cause of the widow and the fatherless now as at other times', tying this biblical command closely to a spiritual blessing.<sup>50</sup> Joan Robertson wrote to the Duke of Buccleuch 'May the blissings of god even be with you for your former kindness to me – your Nobel graces will have the widow and the fathelas blissing'.<sup>51</sup> Isobel Grant was more effusive in writing to a female patron, observing that:

And as I am not in a Capacity to Retailerate your Good offices. I hope the almighty who is a husband to the widow & father to the fatherless will[.] concluding with not only my best wishes and my blessing ...; May it be Gods will to prosper all of you well your undertakings and that he may go pleas'd to send your honourable Ladyship such an Honourable Fortune, as you deserve and your Petitioner shall ever pray.<sup>52</sup>

Women, especially widows, recognising either the reality or the cultural expectation that they would not be in a position to repay charity were much more likely to locate the benefits of answering their requests in spiritual terms – a strategy that also allowed them to draw on their cultural capital as ‘deserving poor’.

In contrast, men side-lined discussions of God’s blessings. Men who were very poor, and particularly the elderly, usually avoided the topic of repayment, beyond their formal acknowledgement to pray. Younger men and those seeking patronage for work or similar, were more likely to explicitly acknowledge that this ‘humble servant’ meant to demonstrate their service. The wright George Home, when seeking to go into business, hoped that his namesake, George Home of Wedderburn would give him £50, which ‘if complied with will entail upon me the most lasting obligation to you for such a great favour’.<sup>53</sup> W. Lindley explicitly observed:

if your Humanity could for the last assist me it would render me happy and something may turn out as put me in a way to return your Goodness. I am awar my Lord Humanity may be ill aid [paid?] But depend it will not be so by me for my Heart Bleeds within me to be troublesome.<sup>54</sup>

Whilst unable to specify how they would return their patron’s charity, both men sought to stress that this request would create a reciprocally beneficial relationship.

For a number of men and particularly those from a slightly higher social background, demonstrating their sense of obligation was considered to be an important aspect of

‘gratitude’. Ruth Perry notes that in the lateeighteenth century, literary representations of charity, at least, focused more on the giver than the recipient. It is the ‘inner life’ of the generous ‘that is supposed to interest the reader, not that of the recently relieved poor. *Their* hyperbolic gratitude is taken for granted; gratitude is presumed to be a less interesting emotion than the exquisite feelings of the giver’.<sup>55</sup> This might explain why charitable patrons were so often located as generous heroes, but, as Houston notes, it underestimates the importance placed on gratitude within wider society, particularly as a mode for ensuring social order. The Irish landlord Richard Warburton observed that ‘gratitude will oblige tenants ye more to honour and esteeme their landlord’.<sup>56</sup>

In an eighteenth-century context, gratitude was understood less in terms of feeling than action. Samuel Johnson defined gratitude as, first, ‘duty to benefactors’ and second, ‘desire to return benefits’.<sup>57</sup> By 1835, James Barclay’s dictionary placed more emphasis on feeling, with duty as a secondary meaning: ‘a virtue, consisting in a due sense and outward acknowledgement of a benefit received, together with a readiness to return the same, or the like. Duty to a benefactor’.<sup>58</sup> The emphasis on ‘duty’ tied gratitude into social relationships. Duty was not just an obligation to which men were bound (Johnson’s first definition), but the ‘obedience and submission due to parents, governours, or superiors; loyalty’ and an ‘act of reverence and respect’.<sup>59</sup> Gratitude was a social emotional practice that combined the desire to fulfil reciprocal obligations with appropriate awareness of the social relationship between benefactor and recipient and was marked by a suitable emotional display and behaviour. Like the begging letter itself, which combined the identities of both writer and reader, it was an act that created a hierarchical social bond and emphasised the mutual benefits of that connection.

Because of these semantic connotations, gratitude was an emotion that acted as an offering in an exchange relationship. William Campbell was ‘mortified’ to learn that his

thanks to a patron for procuring his son a job in the excise had not been transmitted to him.

Defending himself, he wrote:

I am truly concerned at what you state regarding my want of gratitude ... , I immediately, as in duty bound, wrote a letter of thanks to you, and begged of you the additional favour as above stated, for I abhor, and detest Ingratitude in whomsoever it is found.<sup>60</sup>

He emphasised his awareness of gratitude as a 'duty' to be fulfilled, and its social importance in its own right. On his son receiving a commission in the army, James Wingate observed:

my feelings I cannot suppress, the only recompense which I can or ever may have it in my power to offer, is gratitude, but if at any future period, I can be of the least use to your Lordship or any of your family, I shall esteem it an honour to be of the smallest service.<sup>61</sup>

Wingate offered gratitude as 'recompense', a form of compensation for patronage, in addition to his offer of future service. For both men, gratitude was articulated as a useful commodity on its own, not only due to the future promise of service that it implied.

At least in part, the utility of gratitude was due to its commitment to social hierarchies. P. MacDermott argued the reciprocal benefits of gratitude explicitly in his letter:

I am but an humble individual as a young physician, I flatter myself that I possess talents to raise me to some eminence in my profession, and hope it will yet be in my power to testify my gratitude to your Grace in a suitable manner.<sup>62</sup>

MacDermott notes that his expected future prominence in his profession would allow him to make a return of service, but also that he would 'testify my gratitude', a particularly evocative phrase, implying not only that he would prove his gratitude through reciprocal return but act as witness to his patron's benevolence – a beacon for the patronage



relationship. In this, gratitude reinforced social hierarchies, but like prayer and humble service, it emphasised that the patronage relationship did not only flow in one direction.

### **Of manliness and gratitude: a conclusion**

Whilst the deferent structure of the begging letter has so often been dismissed as strategy or as a layer that detracts from the ‘authentic’ self of the beggar, the letter structure reflected and created the relationship between patron and client. It demarcated a social world that relied on people knowing their place in a hierarchical order and so asked men to perform different social roles to each other and to display that in how they expressed their identities in writing. Yet, whilst reinforcing traditional social structures, the begging letter also emphasised the importance of reciprocity. Humble servants provided service whether they were members of the social elite or the poorest peasant, because it was a duty of charitable Christians and because it reinforced the power of the giver. Beggars knew this and utilised a language of gratitude that reflected the mutuality of their relationship, aware and possibly hoping that they too could be called on to perform their part in an exchange relationship.

For the very poorest and for many women, with little possibility of offering a practical fulfilment of the obligations created by charity, duty could be fulfilled through prayer for patrons – an action that provided a service in the form of seeking a spiritual blessing, but which also enforced their acknowledgement of the current social order. In so doing, the democratic potential of the petition, which provided the petitioner with the authority of the British political tradition, was held in check, enforcing the duties and social place of both patron and client. Other men could attempt to fulfil their obligation in practical ways; in doing so, they positioned themselves as holding greater social power than the very poor whilst also promising to uphold the current system of social order.

Given this, analyses of the begging letter that distinguish manly activities from unmanly dependence miss the nuances of how social dependency informed structures of masculinity. Acknowledging one's social position in a hierarchical system was not a denial of self, but a recognition of self within a sociable community. Gratitude provided poor men with a language to assert their own role within the social order, to acknowledge the benefits that such an order accrued to the social elite, and which they ensured through their cooperation within that system – it allowed them to highlight that dependency operated in both directions. Whilst this was also true for women, that the performance of gratitude was gendered provided men with more space to demonstrate this quality and so provided them with greater levels of social authority than those who did not have this opportunity. Yet, through their prayers, this was a system where even the very poor had a place.

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<sup>1</sup> This research was funded by the Australian Research Council DE140100111.

<sup>2</sup> Alison Mackinnon, 'Fantasizing the family: women, families and the quest for an individual self', *Women's History Review*, 15 (2006), pp. 663–75; Sal Renshaw, *The Subject of Love: Hélène Cixous and the Feminine Divine* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (London: Continuum, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Tim Hitchcock, 'Locating beggars on the streets of eighteenth-century London', in Kim Kippen and Lori Woods (eds), *Worth and Repute: Valuing Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe; Essays in Honour of Barbara Todd* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2011), pp. 73–92; M. J. D. Roberts, 'Reshaping the gift relationship: the London Mendicity Society and the suppression of begging in England, 1818–1869', *International Review of Social History*, 36 (1991), pp. 201–31.

<sup>4</sup> Tim Hitchcock, 'Begging on the streets of eighteenth-century London', *Journal of British Studies*, 44 (2005), pp. 478–98.

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew McCormack, *The Independent Man: Citizenship and Gender Politics in Georgian England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005); Katie Barclay, 'Manly magistrates and citizenship in an Irish town: Carlow, 1820–1840', in Krista Cowman, Nina Koefoed and Åsa Karlsson Sjögren (eds), *Gender in Urban Europe: Sites of Political Activity and Citizenship, 1750–1900* (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 58–72.

<sup>6</sup> Trev Lynn Broughton, 'Promoting a life: patronage, masculinity and Philip Meadows Taylor's *The Story of My Life*', in David Amigoni (ed.), *Life Writing and Victorian Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate 2006), pp. 105–21; Alison Duncan, 'Patronage and presentations of the self: a late eighteenth-century correspondence', (MPhil Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2008); Ellen Gill, "'Children of the Service': paternalism, patronage and friendship in the Georgian navy', *Journal for Maritime Research*, 15:2 (2013), pp. 149–65.

<sup>7</sup> For masculinity and social order in Scotland, see Lynn Abrams, 'The taming of Highland masculinity: inter-personal violence and shifting codes of manhood, c. 1760–1840', *Scottish Historical Review*, 92 (2013), pp. 100–22; Rosalind Carr, *Gender and Enlightenment Culture in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014); Susan Broomhall and David Barrie, 'Changing of the guard: governance, policing, masculinity and class in the Porteous affair and Walter Scott's *Heart of Midlothian*', *Parergon*, 28:1 (2011), pp. 65–90; Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> Rosalind Mitchison, *The Old Poor Law in Scotland: The Experience of Poverty, 1574–1845* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 158–9.

<sup>10</sup> R.A. Houston, *Peasant Petitions: Social Relations and Economic Life on Landed Estates, 1600-1850* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), p. 182.

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<sup>11</sup> Alannah Tomkins, “‘Labouring on a bed of sickness’”: the material and rhetorical deployment of ill health in male pauper letters’, in Andreas Gestrich, Elizabeth Hurren, Steven King (eds), *Poverty and Sickness in Modern Europe: Narratives of the Sick Poor, 1780–1938* (London: Continuum, 2012), pp. 51–68.

<sup>12</sup> Joanne Bailey, “‘Think wot a mother must feel’”: parenting in English pauper letters’, *Family & Community History*, 13:1 (2010), pp. 5–19.

<sup>13</sup> Raewyn Connell, ‘Hegemonic masculinity: rethinking the concept’, *Gender & Society*, 19 (2005), pp. 829–59; Leslie McCall, ‘The complexity of intersectionality’, in Davina Cooper (ed.), *Intersectionality and Beyond: Law, Power and the Politics of Location* (Oxon: Routledge-Cavendish, 2009), pp. 49–76.

<sup>14</sup> Judith Butler, ‘Gender as performance’, in Peter Osborne (ed.), *A Critical Sense: Interviews with Intellectuals* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 111–12; Chris Brickell, ‘Masculinities, performativity, and subversion: a sociological reappraisal’, *Men and Masculinities*, 8 (2005), pp. 24–43.

<sup>15</sup> Works on female patronage include: Rosalind Carr, ‘Women, land and power: a case for continuity’, in Katie Barclay and Deborah Simonton (eds), *Women in Eighteenth-Century Scotland: Public, Intellectual and Private Lives* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 193–210; Sharon Kettering, ‘The patronage power of early modern French Noblewomen’, *Historical Journal*, 32:4 (1989), pp. 817–41.

<sup>16</sup> Gestrich et al., *Poverty and Sickness*; Alannah Tomkins, “‘I mak bould to wright’”: first-person narratives in the history of poverty in England, c. 1750–1900’, *History Compass*, 9:5 (2011), pp. 365–73; Peter Jones, “‘I cannot keep my place without being deascent’”: pauper letters, parish clothing and pragmatism in the south of England, 1750–1830’, *Rural History*, 20:1 (2009), pp. 31–49; K.D.M. Snell, ‘Belonging and community: understandings of ‘home’ and ‘friends’ among the English Poor, 1750–1850’, *Economic History Review*, 65:1 (2012),

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<sup>17</sup> Andreas Gestrich, Elizabeth Hurren and Steven King, ‘Narratives of poverty and sickness in Europe 1780–1938: sources, methods and experiences’, in Gestrich et al., *Poverty and Sickness*, p. 13; Snell, ‘Belonging and community’, p. 2; Sokoll, ‘Writing for relief’, p. 108.

<sup>18</sup> Sokoll, ‘Writing for relief’.

<sup>19</sup> Steven King, ‘Regional patterns in the experiences and treatment of the sick poor, 1800–1840: rights, obligations and duties in the rhetoric of paupers’, *Family & Community History*, 10:1 (2007), pp. 61–75.

<sup>20</sup> Sokoll, ‘Writing for relief’, p. 106.

<sup>21</sup> For example, Martyn Lyons, ‘Love letters and writing practices: on *ecritures intimes* in the nineteenth century’, *Journal of Family History*, 24 (1999), pp. 232–39; C. Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Susan Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers 1660–1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> Mireille Bossis and Karen McPherson, ‘Methodological journeys through correspondences’, *Yale French Studies*, 71 (1986), pp. 63–75; Katie Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power: Marriage and Patriarchy in Scotland: 1650–1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 28–30.

<sup>23</sup> Notable exceptions are Peter Wessel Hansen, ‘Grief, sickness and emotions in the narratives of the shamefaced poor in late eighteenth-century Copenhagen’, in Gestrich et al.,

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*Poverty and Sickness*, pp. 35–50 and Donna T. Andrew, ‘*Noblesse Oblige*: female charity in an age of sentiment’, in John Brewer and Susan Staves (eds), *Early Modern Conceptions of Property* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 275-300.

<sup>24</sup> These papers are held by the National Records of Scotland, Edinburgh [hereafter NRS].

<sup>25</sup> Andrews, ‘*Noblesse Oblige*’, p. 276.

<sup>26</sup> See for example, NRS, Papers of the Montague-Douglas-Scott Family, Dukes of Buccleuch, GD224/588/1/13 Begging Letter Department, Mendicity Office, London to Duke of Buccleuch, 25 March 1828, describing one petitioner as ‘wholly undeserving’ having ‘supported herself for many years by writing begging letters’.

<sup>27</sup> Houston, *Peasant Petitions*, pp. 184-5.

<sup>28</sup> Whyman, *Pen and the People*, pp. 19–38.

<sup>29</sup> David Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture: Printing, Petitions and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>30</sup> NRS, Breadalbane Muniments, GD112/11/8/16/36, Finlay McDiarmid to Earl of Breadalbane, 26 July 1826.

<sup>31</sup> Houston, *Peasant Petitions*, pp. 97-103.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 94-96.

<sup>33</sup> NRS, GD224/588/1/9, John Williamson to Duke of Buccleuch, 2 October 1828; GD112/74/23/10-11, James Wingate to Earl of Breadalbane, 16 November 1811; GD136/524/56, Papers of the Sinclair Family of Freswick, Caithness, John Crear to William Sinclair of Freswick, 24 September 1836.

<sup>34</sup> Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power*, p. 105.

<sup>35</sup> For example, NRS, GD224/588/1/8, George Simmonds to Duke of Buccleuch, 18 September 1828; GD112/11/8/16/36.

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- <sup>36</sup> For example, NRS, GD112/11/8/16/36; GD224/588/1/8; GD224/588/1/32, James Brackenridge to Duke of Buccleuch, 1829; Donna Andrew, “‘To the charitable and the humane’”: appeals for assistance in the eighteenth-century London press’, in Hugh Cunningham and Joanna Innes (eds), *Charity, Philanthropy and Reform: from the 1690s to 1850* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 1998), pp. 91-5.
- <sup>37</sup> Houston, *Peasant Petitions*, p. 98.
- <sup>38</sup> For an extended discussion, see Ralph Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family in England, 1480–1750* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).
- <sup>39</sup> NRS, GD112/11/1/6/65, John Campbell to Earl of Breadalbane, September 1788.
- <sup>40</sup> NRS, GD136/524/204 Alexander Loutit to William Sinclair of Freswick, October 1820.
- <sup>41</sup> NRS, GD136/524/394 William Sinclair to William Sinclair of Freswick, [c.1824-6].
- <sup>42</sup> Whyman, *Pen and the People*, p. 22.
- <sup>43</sup> Naomi Tadmor, ‘The concept of the household-family in eighteenth century England’, *Past and Present*, 151 (1996), pp. 111–40.
- <sup>44</sup> Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (Dublin: W.G. Jones, 1768), unpaginated, see ‘humble’.
- <sup>45</sup> Gardiner Spring, *Essays on the distinguishing traits of Christian character* (Boston: Samuel Armstrong, 1819). p. 116.
- <sup>46</sup> Houston, *Peasant Petitions*, p. 103.
- <sup>47</sup> NRS, GD224/588/1/17, Elizabeth Glas to Duke of Buccleuch, 24 October 1828; /3, P MacDermott to Duke of Buccleuch, 28 July 1828;
- <sup>48</sup> NRS, GD224/588/1/6, Charles Clark to Duke of Buccleuch, September 1828.
- <sup>49</sup> NRS, GD112/11/1/6/65; GD136/435/241, Donald Ogg to Dr William Sinclair of Lochend, 21 August 1794.
- <sup>50</sup> NRS, GD136/524/43, Margaret Campbell to William Sinclair of Freswick [c.1816–38].

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- <sup>51</sup> NRS, GD224/588/1/14, Joan Robertson to Duke of Buccleuch, 5 December 1828.
- <sup>52</sup> NRS, Seafield Papers, GD248/371/4/32, Isobel Grant to 'Miss Grant', [c. 1762–88].
- <sup>53</sup> NRS, Home of Wedderburn, GD267/12/1, George Home to George Home of Wedderburn, 12 April 1817.
- <sup>54</sup> NRS, GD112/74/23/15-16, W. Lindley to Earl of Breadalbane, 23 November 1811.
- <sup>55</sup> Ruth Perry, 'Home economics: representations of poverty in eighteenth-century fiction', in Paula R. Backscheider and Catherine Ingrassia (eds), *A Companion to the Eighteenth-Century English Novel and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), p. 449.
- <sup>56</sup> Houston, *Peasant Petitions*, p. 131.
- <sup>57</sup> Johnson, *A Dictionary*, unpaginated, see 'gratitude'.
- <sup>58</sup> James Barclay, *Barclay's New Universal English Dictionary* (London: H. Fisher, R. Fisher, & P. Jackson, 1835), p. 433.
- <sup>59</sup> Johnson, *A Dictionary*, unpaginated, see 'duty'.
- <sup>60</sup> NRS, GD136/524/45 William Campbell to William Sinclaire of Freswick, 12 November 1830.
- <sup>61</sup> NRS, GD112/74/23/10-11.
- <sup>62</sup> NRS, GD224/588/1/3.