Sister Peg: A Pamphlet Hitherto Unknown by David Hume, edited by David Raynor, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1982. Pp. vii, 127. $24.95 (U.S.)

The deceptive title of this volume promises more than its editor has in fact given us. He cannot show that there is much more than a mere possibility that Hume did in fact write this satirical political pamphlet dealing with the failure of the British Parliament to create a Scottish militia in 1760. The pamphlet has long been known to scholars, who have attributed it to Adam Ferguson rather than to David Hume and will continue to do so. Before examining Raynor's arguments it is worth asking if their truth would materially alter our view of Hume's literary abilities, his politics or character? The short answer to this question is no. It has long been known that Hume supported the creation of a Scottish militia and that he belonged to a club dedicated to promoting its creation. And, it is even better known that he was a humorous man with a facile and facetious pen who loved a joke and was capable of writing a pamphlet imitative of John Arbuthnot's The History of John Bull. The author of Sister Peg was clearly a patriotic Scot who shared many of Hume's views but this is no guarantee that Hume wrote the work.

Before considering Raynor's case to establish Hume's authorship, it will be useful to point out several things about the groups in which Hume moved and in which this pamphlet clearly originated. Between 1752 and 1760 when this satire was written, Edinburgh was agitated by a number of controversies which involved Hume and his friends, among whom were the Moderate clergymen William Robertson, John Jardine, Hugh Blair, John Home, Alexander Carlyle and Adam Ferguson. They defended Hume and Lord Kames from attacks by Presbyterian bigots. Hume and Kames returned the favour when the same bigots caused a furore over a play written by Home whose performance had been attended by

Carlyle and others. Hume, the Moderates and others had been involved with the promotion of James MacPherson's poetry and they had been busy in a variety of patronage and political matters both civil and ecclesiastical. By 1754 Hume was associated with some of these men not only in the Philosophical Society, in which he and Kames were officers, but also in the Select Society where the militia question was formally debated on several occasions. After 1762 Hume was to join them in smaller, more exclusive and intimate convivial clubs such as the Poker Club or the Tuesday Club. These clubmen shared a common Scottish patriotism, an interest in improvements, a politically conservative outlook and a dedication to actions to promote their various concerns among which pamphleteering was certainly included. They were also a prankish lot who elected as an officer of the Poker Club an Assassin. In 1760 they shared a sense of being somewhat embattled because of their enlightenment and dedication to politeness. This feeling was reinforced by the realities of local politics which constituted a game in which they were all avid participants but in 1760 not yet regular winners either in the church courts or as the recipients of extensive patronage. Here real success would not come to them until Lord Bute became the principal dispenser of Scottish patronage in 1761. In 1760 the Moderate clerics formed something of a clique within polite Edinburgh. They were not yet secure in positions of power and prestige and were indeed vulnerable to attacks such as those they had recently endured. They acted with a good deal of circumspection and secrecy and they sometimes joined with discrete laymen who shared their views. It is perhaps worth noting that an earlier militia pamphlet by Alexander Carlyle, The Question Relating to a Scots Militia (Edinburgh, 1760), had been written at the request of William Johnstone Pulteney and Adam Ferguson and was edited by William Robertson who added a paragraph to it.[1] Carlyle concealed his identity because, "The parties here

were so warm at this time ... that those pamphlets, which were ascribed to clergymen, had raised a spirit of envy and jealousy of the clergy, which it would not be easy to stand."[2] There were good reasons for anonymity. Finally, one should also recognize that while Hume was close to the Moderates and supported them, he was also older, an infidel and less intimate with them than they were with each other.[3] There is no reason to think he knew who among them might have written Sister Peg although there is good reason to suppose he would have acted to protect the author as Carlyle believed he did. Now to Raynor's arguments.

The first and weakest reason for believing Hume wrote Sister Peg is found in a letter from Rear-Admiral George Murray to his brother General James Murray, then Governor of Quebec, dated 3 March 1761, in which Admiral Murray says Hume was its author.[4] Contemporaries were often wrong about the attribution of anonymous pamphlets and Murray may well have been misled, perhaps even by Hume himself. There is a prima facie case that Murray was in error which depends on a document which Raynor did not know. This is a copy of Sister Peg given to Sir Walter Scott by his close friend Sir Adam Ferguson, the son of Professor Adam Ferguson. On the back of the pamphlet's title page Scott wrote:

> This excellent satire was written on occasion of Scotland being denied the advantage of a militia to protect the country.
>
> The eminent author Professor Adam Ferguson no less a warm patriot than an ardent investigator of historical and philosophical truth corrected this copy with his own hand.[5]

If this note is accurate and the corrections really Ferguson' then the case for Hume's sole authorship and therewith most of the interest in this pamphlet for Hume scholars is closed. There is at present no reason to think that Scott was wrong or the corrections not by its reputed author. Despite this, problems remain, or so Dr. Raynor would have us think.

Hume either did not know who wrote the pamphlet or for some time pretended he did not since he attributed it both to the Rev. Mr. John Jardine and to Alexander Carlyle. When Jardine denied having written it, Hume claimed authorship himself and told Jardine to spread the story that the blame "might not fall on some of us, who were not so able to bear it."[6] He then wrote a letter to Carlyle on 3 February 1761 claiming the piece as his own.[7] If Hume was "a great blab" unable to keep secrets as Carlyle alleged,[8] then he probably did not know the author and the Moderates, worried about their reputation, might not have been eager to tell him the truth. Sensing this, Hume probably sought to protect them, particularly Carlyle, who was his second guess as its author. It would have been a splendid joke to send Carlyle the letter and a generous action from a man who had himself little to fear. This seems to me most probable. Had Carlyle written the piece, Hume's blabbing to others about authorship would not have been quite so harmless in 1761 as Raynor imagines. Hume's letter to Carlyle accords with his known love of jokes as would his belittling of the pamphlet, which he may still have thought written by this friend, and his claim that Carlyle had revealed him as the author. The last point is of some importance since it is flatly denied in Carlyle's Autobiography where the letter is treated as a joke and/or with amazement.[9] Carlyle, like Raynor, wondered why Hume never suspected Adam Ferguson of having written it.

Professor Raynor thinks (p. 6) Ferguson could not have written Sister Peg for several reasons, none of them very convincing. He claims Ferguson lacked humor and wit but this was not an opinion held by his friends. Carlyle believed him capable of writing a witty satire and he was certainly regarded as a convivial man during these years by men who were witty, including those in the Poker Club which derived its name from one of Ferguson's allies.[10] Ferguson

grew up among Gaelic speakers and Raynor imagines (p. 6) that he never mastered polite English. This is plain nonsense and his claim that Ferguson's works exhibited "a poor style" (p. 6) is little better. In 1757 Alexander Wedderburn wrote to Gilbert Elliot that "Ferguson is writing a very ingenious System of Eloquence or Composition in general"[11] which he classed with works in progress by Hume, Robertson, Home, Wilkie and Kames. Hume in 1759 wrote of another of Ferguson's projects; the *book has a great deal of genius and fine writing.*[12] Ferguson's militia pamphlet of 1756 had not been thought poorly written and his An Essay on Civil Society (1766) was praised by many of Hume's English acquaintances who certainly did not see it as the work of a man who had not "adequately mastered the English language" (p. 6).[13] Ferguson was familiar with the arguments employed in Sister Peg and able to present them as they appear. Finally, there is no reason to accept the editor's claim (p. 6) that no Highlander would have treated his countrymen so roughly as they are treated in Sister Peg. This is not true. In his 1756 pamphlet Ferguson called the Highland rebels of 1745 "Banditti from the Mountains"[14] while in 1766 Highlanders generally are discussed in the Essay in the sections dealing with "rude" nations progressing toward civility and politeness. Ferguson would not have found "MacLurchar" an objectionable name for cattle thieves, blackmailers and rebels described in a satirical work. None of these questions is as carefully examined as it should be. Professor Raynor is too eager to make his case and ends by asserting rather than demonstrating his conclusions.

The other arguments used to make Hume's authorship probable rest upon the exhibition of similarities between the views expressed in Sister Peg and opinions Hume is known to have held or upon similarities of phrasing in the pamphlet and in other of Hume's writings. Since Ferguson and Hume shared these views, the first set of arguments, which

are continued in the notes to the text, prove nothing. The similarities of phrasing which Raynor points out are more persuasive but they are often general and imprecise enough to make one suspect that a careful combing of Ferguson's works would yield as many plausible but equally inconclusive cases. No real attempt has been made to show from stylistic evidence that the writing resembles Hume's more than Ferguson's. This could and should have been done.

Raynor's final problem is why Hume suppressed Sister Peg and never claimed it as his own after 1761. His answer is "that he [probably] came to regard it as an inferior production." Although it was badly reviewed in some journals, perhaps for political reasons, the book sold well enough and did make something of a stir. Hume was not overly sensitive to reviewers and a man who was willing to own this production in Edinburgh cannot have worried overmuch about how Pitt and Lord President Dundas would have regarded the caricatures given of them. Had the book been Hume's, there was little reason for him to disown it and doing so might, indeed, have been difficult. No one else, however, seems to have thought it his. Ferguson seems not to have boasted of it either but he had better reasons not to do so outside his family, which certainly took him to be the author. The book was a clever but ephemeral and anonymous work and not one likely to enhance the reputation of a professor at Edinburgh University.

Raynor has neither shown conclusively that this work is not and could not be Ferguson's nor has he given us many reasons to think that it was or could have been written by David Hume. His whole account of this matter really turns upon his reading of Hume's letter to Carlyle. Carlyle was an old man when he wrote his generally reliable Autobiography but there is no reason to think he was confused about this affair or the context in which he put it. He says quite clearly that Ferguson "executed that little work called

Sister Peg" and that he, Jardine and Carlyle himself were among the "ten or a dozen males and females" in on the secret although Hume was not. He mentions no collaborators with Ferguson and he implicitly denies having named Hume as the work's author.[15] For Hume's letter claiming authorship (3 February 1761) to be credible, Carlyle would have had to have done some of the things mentioned in it, such as telling others that Hume wrote the pamphlet, but he denies having done any of them. If someone other than Carlyle had done them, and thus misled Hume, Carlyle's amazement at Hume's audacious claim to having written the pamphlet would have been equally great. He included Hume's letter with the manuscript of his Autobiography as a curiosity. In the end we are left with an unconvincing argument which at best is barely probable and with the feeling that David Raynor has even less of a sense of humor than Ferguson possessed. It is good to have a new edition of this pamphlet, which is nicely reprinted here with useful notes, but we should not, I think, credit it to Hume but to Adam Ferguson, as did most men of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Roger Emerson
University of Western Ontario

1. Alexander Carlyle, The Autobiography of Dr. Alexander Carlyle of Inveresk 1722-1805, edited by John Hill Burton (Edinburgh and London, 1910), p. 418.

2. Ibid., p. 420.

3. Hume's relations with these men are discussed by Richard Sher in Enlightenment and Ideology: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh and the Scottish Enlightenment (forthcoming) and in Sher's "Church, University, Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh, 1720-1793", Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Chicago (1975).

4. E. C. Mossner, The Life of David Hume (Oxford, 1980), p. 238.