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"Fixing Genius: the Romantic Man of Letters in the University Era"
In How to be a Historian: Scholarly Personae in Historical Studies

Travis E. Ross

How to be a historian



Manchester University Press



How to be a historian

Scholarly personae in historical studies,
1800–2000

Edited by Herman Paul

Manchester University Press

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CHAPTER 3

Fixing genius: the Romantic man of letters in the university era

Travis E. Ross

Introduction

In the spring of 1885, the popular English historian James Anthony Froude visited San Francisco and, in the media frenzy to report his every move, a literary weekly titled *The Wasp* scored quite a scoop. It alone reported the mortifying scene that took place at the luxurious Palace Hotel when Froude met the city's own famous and prolific historian Hubert Howe Bancroft. The two historians had a great deal in common. Both had prodigious catalogs. Both enjoyed popular, if sometimes embattled reputations as serious historians whose works held wide appeal within the nascent genre of history. That wide appeal was both difficult to muster and problematic to maintain since history as a genre was dividing externally from general literature and internally to target smaller groups of readers with rather different interests and epistemologies.¹ For all the pair appeared to have in common, though, *The Wasp* narrated in excruciating detail how neither Bancroft nor Froude could recognize the other as a historian.

'History writing is hard work, ain't it,' Bancroft blurted upon completing the short trek up Market Street from the offices of A. L. Bancroft & Company. 'I have found it so,' Froude replied, 'my literary work has been so incessant that I was forced to make a trip to the colonies for my health.' The businessman got right to the point: 'What do you pay your help on the other side of the water?' Froude did not understand. 'Why, your help,' Bancroft attempted to clarify, 'the fellows who write your books, you know.' 'Write my books – you are jesting, Mr. Bancroft,' Froude shot back, 'I write them myself.' Unaware of precisely how much he was giving away, Bancroft pressed on, convinced Froude was 'putting on airs with him.' 'Come now, I hope you are not offended,' Bancroft said. 'We are friends and there is nobody here. You need not object to giving the business away to me. I'll never blab a word of it. Don't talk to me as if I

was a perfect stranger instead of being in the history business myself.' 'Mr. Bancroft,' Froude said, 'it may be news to you, and why I cannot possibly imagine, but I write my histories myself. None but myself compose a line of them. The style is my own, the information collected by myself and the deductions drawn by myself. You are certainly jesting when you talk about help. Do you not write those histories which I have read with such pleasure?' 'Sir,' Bancroft said, haughtily, 'you are looking at a business man. Do you think I find time to write histories?... No, sir, I hire help. I employ competent and energetic young gentlemen – university graduates, sir – men from the finest colleges of Europe – to write my histories, and I pay 'em for it. If I say to my help give us a chapter on the Missions and look smart about it, they do it, and mighty quick, too, I can tell you.' With that, the busy bookman excused himself to get back to work, leaving his English counterpart 'endeavoring to restore his equanimity by frequent application to the ice pitcher.'²

The Wasp had a certain advantage that allowed it to score such a scoop: It made the whole scene up. The famous and acerbic *litterateur* Ambrose Bierce edited the satirical literary magazine at the time, but he also wrote most of it, including this imagined encounter between 'two great historians'.³ Per usual for *The Wasp*, much of the setup was true. Froude really was visiting San Francisco that spring. Bancroft really did pay a team of researchers and writers to write *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft*. The company's Dartmouth-educated librarian Henry Oak had transformed Bancroft's prodigious, ever-growing collection of rare books and manuscripts into a proprietary research library related to Pacific North America. Under the supervision of Oak and a handful of others, researchers and ghost-writers worked to refine the library's raw materials into the definitive history of Pacific North America from Alaska to Panama, inland to the Rocky Mountains, including all of Mexico and Central America, from antiquity to their present.⁴ People of all sorts around North America and Europe subscribed to the thirty-nine-volume series, receiving a new 800-page volume quarterly between 1882 and 1890.⁵

One might empathize with the fictional Froude's exasperation. Whatever else was up for debate about history writing in those tumultuous decades, surely Bancroft's mobilization of wage laborers to research and to write history in their boss's name fell strictly out of bounds for ethical and epistemological reasons. Bierce clearly thought so. Between 1881 and the middle of 1885, *The Wasp* engaged in a merciless campaign to expose Bancroft as a 'literary impostor'.⁶ In spite of Bierce's efforts, Bancroft's company successfully elicited prodigious intellectual and financial support for its enterprise from common and elite people on both sides of the Atlantic. It did that, not by hiding its collaborative research methods,

but by describing them endlessly, proudly declaring how its economies of scope and scale would enable it to do in a decade what an ordinary historian could not do in a lifetime.⁷ Meanwhile, Bierce struggled to convince anyone to join him in outrage over Bancroft's methods.⁸ As early as 1903, however, the public could hardly bear what had become mere rumours: Bancroft had not personally written the massive series. Despite his individual authorship being blatantly ludicrous, Bancroft's unrivalled status in the public mind as the singular 'Historian of the Pacific Coast' had made it less conceivable to large portions of the population that Bancroft's *Works* had been 'written by any person other than Hubert Howe Bancroft.'⁹ Within a decade or two, the methods that had once promised to make an impossibly large history possible had themselves become impossible as an explanation for a work of such grandeur and historical significance.

While 'models of scholarly selfhood do not change from day to day,' this case offers a bewildering example in which the persona of the serious historian *appears* to have changed overnight.¹⁰ Not coincidentally, the same decades saw the rapid professionalization of history writing within American academe and a handful of increasingly professionalized state and local historical societies. Something did change around Bancroft's enterprise, but I argue that it was not the scholarly persona of the historian, the shared set of assumptions that defined a good historian and the best practices of the craft. Just as importantly, I argue that academic professionalization did not create – nor even attempt to create – a new scholarly persona. Instead, early academics worked to create the infrastructure to train and to sustain scholars who fit the persona established by the archival turn.¹¹ Bancroft *et al.* did the same, briefly outpacing their academic counterparts in the 1870s and 1880s. Bancroft's company and the early academic profession engaged in a similar project, with each enterprise working to demonstrate that it could address the economic and cultural challenges of the increasingly onerous expectations of the discipline, amplifying the virtues and diminishing the vices associated with the persona of the archival historian.¹²

The very different infrastructures these intellectual entrepreneurs created pushed them to cultivate in-house personae that initially look quite different: Bancroft & Company worked to demonstrate how their collaborative system animated a collective genius that exceeded the sum of its parts, making possible a kind of archival omniscience; conversely, the early American academic historian J. Franklin Jameson argued that academe could domesticate genius in the competent, professional scholar. I argue that, despite the differences separating the approaches each enterprise advanced or the modes in which each promoted itself, Bancroft's company and early academics responded to a relatively uniform set of expectations

and concerns related to the character and working habits of historians aspiring to do history after the archival turn. Jameson and Bancroft *et al.* shared something else, though. The champions for each of those innovative enterprises demonstrated a surprising concern for claiming the mantle of a rather old-fashioned sense of genius and for demonstrating how their system could fix that problematic character. Whether because the image resonated with them personally or because they thought it would resonate with their internally diverse audiences, Bancroft *et al.* and Jameson invoked the image of the ideal Romantic author.

This chapter presents both a problem and an opportunity for studying the scholarly persona of the historian because it contains so many things that might legitimately qualify as a scholarly persona. For instance, it could compare Bancroft's corporate brain trust to Jameson's quintessential academic professional as competing personae. Alternatively, it could focus on how each of those in-house personae relied heavily on the shared cultural template of the Romantic man of letters, the lone genius who had little interest in fame or fortune, a character that had quickly become the nineteenth century's ideal author.¹³ Instead, this chapter follows the dominant usage of the persona within this volume, examining the character of the ideal historian that had emerged from the archival turn and that both of these enterprises worked to replicate systematically and to sustain professionally. Disentangling these potential personae and the work they accomplished for their respective proponents, though, offers an opportunity to examine the payoffs and limitations of the persona model in general, but especially of different ways of defining the relationship between a scholarly persona and the repertoires, cultural templates, and individual personalities with which it is hopelessly bound up.

Helpfully, Gadi Algazi has delineated a taxonomy of the three potential uses of the scholarly persona, each of which has a ready exemplar in this story. First, the scholarly persona can refer to the careful curation of individual images that aspiring scholars create and maintain.¹⁴ Bancroft's corporate genius and Jameson's quintessential professional certainly qualify as personae according to that definition. Rather than examine them as personae in their own right, this chapter uses those bits of self-styling to explore the scholarly persona in Algazi's second sense: 'the set of regulative ideals made flesh (at least partly)' shared and contested within a discipline, the contested list of virtues and vices that its practitioners must display or mitigate, respectively.¹⁵ To whatever degree defining the historian constituted boundary work within an emerging discipline, it also occurred as an appeal for broad cultural legitimacy within a longstanding debate within general literature about how genuine men of letters could and could not legitimately engage with the marketplace both as a means of financial

support and to distribute their work. The character of the Romantic genius certainly warrants analysis as a discipline-agnostic scholarly persona in Algazi's third sense: the 'cultural template for a codified social role' that offers 'essential cultural resource for forging personae' that 'need not coincide with any ideal espoused within a given community'.¹⁶ Here, however, I have treated that character as a repertoire chosen by these champions of competing enterprises to render legible to outsiders the internal concerns that had remade the scholarly persona of the historian within the discipline of history after the archival turn.

The hero of the archives

Beginning earlier in the nineteenth century in Germany, serious practitioners of history had increasingly reimagined the archive as the place to recover historical truth and, therefore, as the primary worksite for historians.¹⁷ That new mode of historical research both promised and demanded a lot, from its practitioners as well as its readers. The archival turn promised more reliable history since its sources were closer to past events. However, those sources were another step removed from actual readers, and so whatever additional trust they warranted had to be borrowed against the character of the archival historian.¹⁸ The very transformation intended to make history writing more scientific had, ironically, made its core research moment nearly unrepeatable, removing even the pretence that other specialists could verify purported facts or assertions that seemed dubious or surprising.¹⁹ Archival research, therefore, made the character of the historian more important than ever, launching a debate among likeminded historians about the virtues and vices of the archival historian and the proper balance between them. Underlying Bancroft's corporate genius and Jameson's network of competent academic professionals was a shared figure: the hero of the archives who could be trusted to examine critically *all* of the historical evidence, to reconstruct the past with neither compromise nor error, ruthlessly dispatching misinformation in the existing literature and in the historical record.

Whether that character proceeded from or merely took advantage of it, the Romantic man of letters offered a powerful, cross-cultural touchstone for a character who could be trusted to perform that onerous task. That figure had taken shape earlier in the century in Thomas Carlyle's series of lectures 'On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History' (1840).²⁰ Carlyle began by examining the Romantic history of the 'hero as Divinity' (Odin), 'as Prophet' (Muhammad), 'as Poet' (Dante), and 'as Priest' (Luther). In the penultimate lecture, he turned to modern heroism: 'The

Hero as Man of Letters.’ In it, Carlyle offered an optimistic examination of the problems and potential created in the previous century by the expansion of knowledge through books. ‘Never till about a hundred years ago,’ Carlyle asserted, ‘was there seen any figure of a Great Soul living apart in that anomalous manner; endeavouring to speak forth the inspiration that was in him by Printed Books, and find place and subsistence by what the world would please to give him for doing that.’²¹ As opposed to ‘spurious’ men of letters, Carlyle argued that the ‘genuine Man of Letters’ was ‘inspired,’ an imperfect signifier for the complex of heroic qualities for which ‘we have no good name,’ but that included ‘originality,’ ‘sincerity,’ and ‘genius.’²² Fulfilling the historical roles previously divided between the prophet, poet, and priest, the ‘true Literary Man’ guided the world, whether or not it acknowledged him in his lifetime with either respect or bread.²³

Carlyle primarily concerned himself with the promises and the problems posed by the burgeoning book market in the nineteenth century. Books, he believed, had made an education and the life of the mind available to even middling people, but it also demanded an inquiry into what stood to be gained and lost when literary work could become a job. Having found his own financial support and intellectual platform as a professional lecturer, Carlyle boldly declared in that capacity and with no sense of irony: ‘It is no evil to be poor,’ adding, ‘there ought to be Literary Men poor, – to shew whether they are genuine or not!’²⁴ Carlyle’s genuine men of letters were a mendicant order; like their religious counterparts, legitimate authors performed poverty to signify their devotion. These Romanticized authors were *in* the market by necessity, but as a matter of principle they were not supposed to be *of* it. Carlyle’s lectures anticipated how aspiring authors in the nineteenth century would feel compelled to protect their literary integrity against an increasing number of temptations to more than preserve their bodies at the expense of their authorial souls.

Carlyle established a powerful, resilient image of the genuine man of letters: Self-made through deep reading, that lone genius wrote exclusively for the life of the mind, preferring poverty – if necessary – over writing to appeal to the whims of the mass market. That ideal, ironically, gained further power as the burgeoning market provided a growing number of ways to make a living by the pen. Rather than seriously defining a starving writer in a squalid garret who refused to write for money, Carlyle offered a powerful list of vices and virtues that would help aspiring *litterateurs* take advantage of the marketplace without being corrupted by its deleterious effects. He offered the same list as a means by which critical readers could judge the originality and sincerity of distant authors who could only be encountered only through the book trade. Rather than actually

demanding its practitioners remain destitute, the Romantic authorial ideal eventually made aloofness from the market a potential selling point within it. Authors like Edgar Allan Poe or Herman Melville could create a market to support their literary efforts while fashioning authorial personae that appeared plausibly disinterested in the financial and literary success of those works in the market.²⁵ In other words, if done correctly, pretending not to care about fame or money could gain both for an author.²⁶

That character provided a resilient, powerful touchstone for striking the proper balance between intellectual integrity and economic sustainability in the marketplace. The struggle to legitimize these innovative enterprises necessarily engaged with history's only default home at that time: the genre of history. In part, the question of how historians should support and disseminate their work played out within the larger debate about how all kinds of serious authors should legitimately use the market for those purposes. The idealized Romantic author imposed a set of external expectations on aspiring heads of enterprise like Bancroft or Jameson since each man hoped to convince a broad public that his enterprise could legitimately combine intellectual and economic labors without compromise. Neither Bancroft nor Jameson drew passively from that repertoire; both attempted to demonstrate that their enterprises could improve upon the recognizably flawed figure of the genius.

In the company of genius

Between roughly 1870 and 1885, Bancroft's promotional materials worked to demonstrate that its system alone could realize in full the promises of archival history while mitigating its most obvious problems. The company assumed that its diverse audience expected to hear a story that hit certain points. Readers would care about the comprehensiveness of the sources consulted and about how the company had managed analysis that was simultaneously exhaustive and critical. It assumed those readers would have questions about how the company managed to engage in a research process that demanded the expenditure of so much cultural, economic, and political capital while insulating its writers from influence in the process. In each case, the champions of Bancroft's model worked to demonstrate that the economies of scope and scale afforded to it by the publishing house in which it was built offered a systematic solution to the problems inherent to archival history.

The company accomplished that by demonstrating how its unique enterprise animated a collective genius that exceeded the sum of its human parts. Promotional pieces often opened with a thumbnail biography of

Bancroft. 'Mr. Bancroft' usually disappeared rather quickly, though, replaced by a rotating stock of characters who were essentially discrete, anonymized functions of the historian. Writing in a signed article in *The Californian and Overland Monthly* that failed to identify her relationship to the company, its only female writer, Frances Fuller Victor, explained the collaborative system. First, 'readers' went over the whole collection of books and manuscripts, after which 'the secretary' transformed their notes into narrative. That early work allowed writers further down the line to write with near-omniscience, Victor claimed. The 'librarian' could know 'with certainty' anything in the library, from a 'single sheet to a heavy quarto'; the 'writer' could draw on, but also judge between *all* of the relevant sources. 'It is safe to assert,' she boldly declared, 'that no historical writing was ever done under better conditions.'²⁷ These faceless practitioners served a purpose: They promoted the image of the company's singular, collective genius. Connecting individual names and faces to discrete bits of work would have diminished the nearly divine omniscience that Victor and others worked tirelessly to describe.

Oak penned an extended conceit in the voice of the company's unnamed collective author in which he compared his own assisted authorship of the California volumes to the work of a hypothetical historian trying to write the same history by traditional means. Though written about his own experiences, from his own point of view, and with an 'I' that referred directly to himself, Oak's account of the writing process within the library was intended to describe the work done by Victor, Thomas Savage, or any of the lead authors working within the company's system. Taking himself as a representative author in a system that had many, Oak explained how the author took advantage of the labor of research assistants to make manageable an otherwise impossible task. The use of an anonymized, singular author as a stand-in for any of the company's several lead authors made Oak's description of the operation particularly vulnerable to his boss's misappropriation in *Literary Industries*.

Oak's comparison began with the assumption that the company's unrivalled research library might have offered it an advantage over its competition, but that it also exacerbated the familiar problem of archival history, demanding explanation. Oak had the advantage of having collapsed the successive nature of archival research into a single site in which documents could be re-examined and compared as necessary. While Oak's 'imaginary author' had to plod 'industriously through each work as he finds it, making careful notes' of what seemed important at the time, Oak could put 'ten men, each as capable in this kind of labour as [the conventional historian] or I, at work to extract everything under its proper heading.'²⁸ That allowed the author of a volume or section to 'tunnel the

mountain of court records and legal briefs, bridge the marsh of United States government documents, and, stationing myself at a safe distance in the rear, hurl my forces against the solid columns of two hundred files of California newspapers.²⁹ Oak's assisted authorship of the California volumes illustrated how the company's workshop combined his and other heavily augmented intellects into a collective genius that had achieved near-archival omniscience. Rather than argue that the company did acceptable archival history, Oak argued tirelessly that its system – and it alone – made the otherwise idealistic discipline of archival history tenable. A historian working by ordinary means, Oak claimed, necessarily had to 'confine himself to limited topics, or do his work superficially.'³⁰ He boldly declared: 'I claim that mine is the only method by which all the evidence on a great subject, or on many smaller subjects, can be brought out.'³¹ Still, Oak argued that the company's methods differed from the methods of ordinary historians only in degree, not in type. The system multiplied the results yielded by the best practices of archival research and writing.³²

Bancroft eventually usurped Oak's conceit, making it the core of his chapter 'My Method of Writing History' in *Literary Industries*.³³ Simply by appropriating Oak's 'I,' Bancroft effectively supplanted the collective genius into which the individual labors of Oak and his peers had been absorbed with a singular, individual genius. Bancroft generously lent that character his own name and face. That purloined letter angered Oak more for what it did to diminish the system he had devised, managed, and carefully explicated than for what it did to obscure any individual's contribution to the histories. Bancroft had written many pages in the histories, but he had not written them using the collaborative system, as his appropriation of Oak's conceit implied. While Oak believed he and his peers had written with near-omniscience, Bancroft, 'a rapid and strong writer naturally', preferred to write based on his personal experiences rather than from either notes or sources. He filled his pages with 'long words,' 'fine sentences,' classical allusions, and 'brilliant theories' rather than history written from archival sources.³⁴ So, while Bancroft alone could claim unassisted authorship of his sections, that meant he had almost no legitimate claim to be an archival historian.³⁵

Far worse than Bancroft's misrepresentation of his own method of writing, Bancroft's appropriation of Oak's conceit as a general statement about the whole series rendered it untrue in Oak's judgment because it reduced the company's collective genius to a single, heavily assisted and individually brilliant author. Oak had no qualms with using a first-person-singular pronoun to describe the heavily assisted authorship of the California histories (vols XVIII–XXII) of which he was the primary author. He would not have identified himself as the author of *The History of the Northwest*

Coast, however, even though he had written in it ‘73 p. on the “Oregon Question”’.³⁶ Meanwhile, Oak did not object to his counterparts asserting their assisted authorship of other full volumes where appropriate: Bancroft had hired Victor to finish under his name her existing two-volume history of Oregon (vols XXIX and XXX).³⁷ So, while Oak’s imaginative exploration of how the author worked within the system truthfully recounted his claim to assisted authorship of the California volumes, it proceeded on the assumption that no individual author could have made that statement about the full series. When Bancroft inserted the story unchanged into his ostensible memoir and the final volume of the series, he told exactly that lie.³⁸

Beyond comprehensiveness in research, the company emphasized how its system insulated its workers from any concern other than historical truth. Ironically, Bancroft & Company achieved its distance from pecuniary concerns by pointing to Bancroft’s personal wealth and business acumen. Having ‘poured forth his money freely’, promotional materials explained that Bancroft had given ‘no thought’ to ‘the cost’ or ‘the returns’ when ‘embarking in the work, except the general one that it would absorb the greatest part of his fortune. He had been fully taught, by his experiences as a publisher, that literary work of this kind does not pay.’³⁹ While other authors had to display at least a willingness to endure poverty for the sake of their integrity, the wealthy publisher had a ready-made explanation for how he could stand to lose a bit of money and for why he surely expected to, echoing the popular assumption that literary quality and financial gain are difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile. When the company embedded those assurances within marketing materials meant to drive the global sales of subscriptions to the histories, of course, it performed perfectly the familiar role of the Romantic man of letters in the marketplace.

Like other archival historians, Bancroft & Company had addressed the question of how it maintained its independence from the influence of the people and institutions who controlled the sources.⁴⁰ It certainly helped the company’s case that it had a proprietary library acquired at auction or by outright donations.⁴¹ Still, sometimes the company had to negotiate with important institutional partners, as Thomas Savage did in order to get permission to copy records controlled by Archbishop Joseph S. Alemany of San Francisco. Alemany enthusiastically welcomed Savage, but he also, subtly, insisted on the right to review the resulting histories ‘lest unintentionally something might be stated inaccurately, which no doubt you would rectify.’⁴² Bancroft had Savage copy the sources, later proclaiming in *Literary Industries*: ‘it is needless to say that neither to the archbishop, nor to any person, living or dead, did I ever grant permission to revise or change my writings.’⁴³

Whether in Oak's collective genius or in Bancroft's fictionalized self, the company's brain trust amplified the best qualities of the archival historian while diminishing the vices likely to afflict that character. Between its proprietary library and the collaborative system that examined it, the company could believably claim to have done research that critically examined the full weight of all the evidence available on its topic. Its hierarchical structure, meanwhile, made it possible to write histories ruthless in their pursuit of truth by ostensibly insulating the researchers and the writers from concerns about the political, financial, or cultural consequences. In so far as these materials targeted other insiders within the discipline, they demonstrated how their system had provided institutional structures that archival history increasingly demanded. Just as importantly, though, the company targeted members of the general public who thought far less about the methods of source criticism and far more about how the methods one used to judge between genuine and spurious men of letters.

Synthetic genius

Meanwhile, a new class of professional scholar-teachers began to fill professorships in the United States's new or newly reformed research institutions after receiving PhDs first from German universities and, after the founding of Johns Hopkins University in 1876, from American doctoral programs. Like Bancroft's staff had done, these new academic professionals weighed – but also weighted in their own favour – the advantages and disadvantages of their new enterprise for addressing familiar problems. A member of the first cohort to receive the new PhD in history from Hopkins, J. Franklin Jameson took the occasion provided by his inaugural lecture as the incoming Chair of the Department of History at the University of Chicago in 1902 to examine the influence that universities had had on historical writing in the previous two decades. Like Bancroft, Jameson worked to demonstrate that practitioners within his enterprise were meticulous and thorough researchers, that they relied on exhaustive research, and that they enjoyed sufficient political, cultural, and economic insulation from outside influence to tell the truth without compromise.⁴⁴

At first glance, the repertoire of professionalism on which Jameson drew made the academic historian look like the antithesis both of Bancroft's corporate genius and of the Romantic man of letters. While Bancroft's genius had always achieved both fidelity and felicity in writing in order to appeal to common readers, the academic historian ostentatiously disregarded those readers. An unrepentant writer of wooden prose, the professional historian simply knew too much, had researched too deeply

and too scrupulously. Steeped in the methods and minutiae of his esoteric discipline, he could never be bothered to polish the prose to accommodate non-specialist readers.⁴⁵ Ideally, American academe was supposed to create the infrastructures for the intellectual and economic support of research and writing that would never be economically or culturally viable in the marketplace; meanwhile, those history professors would pay back the public and their employers by making research-informed teaching accessible to an increasing segment of American society.

While Bancroft's system focused on the system that made the work, Jameson focused on the system that made scholars. Jameson fashioned the trained academic on a familiar character, arguing that graduate training could amplify the virtues and diminish the vices associated with the quintessential genius of pre-professional academe: The Oxford don. Most importantly, Jameson's academic professional was trained rather than born.⁴⁶ Professional academe could create genius, he argued, by teaching 'technical perfection' just as one could teach technical proficiency in any art; one 'could not,' Jameson lamented, imbue 'genius or originality' in those who 'do not possess it.'⁴⁷ As would become a central theme of his lecture, Jameson transformed that bit of self-deprecation into an inherent advantage for the resulting synthetic, systematic genius produced through graduate training. By juxtaposing the careful, reserved competence taught in graduate schools with the infamous brilliance and egotism of the don, Jameson argued that academic training and employment could synthesize and maintain a staid version of the genius that had previously been erratic both in its appearance and in its intellectual production.⁴⁸

Jameson explored the trade-offs of creating a less original, staid version of genius in doctoral seminars and supporting its steady labor with middle-class professorships at the new and newly reformed research universities in the United States. Jameson's self-deprecating repertoire for the professional historian will likely sound surprisingly familiar to modern academics. That familiarity and the ways in which it obscured a direct appropriation of the Romantic genius as the hidden template for academic professionals surely warrants further introspection by historians of the humanities in the future. He lamented the peculiar dialect of 'doctor's-dissertation English,' for instance, which regrettably combined 'good English' with 'the scholastic jargon of a specialty, and undergraduate slang.'⁴⁹ Jameson mastered the art of subtly complimenting academic historians by deriding their ostensible weaknesses as the necessary price one paid for producing and sustaining a more stable form of genius. Taking the 'unchartered freedom' of history written 'in the age of brilliant amateurs' and sending it to school 'to learn how to read and interpret documents, how to sift and to weight evidences, how to avoid the blunders

of amateurs and the vagaries of rhetoricians' had necessarily made history dull and boring, *per* the requirements of the archival historian.⁵⁰

Beyond their writing style, Jameson paid particular attention to how the new influences of the profession conditioned these academic historians' engagement in the life of the mind. Jameson worried briefly that the seclusion of the ivory tower might keep academics worryingly insulated from the troubles of the world about which they wrote, but he accepted that the 'still air' of universities could 'powerfully [restrain] from partisanship and overstatement.'⁵¹ Like their bad writing, the quiet, isolated worlds in which they lived and worked diminished the overall connection between scholars and wider society to the ultimate benefit of their intellectual production. That certainly aligned with the expectations of the genuine literary man, who ostensibly had to accept that writing for the acclaim of one's peers often negated finding fame or fortune. It also proceeded on the assumption that exacting, exhaustive history had little place in public. Still, he assumed that original research directly benefited the scholar, therefore indirectly benefitting the institution and its students, with historical instruction filling the gap left by the retreat of serious scholars from common readers.⁵²

Just like those other authors, though, Jameson thought professional historians would have to work to maintain that distance. Though their isolation aided in their resistance to the deleterious influences of the marketplace, sometimes temptation would still prove too much. 'He plans a *magnum opus*', Jameson lamented, but then '[a]non the tempter' might persuade even the most serious historian to 'undertake some little caitiff book of a publisher's devising, utterly unneeded, but eminently vendible.'⁵³ Like men of the cloth who retreated to 'learned monastic communities,' the latter found quiet reprieve from the marketplace in the pious fraternity created by scholarly journals. Rather than serving 'to evoke originality' or 'to kindle the fires of genius,' these scholarly organs sought 'to regularize, to criticise, to restrain vagaries, and to set a standard of workmanship and to compel men to conform to it.'⁵⁴ Jameson took his place at the head of a long line of history professors who would joke that university employment 'virtually' constituted 'vows of poverty and obedience.'⁵⁵ Still, he worried that the need 'to conform to bourgeois standards [might] effectually stifle' the spirit of true intellectual pursuit.⁵⁶

Modern academe, Jameson argued, replicated in highly trained individuals a very specific, rote form of genius that could not match the don, but that could surpass that character in reliability and stability, the traits required of the archival researcher. The infrastructure of modern academe and its mediocre pay scale insulated the professional scholar from the worst influences of the mass book market. Within the ivory tower, they could

live the life of the mind apart from the need for bread with only the pesky interruptions produced by the many spirits within university bureaucracies who did not share the same ideals.⁵⁷ The new professional associations and their *Quarterlies* and *Reviews* provided opportunities for them to write important essays on impossibly esoteric topics for other likeminded scholars without having to worry about mass appeal. Though exhaustive research and a high demand for accuracy had necessarily narrowed the topic and claims most historians could make, Jameson suggested a kind of collaboration might begin to fix that over time.⁵⁸ Jameson suggested that historians might 'store up well-sifted materials which later may be used by masters of synthesis, of a type not yet evolved.'⁵⁹

Conclusion

Despite the very different repertoires on which they drew, Jameson's curated image of the competent professional worked to address a similar set of expectations and concerns to those Bancroft and Oak imagined. Just as Bancroft's workshop had made it possible to do the otherwise impossibly onerous work of archival history by animating a genius that exceeded the sum of its human parts, Jameson claimed that academic seminars could synthesize a whole profession of standardized, reliable, interlocking replacements for the brilliant but erratic don. Just as Bancroft's enterprise had insulated its laborers from the deleterious effects of the marketplace, of political control over sources, and of the desire to write for fame rather than truth, so, too, did Jameson's university offer an internal reward system that isolated its practitioners and their work from nearly everyone but their peers. By populating an entire profession with systematically trained historians, the new profession promised to strike a balance between depth and breadth by creating a supply of bricks of uniform size and quality that later historians could figure out how to combine into something that would approach the scope of the grand narratives that the archival turn had seemed to make impossible, at least for the moment.

In other words, both of these enterprises assumed that the archival turn demanded a scrupulous researcher who could believably claim to have critically examined *all* of the relevant sources on a question before reconstructing from them absolute historical truth, told without regard for the personal, professional, political, and economic consequences of that ruthless devotion to accuracy. Both enterprises tried to demonstrate that their system gave its practitioners the skills and the resources as well as the independence to do all of that with the assumption that, under ordinary circumstances, an individual historian could not yet hope to do any of it.

Like most contributions to this volume, this chapter has defined scholarly personae as a shared set of intradisciplinary expectations about what it takes to be a good archival historian. This story presents alternative ways of delineating between a scholarly persona, its cultural source material, specific disciplinary concerns, and the repertoires of its performance. Because this chapter focuses on competition for legitimacy between novel historical enterprises rather than between individuals, it has made explicit some of the implicit problems of vocabulary for persona studies. Featured herein are any number of cultural templates, touchstones, and repertoires that could be identified as a scholarly persona. Should Bancroft's fictional version of himself, or Oak's collective genius, or Jameson's professional qualify as personae? This chapter uses those curations of in-house personae to examine what their practitioners thought was the common denominator of expectations for the historian after the archival turn. As a means for performing the proper relationship between intellectual and economic work and as a means of portraying trustworthiness to a broad audience, however, the ideal Romantic author might have warranted examination as a scholarly persona of the humanist after the emergence of the mass book market. In that sense, archival historians might only have adapted that existing character to their own discipline-specific questions and concerns.

The problems are semantic, but they are not trivial. Determining what to identify as a scholarly persona and what to reduce to a template on which it is based or to the repertoire with which it is performed, for instance, can produce very different arguments. I know this from experience. These permutations divide over whether the chapter defines history as a discipline or as a genre. The chosen version traces the emergence of the persona of the historian from within the discipline created by the archival turn, that necessarily engaged with broader public expectations because that discipline still wrote for a mixed marketplace. The path not taken might have examined the emergence of a scholarly persona of the historian as a specific form of the idealized author. In that alternate version, this chapter would have examined how two aspiring enterprises worked to demonstrate to a broad public that they had domesticated genius, transforming the inherently erratic and ephemeral quality into something dependable and reproducible. By suggesting that academic professionalization made it possible to believe in genius, rendering what had always been an obviously unrealizable ideal into a job description, that version would have better explained how Bancroft's status as the unrivalled historian of the Pacific made it impossible for common readers to imagine he had not written the more than 30,000 pages of his histories on his own. It would further have suggested why academics have had a particularly difficult time accepting

the rumours of the death of the author as an individual, inspired genius solely responsible for a text.⁶⁰

Notes

- 1 On the print history of history in England, see Leslie Howsam, *Past into Print: The Publishing of History in Britain, 1850–1950* (London: British Library, 2009); on the emergence of serious history as a genre in that era, and especially of Froude's embattled place as a test case within that boundary work, see Ian Hesketh, 'Diagnosing Froude's disease: boundary work and the discipline of history in late-Victorian Britain', *History and Theory*, 47:3 (2008), 373–95; Ian Hesketh, 'Writing history in Macaulay's shadow: J. R. Seeley, E. A. Freeman, and the audience for scientific history in late Victorian Britain', *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, 22:2 (2011), 30.
- 2 'Two great historians, the meeting of James Anthony Froude and Hubert H. Bancroft', *The Wasp* (25 April 1885).
- 3 Ibid. Until his feud with new management led to his dismissal in the spring of 1886, Bierce exercised nearly full control of the magazine. 'In addition to "Prattle,"' Kenneth M. Johnson asserts, Bierce 'wrote practically all the editorials and dominated all departments.' Kenneth M. Johnson (ed.), *The Sting of The Wasp: Political & Satirical Cartoons from the Truculent Early San Francisco Weekly, with an Introduction & Comments by Kenneth M. Johnson* (San Francisco: Book Club of California, 1967), p. 10.
- 4 The company succeeded. Bancroft's histories established the historiography for most state and local histories within that vast region. For the better part of a century, the widely available volumes remained a reliable first stop for researchers working on any topic in western North America. Earl Pomeroy, 'Old lamps for new: The cultural lag in Pacific Coast historiography', *Arizona and the West*, 2:2 (1960), 107–26; Charles S. Peterson, 'Hubert Howe Bancroft: First Western regionalist', in Richard W. Etulain (ed.) *Writing Western History: Essays on Major Western Historians* (Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press, 2002).
- 5 The series began by reissuing the five-volume series *The Native Races of the Pacific States*, which it had completed as a potentially self-contained set in 1874–75 to test (or to build) the market for the larger series in the 1880s. Harry Clark, *A Venture in History: The Production, Publication, and Sale of the Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973), p. 59.
- 6 The first reference to Bancroft as a 'literary impostor' appeared early in 1883: 'Our roasted historian', *The Wasp* (17 February 1883).
- 7 A. L. Bancroft & Company, *A Brief Account of the Literary Undertakings of Hubert Howe Bancroft* (London: Trübner & Company, 1883), p. 9.
- 8 Oak claimed Bancroft overemphasized his system for its positive effect on public opinion. Henry Lebbeus Oak, *'Literary Industries' in a New Light: A Statement on the Authorship of Bancroft's Native Races and History of the Pacific States, with Comments on Those Works and the System by Which They Were Written* (San Francisco: Bacon Printing Company, 1893), p. 35. For a list of the leading lights of Victorian science and literature who praised Bancroft's enterprise as of 1883, see Bancroft & Company, *Brief Account*. In January 1883, Charles H. Phelps wrote a letter to the *New York Evening Post* (objecting to Bancroft's enterprise) that shared a great deal in common with Bierce's criticisms. Phelps had edited *The Californian* before it became the *Overland Monthly* and knew at least one of Bancroft's staff writers. Bierce reprinted Phelps' letter with an introduction noting their shared outrage, going so far as to imply that his campaign against Bancroft in *The Wasp* had spurred Phelps toward his position. 'Our roasted historian'; Clark, *A Venture in History*, pp 289–90.

- 9 William Alfred Morris, 'The origin and authorship of the Bancroft Pacific States publications: A history of a history', *The Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society*, 4:4 (1903), 290–1.
- 10 Herman Paul, 'What is a scholarly persona? Ten theses on virtues, skills, and desires', *History and Theory*, 53:3 (2014), 354.
- 11 Herman Paul has examined the emergence and contestation of this persona elsewhere, in greater detail than I will here: Herman Paul, 'The heroic study of records: The contested persona of the archival historian', *History of the Human Sciences*, 26:4 (2013), 67–83.
- 12 I follow the historian Rob Townsend in distinguishing between the historical discipline and its several professions. Robert B. Townsend, *History's Babel: Scholarship, Professionalization, and the Historical Enterprise in the United States, 1880–1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), pp 3–4.
- 13 Christine Haynes, 'Reassessing "genius" in studies of authorship: The state of the discipline', *Book History*, 8:1 (2005), 287–320.
- 14 Gadi Algazi, 'Exemplum and Wundertier: Three concepts of the scholarly persona', *Low Countries Historical Review*, 131:4 (2016), 9–10.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 10–11.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 8, 11–12.
- 17 Kasper Risbjerg Eskildsen, 'Inventing the archive: Testimony and virtue in modern historiography', *History of the Human Sciences*, 26:4 (2013), 18–19.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 18–19; Paul, 'Heroic study of records', 72; Herman Paul, 'The virtues of a good historian in early Imperial Germany: Georg Waitz's contested example', *Modern Intellectual History*, 15 (2018), 681–709.
- 19 As historian Anthony Grafton cogently argued in his masterful history of the footnote, the 'strings of coded references to unpublished documents' that make up citations to archival sources often mean that only historians working on closely associated topics could hope to 'identify the catch in any given set of notes with ease and expertise.' Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 7.
- 20 Haynes, 'Reassessing "genius"', 287.
- 21 Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1842), pp 242–3.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 244.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 246.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 261.
- 25 The negotiation of this new space as a potentially transformative but anxiety-provoking way to support the creation of a distinctly American literature, like the advent of that literature itself, lagged somewhat behind its European forebears. Geoffrey Turnovsky, *The Literary Market: Authorship and Modernity in the Old Regime* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Sheila Post-Lauria, *Correspondent Colorings: Melville in the Marketplace* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996); Terence Whalen, *Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses: The Political Economy of Literature in Antebellum America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Michael S. Kearns, *Writing for the Street, Writing in the Garret: Melville, Dickinson, and Private Publication* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2010).
- 26 According to H. J. Jackson, the Romantic ideal of authorship 'turns out to be less uniform, less revolutionary, and less tied to one period' than one might expect, a fact that only makes the study of it more important as 'a cluster of ideas that are not only historically significant but also still operative in the modern world.' H. J. Jackson, *Those Who Write for Immortality: Romantic Reputations and the Dream of Lasting Fame* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), pp x, 232 n. 4, 110.
- 27 Frances Fuller Victor, 'The Bancroft Historical Library', *The Californian and Overland Monthly*, 6:36 (1882), 494.

- 28 Hubert Howe Bancroft, *Literary Industries* (San Francisco: The History Company, 1890), p. 596.
- 29 Ibid., p. 596.
- 30 Oak, *'Literary Industries' in a New Light*, p. 48; Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, p. 598.
- 31 Oak, *'Literary Industries' in a New Light*, p. 48; Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, p. 598.
- 32 For whatever reason, Oak omitted this assertion from Bancroft's *Literary Industries* with an ellipsis in his reproduction of it. Oak, *'Literary Industries' in a New Light*, p. 48; Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, p. 598.
- 33 Oak, *'Literary Industries' in a New Light*, p. 29; Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, p. 592.
- 34 Oak, *'Literary Industries' in a New Light*, p. 57.
- 35 For instance, Bancroft wrote in three consecutive chapters a first-person narration of his journey to California in 1852 from New York (via two steamers with an intermediary transit across the isthmus of Panama) that stood in for a more systematic history of that popular method of getting to California. Confirming Oak's diagnosis, these chapters run just over one hundred pages and contain no citations other than a few internal cross-references. Hubert Howe Bancroft, *California Inter Pocula* (San Francisco: The History Company, 1888), pp 121–2, for instance. The chapters are: Chapter VI: 'The voyage to California – New York to Chagres'; Chapter VII: 'The voyage to California – isthmus of Panama'; and Chapter VIII: 'The voyage to California – Panama to San Francisco'.
- 36 Oak, *'Literary Industries' in a New Light*, p. 42.
- 37 Oak noted that Victor had exhibited 'her volumes' with 'her name on back and title' at the Chicago World's Fair and elsewhere. He considered her 'claim and action' to be 'entirely justifiable and proper' (ibid., p. 38). He eventually did exactly that, and a set of his volumes are cataloged as such at Dartmouth, Oak's *alma mater*. Henry Lebbeus Oak, *Works of Henry L. Oak*, 11 vols (s.i.: s.n., 1875–93), online at [http://libcat.dartmouth.edu/record=b1300440~\\$1](http://libcat.dartmouth.edu/record=b1300440~$1).
- 38 Bancroft made it worse when he split the final volume off in a popular edition, with an introduction written by George Frederic Parsons to celebrate Bancroft's genius individually. George Frederic Parsons, *On the Completion of the Historical Section of the Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft* (San Francisco: History Company, 1891); Hubert Howe Bancroft, *Literary Industries: A Memoir* (New York City: Harper & Brothers, 1891).
- 39 Bancroft & Company, *Brief Account*, p. 11.
- 40 Eskildsen, 'Inventing the archive', 18–19.
- 41 Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, pp 199, 394.
- 42 Ibid., p. 472.
- 43 Ibid., pp 472–3. The company similarly negotiated the cooperation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, without which it could not have written the history of Utah. Bancroft spent much of 1884 in Salt Lake City and, though he failed to mention it in *Literary Industries*, he reviewed the manuscript with church leaders in September of that year. According to church leader Wilford Woodruff, since Bancroft 'was giving both sides of the question for and against' the church, he offered its leaders 'the privilege of correcting any mistakes on our side.' LDS Church History Library, MS 1352, Wilford Woodruff, 'Wilford Woodruff Journals and Papers' 1828–98, quoted in George Ellsworth, 'Hubert Howe Bancroft and the history of Utah', *Utah Historical Quarterly*, 22:2 (1954), 114.
- 44 For a more thorough analysis of professionalization as a performance, see Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), ch. 2. Maleness proved especially important to these professionals' self-representation as well as their denunciation of others as feminized amateurs. See, for example, Bonnie G. Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998) and Julie Des Jardins, *Women and the Historical Enterprise in America: Gender, Race,*

- and the Politics of Memory, 1880–1945* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).
- 45 This way of performing erudition and expertise as drudgery has not gone anywhere. In his own amusing departure from that dour demeanor, Grafton satirizes this performance by comparing the tedium of a footnote to the ‘high whine of the dentist’s drill,’ both of which serve to reassure: ‘the pain inflicted... is not random but directed, part of the cost that the benefits of modern science and technology exact.’ Grafton, *Footnote*, p. 5.
- 46 John Franklin Jameson, ‘The influence of universities upon historical writing,’ *University Record* (*University of Chicago*), 6:40 (1902), 298.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Ibid., 299.
- 52 J. Franklin (John Franklin) Jameson, John Bach McMaster, and Edward Channing, *The Present State of Historical Writing in America* (Worcester, MA: The Davis Press, 1910), p. 12.
- 53 Jameson, ‘Influence of universities’, 299–300.
- 54 Ibid., 299.
- 55 Ibid., 300.
- 56 Ibid.
- 57 Ibid., 299.
- 58 In support of their own system, Bancroft and Oak had identified this as a fundamental limitation of individual scholarship. Bancroft, *Literary Industries*, p. 598.
- 59 Jameson, ‘Influence of universities’, 300.
- 60 On the death of the author, see Roland Barthes, ‘Death of the author’, trans. Richard Howard, *Aspen*, 5:6 (1967). For the ways in which rumors of that author’s death have been somewhat exaggerated, see Haynes, ‘Reassessing “genius”’, 314–16.