

**David Alff**  
**Department of English, SUNY-Buffalo**

This essay is drawn from a book manuscript entitled *The Wreckage of Intentions: Projects in British Culture, 1660-1730*. I have included a prospectus of my complete project to place the excerpt in context.

### **Prospectus**

What do expired plans reveal about the past? This question guides my book manuscript's investigation of the literature of projects, concrete yet incomplete schemes for advancing British society during the 1600 and 1700s. Then, as now, a "project" was a delimited effort to achieve some goal. The word meant both a unit of human endeavor and a genre of writing for proposing new enterprise in manuals, solicitations, and manifestos. What these documents shared was an anticipation of performance, a capacity to imagine their enactment through material action. This action often never came, and the period's archives swell with defunct proposals for highway systems, zoning codes, silk cultivation, academies for women, and universal poor relief. When a select few ventures succeeded in establishing institutions in fields like experimental science and banking, their project status -- their ability to come or not come into being -- was typically forgotten, as uncertain endeavor hardened into the empirical fact of achievement. My goal is to recover the lost possibility of a broad spectrum of projects, from ventures that failed obscurely to ones so proficient in creating the conditions of the future, even our present, that it is hard to remember these undertakings were ever projects. At stake in recognizing the uncertain prospects of old schemes is a more complete cultural history of eighteenth-century Britain derived from the texts of speculative proposals rather than the hindsight of progress narratives.

Existing scholarship on early modern project writing focuses on literary responses to new enterprise, particularly the controversial reception of projects in venues ranging from the Restoration stage to the Hartlib Circle's correspondences. This research foregrounds canonical writers like Daniel Defoe, who understood project writing as a genre of potential innovation, and Samuel Johnson, who censured the authors of "wild impracticable schemes." By contrast, my work concentrates on actual proposal documents, the prescriptive texts that incited acclaim and reproach. I treat projects for agricultural intensification, social reform, trade policy, and urban construction not just as satirical fodder, but as a literature unto itself that imagined futures distinct from but responsive to the circumstances in which they were conceived. Reading project proposals alongside representations of projects in drama, poetry, and fiction yields a more textured and complete idea of how improvement became a matter of public discourse at different moments in British history.

Approaching project proposals as literature grants access to a past in process. The textual remains of old endeavor can vitalize our conception of history by showing the impact of undertakings that were intended but unrealized. Even outlandish and fantastical schemes for draining the Irish Channel to recover sunken treasure and stamping out famine through statutory apple plantation militate against what Michael André Bernstein denounces as a "triumphalist, unidirectional view of history." Such teleology subtends not only much-critiqued Whig narratives presenting constitutional monarchy as the ultimate culmination of early British history, but also more recent scholarship that locates in the eighteenth century the birth, rise, invention, and discovery of empire, science, the novel, the self, the public sphere, the nation, and Enlightenment. While project writing invariably

aspires to progressive ideals (to rise, discover, enlighten), its history is riddled with commercial busts, epistemological cul-de-sacs, and abandoned infrastructure. Projection reveals an eighteenth-century society engaged in making and unmaking itself through the ongoing generation of chancy schemes. My study of projects and their since-superseded futures aims to ventilate a past thick with multiple possibilities, including possibilities of failure that should complicate and counterbalance progressive accounts of early modern accomplishment.

My first three chapters focus on different fields of projects and facets of projection. I begin by identifying several central rhetorical features of project literature, concentrating on Andrew Yarranton's 1677 pamphlet, *England's Improvement by Sea and Land*. Yarranton's plan to better the nation through textile manufacturing, property registration, and urban fire-proofing relied upon persuasive conventions that constituted a recognizable project genre, including the comparison of a troubled present with better futures, the reconciliation of profit motives with a public good, and the representation of Holland as a menacing threat and enviable economic model.

My second chapter, excerpted here, argues for the crucial role of print as an enabling medium of projection. I focus specifically on the flurry of patent applications, newspaper advertisements, share slips, and panegyric poems generated by Aaron Hill's frustrated attempts to establish a market for beech seed oil in Georgian England.

Recognizing that projects were made of more than ink and paper, my third chapter foregrounds the performative aspects of project undertakings, in this case, seventeenth-century fen drainage. I analyze drainage projects as a body of writings and repertoire of

once-embodied labors to show how wetlands thought to be marginal wastes were actually rich sites of cultural convergence and literary production.

The final two chapters investigate the relationship of project writing to more canonical modes of literary expression: georgic poetry and prose satire. British georgic, I contend, derives its tendency to aestheticize rural ways of life not only from Virgil but also seventeenth-century husbandry manuals. I show that didactic agricultural writing, often under-valued as prosaic and evidentiary, co-invented with georgic verse the idea of a virtuous English heartland to anchor illustrations of domestic prosperity and imperial dominance. My final chapter examines the role of projection in fiction writing. It argues that Jonathan Swift's depiction of an Academy of Projectors in *Gulliver's Travels* not only mocks contemporary scientific and political projects, but eviscerates the linguistic strategies of projection itself. For Swift, a perennial opponent of English plans for Irish improvement and himself an author of schemes for refining the manners, language, and industry of his countrymen, project pastiche provided a means of inhabiting and negating certain projects in order to clear space for his own.

Although this book focuses on eighteenth-century studies, my introduction and coda pose questions about projects that pertain to the present. "The Wreckage of Intentions" pursues an idea of the project as discrete design and futuristic forecast that is omnipresent today in the form of client projects, dissertation projects, housing projects, infrastructural super-projects, and countless projects in private self-fashioning. The term is undeniably vital to modern society but also ungraspably abstract, proliferating within managerial modes of thought as well as philosophical discourses as diverse as Heideggerian ontology, Freudian psychoanalysis, and Marxist explanations of value. It is to some extent impossible

to deliver an account of projection without indulging in a discursive endeavor that could itself be termed a project. Given this immersion, a theoretical goal of my book is to establish the project as an investigable entity, and to show through its study how writers in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Britain supplied crucial terminology for interpreting the conditions of modernity.

## **Chapter 2 - Paper Projections: Aaron Hill's Beech Oil Bust**

My first chapter showed how the improvement zealot Andrew Yarranton dreaded being “scandalized as a projector” in an era that abounded with schemes for private gain and public advantage. His tract elevates its particular vision of national improvement above the banal fray of projection, legitimating certain ideas by claiming their singularity. Daniel Defoe similarly opens his *Essay Upon Projects* (1693) by grouching that Britain “swarms with a multitude of projectors,” each promoting “innumerable conceptions, which die in the bringing forth, and (like abortions of the brain) only come into the air and dissolve.”<sup>1</sup> Defoe bemoans the pestilential volume of projects (the countless output of an authorial swarm) and their infinitesimal lifespan (dying from creation). His *Essay* ridicules Britain’s transitory culture of enterprise while contributing to it new proposals for highway repair, banking, and poor relief. A critic and sponsor of new enterprise, Defoe dubbed his period the “Projecting Age” to describe its mass proliferation of ephemeral plans, a period of vigorous yet vacuous bustle.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> eds. Joyce Kennedy, Michael Seidel, and Maximillian Novak (New York: AMS Press, 1999), 35.

<sup>2</sup> With similar anxiety over projection’s exponential growth the anonymous *Anglia Tutamen*, declared “Projects, like Parents, beget their like, and multiple wonderfully” (23). Thomas Baston’s 1716 jeremiad against stock-jobbing laments of projects “we have plentiful Crops, and every Season is too fruitful of them” (1). Swift’s 1720 poem, *The Battle of the Bubbles*, lists over a hundred distinct projects, many facetious, from the insuring of

But for projects to exist in ways that Defoe could critique, they required matter. They needed to exist in the world outside of projectors' brains in forms that would not vanish into air. In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Britain, new enterprise began as paper and ink. Projection manifested through printed sheets that were folded into books, curled into scrolls, posted as broadsides, and cut into cards, bills, and tickets. The impression of characters on paper transformed the futuristic rhetoric of projectors into objects that could be grasped, read, annotated, distributed, and discarded. Print allowed projection, a forward-looking representation of non-reality, to become a tangible cultural phenomenon when so many schemes failed to leave the page.

Existing scholarship acknowledges the materiality of project writing glancingly, often by rehearsing sensory tropes coined by writers of the seventeenth century. Adapting Defoe's insect metaphor, Max Novak associates the "Projecting Age" with a "swarm of proposals...(usually in pamphlet form)."<sup>3</sup> Catherine Skeen locates a "print whirl of broadsides, pamphlets, and tracts" in eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland.<sup>4</sup> Both descriptions foreground the multiplicity of projects over the physical properties of individual schemes: the image of "swarm" takes precedence for Novak over the object, "pamphlet," which he couches in a parenthetical subclause. Skeen foregrounds the rapid motion of "whirl" over the print forms she lists.

Such kinetic language renders projection an evanescent spectacle (swarm, whirl, blizzard, deluge) comprised of barely discrete objects (swarming insects, whirling

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horses to "carrying on an Undertaking of great advantage; but no Body to know what it is" (20).

<sup>3</sup> *Essay Upon Projects*, xv.

<sup>4</sup> "Projecting Fictions: *Gulliver's Travels*, *Jack Connor*, and *John Buncler*," *Modern Philology* 100, no. 3 (2003), 331.

broadsides). This interplay of transience and accumulation organizes Carole Fabricant's description of a long eighteenth century "littered with the corpses of failed or abortive projects."<sup>5</sup> Where Defoe/Novak's "swarm" and Skeen's "whirl" implicate fleeting, weightless enterprise, the project in Fabricant's mortuary trope is explicitly a dead letter, an inert container of defunct instructions. The broadsides and codices that once foretold improved ways of being in her language harden into relics of expired ambition. Defoe's swarm leaves Fabricant's litter, reducing projects to lifeless debris.

When critics represent proposal documents as shells of future thought they diminish both projection's sensuous existence and the past potential for inked paper to change society. This chapter defies such foreclosures by showing how proposals became actionable instruction through their printing. Print was an enabling medium of projection rather than its incidental byproduct. Drawing upon Raymond Williams's observation that the "strongest barrier to the recognition of human cultural activity is [the] immediate and regular conversion of experience into finished products," I treat printed proposals not simply as objects experienced in sublime multitude, but as evidence of a "forming and formative process" that made individual projects legible, tangible entities.<sup>6</sup> Print mediated between the moment of projection and the occasion of reading, when characters pressed on paper supplied a script for future action. Print created a vestibule between thinking enterprise and doing it.

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<sup>5</sup> Carole Fabricant, "Geographical Projects in the Later Eighteenth Century: Imperial Myths and Realities," in *The Age of Projects*, ed. Max Novak (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 318.

<sup>6</sup> *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 128.

The production of any work engenders narratives “apart from that recounted by its text,” according to D.F. McKenzie.<sup>7</sup> Attention to the mechanical aspects of printing reveals that projects were anchored neither in constant rhetorical forms (“the proposal”) nor stable material units (“the project pamphlet”), but dispersed across multiple fora in distinct arrangements. Broadside manifestos hawked in St. Paul’s Churchyard campaigned for Parliamentary statutes to curtail paper credit and encourage the construction of fisheries. Advertisements in *The London Examiner* directed readers to manuals for improving their lands, fortunes, and souls. Each of these items participates in acts of projection, but does not encompass a whole project. It was, instead, an interchange of printed signs that created the experience of a project for investors, customers, critics, and bystanding readers, an experience shaped by the challenge of fixing proposal language in reproducible forms.

Recent scholarship in the history of the book supports the disalignment of project writing from representative print forms by demonstrating how even basic terms like “work” and “document” fail to yield constant referents. Alexandra Halasz shows that the pamphlet hardly constitutes a “clear unit of trade production” since print jobs were measured in “sheets (of paper), underscoring the continuum on which pamphlet and book exist.”<sup>8</sup> McKenzie argues that the book cannot be a taken-for-granted object of analysis given the print shop practice of executing multiple jobs concurrently, wherein the sheets of one work might be interchangeably printed with those from another.<sup>9</sup> Projection infused and was infused by other modes and genres of expression in the print shop shuffle of

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<sup>7</sup> “What’s Past is Prologue’: The Bibliographical Society and History of the Book,” in *Making Meaning: “Printers of the Mind” and Other Essays*, eds. Peter D. McDonald and Michael F. Suarez (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 262.

<sup>8</sup> *The Marketplace of Print: Pamphlets and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1997), 3.

<sup>9</sup> “The London Book Trade in 1668,” in *Making Meaning*, 111.



sheets at the same time that project writing became a popular and popularly despised set of rhetorical conventions distinctive enough to incense an author like Defoe.

This chapter traces the materialization of projection through case study. I specifically investigate an archive of documents generated by the attempted invention of a new eighteenth-century commodity: Aaron Hill's effort to distill oil from beech tree nuts for use as lubricant, food, medicine, and fuel. The beech oil enterprise caught fire then fizzled between 1714 and 1716, one of many entrepreneurial cul-de-sacs from an era renowned for "Agricultural Revolution." What makes this undertaking particularly intriguing is that many of its papers survive today -- a seemingly low attrition likely due to Hill's status as a semi-canonical poet. Seldom is it possible to draw such a complete narrative of an eighteenth-century project from its archival remains. Furthermore, while projectors almost always scrutinized the conditions under which their works circulated, Hill, who self-published his beech-oil propaganda, mentioned books, slips, sheets, and rolls in his proposals, and years later even outlined a project for milling cheap white paper, was exceptional. His star-crossed adventures in oil sales reveal numerous instances where the concerns of pamphleteering occasioned and constrained the textual output of the projector, shedding light on the experiences of countless other projectors. Analyzing the stationery products of the beech oil scheme can sensitize us to the importance of print as both a physical precondition of projection and the under-examined medium through which we access old projects today.

Aaron Hill's career as literary miscellanist and frustrated visionary is well documented. His beech writing in particular has already received treatment in biographies

by Dorothy Brewster and Christine Gerrard.<sup>10</sup> Where Brewster and Gerrard explain the oil enterprise to shed greater light on Hill as biographical subject, my chapter treats the business as a document engine, foregrounding clashes between the futuristic poises of a projector and the idiosyncratic milieu of Britain's book trade. This perspective reveals how a series of printed works contributed to the formation and deformation of a joint-stock company. It also allows us to specify the incremental differences between proposal documents that anticipated industrial endeavor and those that actually brought industry into being. Even after the beech company's demise, attention to flows of print works reveals how pejorative terminology of the era -- like "bubble" -- articulated cultural anxieties over the unregulated proliferation of projects on paper.

### **Patent Promotions**

The paper trail begins with Aaron Hill's 1713 petition to patent his discovery of "how from the Fruit, or Triangular Seed of the Beech Tree, may be express'd a sweet, pure, and wholesome Oil."<sup>11</sup> Projectors routinely sought governmental support in the form of charters, grants, and laws, but relatively few pursued patent protection due to the costly application process and difficulty of enforcing registered claims.<sup>12</sup> The Attorney General

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<sup>10</sup> See Brewster, *Aaron Hill: Poet, Dramatist, Projector* (? : ?, 1913) and Gerrard, *Aaron Hill: The Muses' Projector, 1685-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> *An impartial account of the nature, benefit, and design, of a new Discovery and Undertaking, to make A Pure, Sweet, and Wholesome Oil, From the Fruit of the Beech Tree. By Authority of Her Majesty's Royal Letters Patents, under the Great Seal of Great Britain. With particular Answers to every Objection, which has been made, or may reasonably be conceived against it. And Proposals for Raising a Stock not exceeding Twenty Thousand Pounds: Wherein every Hundred Pounds Advanc'd, will Entitle to an Annuity for Fourteen Years, of Fifty Pounds per Annum, and for a Less Sum proportionably, upon a Good and Solid Security* (London: [n.p.], 1714), 4.

<sup>12</sup> Christina MacLeod describes patent review as an "unnecessarily lengthy and torturous procedure" costing "between £70 and £100 in money and from two weeks to six months in time." See "The 1690s Patents Boom: Invention or Stock-Jobbing?," *The Economic History*

evaluated proposals neither for merit nor originality, but rather to gauge the risk that new invention might violate the 1624 Statute of Monopolies. This law reserved monopoly privileges only “for the tearme of fowerteene yeares or under, hereafter to be made of the sole working or makinge of any manner of new Manufactures within this Realme, to the true and first Inventor and Inventors of such Manufactures.”<sup>13</sup> So enduring was disgust over Charles I’s sale of commercial privilege to subsidize his autocratic “Personal Rule” that even eighteenth-century patentees felt obliged to disclaim the example of early Stuart courtiers, who monopolized staples like salt, soap, starch, glass, coal, and iron at the expense of consumers.<sup>14</sup>

Hill sought to deflect the stigma of patenting by warding off the old specters of projector monopolists while touting the future benefits of beech oil. Patent review criteria encouraged him to conceive of beech oil as a discovery that would first do no harm to British consumers, and then only second, supply new utilities that existing industry did not. In this spirit, Hill claimed his intent was to break foreign monopolies rather than establish domestic ones. He argued that distilling oil from the beech mast that blanketed English forests and was commonly “eaten up by Hogs; or rots among the Leaves” would obviate the importation of olive oil from Spain, Portugal, France, and Italy, liberating the kingdom from

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Review 39.4 (1986), 551. Maxine Berg observes that the eventual rewards of patenting were “sometimes questionable.” See “From Imitation to Invention: Creating Commodities in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” *The Economic History Review* 55.1 (2002), 21. The rolls reveal some projector patentees, including Thomas Hale, author of *An Account of several New Inventions and Improvements Now necessary for England* (1691), who received a patent for milling lead to fortify ship hulls. Richard Haines sold licenses to make cider by a method he patented. John Apletree refers to his patent for silk cultivation in the pamphlet, *Proposals for an Undertaking to manage and produce Raw-Silk...pursuant to a Patent granted to John Apletre, Esq: under the Great Seal of England* (1718).

<sup>13</sup> 21 Ja 1. Cap. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution 1603-1714* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 31.

an exorbitant trade dependency. This proposed displacement of foreign goods through industrial imitation, a process Maxine Berg has dubbed the “invention of commodities,” would entail “nothing but the Charge of shaking from the Trees,” and transporting the mast to London where engines would “Grind and Press Three Hundred and Twenty Tun within the year.”<sup>15</sup>

Hill’s petition satisfied reviewers, who granted him a patent on October 23rd. This meant that a description of the beech oil invention was transcribed onto parchment sheets stitched to the continuous patent rolls kept in Chancery. The writing on the rolls took the form of a letter from the attorney general to Queen Anne, professing beech oil’s radiant ingenuity and commercial promise. Technical specification would not become compulsory in patents until the 1770s, so Hill’s entry pontificates vaguely on the benefits of beech oil without divulging trade secrets or other tangible details.<sup>16</sup> The patent text would have been written by (or by the order of) Attorney General Edward Northey. During Northey’s second tenure as attorney general (1710-1718), 36% of patent applications lapsed or were rejected, an unprecedentedly high figure.<sup>17</sup> That applications sometimes failed provided Hill with modest standing to elevate his discovery above less esteemed projects.

In an era when patents sometimes meant “whatever their holder could promote them as meaning,” Hill was eager to publicize his award to prospective investors and

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<sup>15</sup> *Impartial Account*, 13. See Berg “In Pursuit of Luxury: Global History and British Consumer Goods in the Eighteenth Century,” *Past and Present* 182 (2004), 85-142. Domestic oil production had been the elusive goal of seventeenth-century projects to grow hemp and coleseed on reclaimed marsh (See Joan Thirsk, *Economic Policy and Projects* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 69. Despite heavy agricultural experimentation, and widespread mercantilist desire to curb imports and employ the king’s subjects in improvement projects, eighteenth-century Britain continued to import foreign oil.

<sup>16</sup> cite

<sup>17</sup> “The 1690s,” 552.

customers.<sup>18</sup> The original patent, confined to cumbersome court scrolls, was unfit for this task. Hill therefore copied its admiring language into a more portable “Abstract of the Letters Patent” that could be inserted in pamphlets and newspaper notices. The abstract identifies Hill as the inventor of beech oil, and stipulates that “no others” could claim its “Profit, Benefit, Commodity and Advantage.”<sup>19</sup> This text lends official support to Hill’s undertaking while also projecting Britain itself as a functional civil society capable of securing the “Profit, Benefit, Commodity and Advantage” of its inventors:

KNOW YE, that We, being willing to give Encouragement to all Arts and Inventions, which may be of such Publick Use and benefit, of Our Especial Grace, certain Knowledge, and meer Motion, Have Given and Granted, and by these Presents, for Us, Our Heirs, and Successors, DO Give and Grant, unto the said Aaron Hill....(*An Impartial Account* 4)

The patent underwrites Hill’s promise of commercial advancement while also imagining the power of the crown to foster, define and regulate innovation. The attorney general turns private ingenuity to “Publick Use and benefit” through the authority of “these Our Letters Patents, or the Inrollment thereof,” instantiating state power through stationery practice.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 551. Hill made his patent sound more impressive by implying that Queen Anne herself had personally signed off on the award. In his second pamphlet, *Proposals for Raising a Stock*, Hill makes the monarch the grammatical subject of the patenting process: “Her Majesty by *Letters Patents*, under the Great Seal of *Great Britain*, bearing Date the 23d Day of *October* last, as graciously pleas’d to Grant to *Aaron Hill*, Esq; and his Assigns, the *Sole Priviledge* and Exercise, for 14 Years, of a *New Invention*, to make *Oil* from the *Fruit* of the *Beech-Tree*, commonly call’d *Beech-Mast*” (London: [n.p.], 1714), 3. While not technically wrong, this passage misleads readers by suggesting that Hill’s invention had garnered exclusive royal favor.

<sup>19</sup> *An Impartial Account*, 4.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

News of Hill's patent appeared four days after it was issued on October 27th in *The Post-Boy*, one of several London-based periodicals founded after the lapse of the Licensing Act. Published thrice weekly from 1695 to 1728, the single-sheet *Post-Boy* catered to the city's growing appetite for writing about current affairs. Hill's notice appeared alongside various reports from Spain and France, an account of the Prussian envoy's travels through Holland, notes of ship arrivals at Dublin, London, and Harwich, and advertisements for gowns, picture cards, and other items:

A Patent is pass'd the Seals, for granting to Aaron Hill, Esq; the sole Priviledge of a new Invention to make *Oil* from the Fruit of the Common Forrest Tree the *Beech*, which Invention, we hear, the Author affirms, will not only serve the Nation with an Eating-Oil as good as that from *Florence* and *Genoa*; but also supply the *Soap* and *Wollen* Manufactures, and all other Demands of Her Majesty's Subjects, without the Importation of *Forreign Oil*, to the particular Advantage of the *Wooded* Estates of this Kingdom, and general Employment of our *Poor* in one of the worst Seasons of the Year...(October 27-29, 1713)

The piece opens by mentioning "Seals," fragments of wax displaying the royal insignia that would have been stamped on Hill's letters patent and emblemized crown support of his scheme. The author then reiterates the abstract's protectionist argument for finding a domestic substitute for "*Forreign Oil*" that would save bullion, raise domestic land values, and employ idle people. The grammatical subject of this announcement is the first-person, plural "we," an encompassing and personalized article reflecting *The Post-Boy's* gathering of multiple authorial voices into a single organ, and perhaps also the writer's desire to identify with the public who would be judging Hill's project. More evidence of the conflated

perspectives of news writers and readers appears in the notice's repeated identification with the object form of the first-person plural noun, "us":

...a little Timme will shew us whether a Pretension to so important a  
Discovery in Trade will be attended by the Consequences which so rais'd in  
Expectation makes us hope for. (October 27-29, 1713)

The author exhibits qualified optimism, harboring "hope" that the beech oil enterprise could succeed. At the same time, this "us" diminishes Hill's "discovery in trade" to "Pretension," evoking a lineage of similar projects that failed, their patents and promising rhetorics notwithstanding. The ambiguous "us" hopes and defers hopefulness by classifying beech oil as a commercial "discovery" whose merits will become evident only with time. Until this unspecified date, beech oil remains "Pretension," an untested idea that could edify or disappoint consumers. Perhaps in response to *The Post-Boy's* measured skepticism, and the widespread societal anxieties about projects that it epitomized, Hill would endeavor to make his project more than empty pretense by employing print strategies to place the products of an intangible future in the hands of readers.

### **Folding Projects**

Less circumspect was Hill's own writing about beech oil, which he published in *The Post-Boy*, *The Daily Courant*, *The Englishman*, and other papers. Weekly periodicals served the beech project as organs of commercial news and vehicles of paid publicity. In December 1713, Hill placed a notice in *The Post-Boy* to promote his new pamphlet announcing plans to form a joint-stock company. The topic of the beech oil project's first advertisement is neither beech nor oil, but a paper pamphlet:

*Given Gratis*, at the Oil Annuity Office against the Upper-End of *Mountague-House* in *Great Russel-street, Bloomsbury*, a Book, Entitled,

+\*+ An Impartial Account of the Nature, Benefit, and Design of a new Discovery and Undertaking, to make OIL from the Fruit of the BEECH-TREE; by Authority of Her Majesty's Royal Letters-Patents, under the Great-Seal of Great Britain. With Answers to All that can possibly be said against it. And Proposals for raising a Stock of 20000 l. upon Annuities for 14 Years, at 50 *per Cent. per Ann.* upon a good and solid Security. (cite)

This notice invites readers to Hill's personal home (grandly rechristened "The Oil Annuity Office") with the promise of free literature, *An Impartial Account*.<sup>21</sup> Hill chose to distribute his prospectus "gratis" in a private, interior space at a time when most project pamphleteers arranged for the sale of their proposals in open-air book stalls. Project writing regularly competed for readers alongside "poems, plays, novels, periodicals, histories, travelogues, and more" according to Skeen.<sup>22</sup> George Wittkowsky speculates that readers of Swift's *Modest Proposal* (1729) would have been "accustomed to the sight of "humble petitions" and "modest proposals," displayed on the bookstalls of London, Edinburgh, and Dublin, dealing with economic problems."<sup>23</sup> By contrast, Hill used gratis print as a loss leader, a strategy for baiting investors reminiscent of seventeenth-century projectors' "calculated use of print in search of profit as the printed page became complicit

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<sup>21</sup> Hill informs readers in a postscript to *An Impartial Account* that "Till Places proper for the Business can be prepar'd and fitted in the Heart of the Town, The Oil Annuity-Office will be kept at the Patentee's-House, against the Upper-End of the Duke of Mountague's, in Great Russel-street, in Bloomsbury: Where the Books are now open'd, in Order to receive Subscriptions," 30.

<sup>22</sup> "Projecting Fictions," 336.

<sup>23</sup> "Swift's Modest Proposal: The Biography of an Early Georgian Pamphlet," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 4 (1943), 89.



in the luring in of the consumer.”<sup>24</sup> Hill took this tactic to an extreme by using free books to attract not profit, but the capital necessary to launch his project.

Still, even as Hill gave away printed literature, he was careful to do so economically. *An Impartial Account* was printed on three sheets of paper folded three times each and bound together as a pamphlet. This type of book, known as an octavo, made fiscal sense for a gratis manifesto since it could fit more text on fewer sheets than quartos and folios when using sheets and type point of the same size. Pamphleteers and their publishers could exert miserly control over sheets in the early 1700s, when paper accounted for 50-75% of book production costs, a problem exacerbated by Britain’s lack of a white paper manufacturer.<sup>25</sup> Of the four beech oil pamphlets that Hill published, all were octavo, a trait they shared with other works of projection, including Carew Reynell’s *True English Interest*, Defoe’s *Essay Upon Projects*, Charles Davenant’s *An Essay Upon Ways and Means of Supplying the War*, and later, Swift’s project pastiche, *A Modest Proposal*. Project writing by no means appeared exclusively in octavo (Yarranton’s *England’s Improvement* was a quarto, and Nicholas Barbon’s 1690 *Discourse of Trade* materialized in the even smaller duodecimo format). But Hill’s consistent use of the format for the beech oil pamphlets likely reflects his conscious weighing of costs against the grander modes of presentation afforded by other folds.

Hill’s desire to conserve paper in a gratis production made the octavo format attractive. Cost considerations also exerted influence over the length of his pamphlets. Since each sheet in octavo makes eight leaves (sixteen pages), an octavo pamphlet needs to

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<sup>24</sup> Samantha Heller, *Poets and projectors: Profit, production, and economic paradigms in early modern England*. PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1999. Ann Arbor: ProQuest/UMI. (Publication No. AAT 9948990), 52.

<sup>25</sup> Joad Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 72.

have a leaf-count divisible by eight (page-count divisible by sixteen), otherwise it would leave blank pages -- pages that other works would need to consume to avoid wasting paper. That *An Impartial Account* contained exactly thirty-two pages suggests that Hill had the final document form of his work in mind during composition; that his project writing answered physical requirements. These requirements were by no means rigid, especially given that the printer's labor entailed making myriad adjustments to ensure the efficient packaging of text. Still, the notion that Hill wrote to length, or that length was the product of negotiations between author and printer, is bolstered by the fact that all of the beech pamphlets match octavo specifications:

<b>Title</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>Leaves</b>	<b>Pages</b>	<b>Sheets</b>
<i>An Impartial Account</i>	1714	8°	16	32	2
<i>Proposals for Raising a Stock</i>	1714	8°	12	24	1½
<i>An Account of the Rise and Progress</i>	1715	8°	56	112	7
<i>An Impartial State of the Case</i>	1716	8°	8	16	1

The only work with a page-count not divisible by sixteen is *Proposals for Raising a Stock*, which used one and one-half sheets. Works of twenty-four pages (twelve leaves) could be readily produced by cutting one sheet, with identical content on each half, down the middle, using four leaves in one pamphlet and four in another. This procedure, known as half-sheet imposition, turned three sheets into two octavo pamphlets.<sup>26</sup> Whether Hill performed discrete additions and subtractions on his rhetoric to make it fit on a target number of sheets, or whether he composed cumulatively and then stopped writing when

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<sup>26</sup> See Phillip Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972 (page numbers)

he ran out of space is uncertain. What does appear evident is that the beech oil pamphlets were not simply containers sized to accommodate autonomous language. To the contrary, cheap print formats produced and constrained the possibilities of content for Hill throughout his campaign to publicize the virtues of beech oil.

Fashioning *Impartial Account* into a literary object and circulating good brought Hill into contact with various actors from London's burgeoning print industry. Hill had already worked with several different stationers to publish poems, speeches, and histories when in 1714 he turned to a new printer, "J. Gardyner" to issue his first beech oil pamphlet. Records from the English Short Title Catalogue suggest that "J" or John Gardyner was an active, though not prolific, printer during the first two decades of the eighteenth century. Of the eight works attributed to his press between 1700 and 1720, notable pieces include Nahum Tate's *Funeral Poems* (1700), John Pomfret's *A Prospect of Death* (1703), and parallel English and Italian librettos of *Dorinda* (1712). Why Hill employed Gardyner on this job is open to speculation: perhaps it was Gardyner's connections to the Tory news purveyor John Nutt, though availability and cost were also likely factors.<sup>27</sup>

The title page does not name a publisher, the party who "selects, organizes and above all, finances, the manufacture of books."<sup>28</sup> Given the *Account's* free distribution at the Annuity Office, and the fact that a later beech oil pamphlet identifies the "patentee" as publisher, it seems likely that Hill discharged this role himself. Self-publishing was relatively common among English projectors, who either could not find publishers for their

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<sup>27</sup> Nutt published and sold the Gardyner-printed *Funeral Poems* in 1700. Nutt was succeeded at his Royal Exchange printshop by John Morphew, who would publish Hill's *The Dedication of the Beech Tree* (1714) and later became publisher of the Tory-leaning *The Post-Boy*.

<sup>28</sup> John Feather, "The Commerce of Letters: The Study of the Eighteenth-Century Book Trade," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 17.4 (1984), 409.

proposals or elected to pay for printing themselves.<sup>29</sup> In return for assuming production costs, Hill maintained editorial control over his writing, and the standing to negotiate with printers the exact terms of that writing's commitment to paper. Printed materials would be the first products of the beech oil enterprise, an undertaking that invested first in paper to later capitalize trees.

### **Writing about Print**

*An Impartial Account* opens with a copy of the patent abstract, the report commending Hill as a gifted national servant. Hill foregrounds the abstract to lighten his persuasive burden in an era when project rhetoric was untrusted and projectors were typecast either as unaffiliated adventurers or over-connected monopolists. The lines immediately following the abstract build upon its labors of legitimation by shielding Hill from personal attack while interrogating the doctrinaire cynicism of British anti-projectors:

Every New Proposal must expect to meet with Opposition, from the *Envious*, and the *Ignorant*. And, as all untrodden Steps in Trade, are naturally subject to general Incredulity, and an undistinguishing Untowardness of Apprehension: it will be necessary to undeceive the World by barely doing Justice to the Undertaking. (*An Impartial Account*, 7)

*An Impartial Account* expects indiscriminate spite. Hill therefore labors to do "Justice to this Undertaking" by outfitting beech oil with persuasive language in a respectable codex form. Rhetorically, he adapts a dialogic objection-answer format to pastiche and answer potential complaints, while continuing to extoll beech oil's importance to a self-sufficient British

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<sup>29</sup> John Smith self-published the first edition of *England's Improvement Reiv'd* (1670). Moses Pitt self-published his prison reform treatise, *The Cry of the Oppressed* (1691), and arranged for its sale by the unspecified "Booksellers of London and Westminster." Charles Povey did the same with his commercial treatise, *The Unhappiness of England* (1701).

economy. Materially, Hill leverages the physical existence of his pamphlet in passages that correlate the physical weight of paper to the weighty significance of his invention. *An Impartial Account* refers to itself as a “book” multiple times, and with more tactile specificity, “the book in your hands.”<sup>30</sup> That Hill describes his octavo pamphlet as a “book,” a term usually reserved for more substantive textual productions, perhaps reflects the same aspirations of grandeur that led him to call his house an “Annuity Office.”

When refuting his detractors, Hill juxtaposes the “sheets” of his pamphlet against the “noise” of its detractors, elevating the pamphlet medium over verbal expression. Where Defoe remarked that projects are “blown up by the air of great words,” Hill contends it is the anti-projectors who are full of hot air: “These Busie-bodies, these Tongue-Champions, who, like a Drum, owe all their noise to their being hollow.”<sup>31</sup> *An Impartial Account* appears to exist above and apart from the buzzing, whirling cacophony that Novak, Skeen, and Fabricant perceive, declaiming silent truths in measured prose made matter.

This diction exemplifies what Joad Raymond calls “bibliographic self-consciousness,” an authorial awareness of how “physical construction and distribution shaped the social and rhetorical performances of pamphlets.”<sup>32</sup> Hill conceives of his printed works as the products of careful, deliberative action, while associating speech with chaotic and reactionary exchange. In his second beech oil pamphlet, *Proposals for Raising a Stock* (1714), Hill contemns his vocal critics:

Light Heads are always Merrily dispos’d, and Grave ones often ready enough  
to laugh at any Thing, which looks like a Project: I have more Reason than

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<sup>30</sup> *An Account of the Rise and Progress of the Beech-Oil Invention* (London: [n.p.], 1715), 6.

<sup>31</sup> *Essay, ?; Impartial Account*, 6.

<sup>32</sup> *Pamphlets*, 54.

most Men to know this Truth, for scarce a Day passes in which I have not Pleasure to hear my self heartily Rail'd at in the Coffee-Houses, by People, who, all the while they are endeavoring my Hurt, have no Malicious Intention, and are equally Strangers to my Person, and Discovery." (11)

So confused is London's coffee-house banter that even raillery, good-natured teasing, tends to vitiate the prospects of new enterprise. Hill laments that spoken words can scandalize projects even in the absence of factual knowledge or "Malicious Intention." Against this racket, the premeditated pamphlet renders beech oil's virtues "clear and visible as the Light Heaven" to "confute and expose to Scorn and Impudence and Folly...those idle Cavils and Objections which are made against it."<sup>33</sup>

The substantiveness of printed documents ultimately enables Hill to argue, in a later pamphlet, that "the Business we are now upon, is no *Project*, 'tis a *Discovery*," placing his enterprise completely beyond the degraded limits of projection.<sup>34</sup> He continues:

A Project is a Notion, which, having no real or visible Existence, the issue subsists at best upon a precarious Probability. But a Discovery is a Secret in Nature, or in Art, which having long lain hid, is brought to light by some fortunate Accident, pretends to nothing, but what Experience justifies, and carries its Demonstration along with it. (8)

Hill's bibliographic self-consciousness invests beech oil with "real or visible Existence" in the matter of paper. Through its printing, the notional project becomes a factual discovery that "pretends to nothing" but seeks justification in empirical experience and natural

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<sup>33</sup> *Impartial Account*, 6.

<sup>34</sup> *Account of the Rise*, 8.

evidence. By locating fractious speech in coffee-houses, Hill sets his pamphlet against one of London's most recognizable sites of public discourse:

People in Coffee-houses, or elsewhere, pretending to speak ill of the  
Invention, or advise against it, make This your Test of their Intention and  
their Honesty; Tell them, that Reason, and not Noise, shou'd be the End of  
Talking...(7)

Hill's association of coffee-houses only with oral exchange ignores the fact that printed works like *An Impartial Account* would have circulated in such venues through the sort of informal dissemination that made beech oil a knowable topic of raillery. Print and speech would instigate one another in a polemical environment that Hill feared would stifle investment. The conditions in which beech oil pamphlets were read would become the subject of increasing concern for Hill between 1714 and 1715, as he became convinced that prospective investors were not granting his materials the diligent attention they commanded.

### **Project Archivalism**

Hill invoked the solidity of his pamphlet to bolster its arguments and repel criticism. He also labored to position beech oil within established, reputable discourses of trade and agriculture. *An Impartial Account* presents itself as one document imbricated with others through the use of excerpt and citation. These strategies of intertextuality -- bibliographic consciousness of *other* works -- enable Hill to synthesize futuristic propaganda from the fragments of existing discourses. *An Impartial Account* demonstrates this archival resourcefulness when Hill references the bills of entry at the London Customs House to predict that beech oil would find ready British markets:

...so prodigious indeed is the Demand for Oil, that tis a difficult matter to guess high enough for the Consumption of the whole Kingdom.

It appears, by the Bills of Entry at the *Custom-House*, that, from *May* to *August*, this present Year was Imported, at *London*, Nineteen Hundred Tun of Oil.

At this Rate, *London* alone, Imports above Seven Thousand Tun of Oil a-Year. (21)

The bills of entry provide a daily record of the nature and quantity of goods legally imported and exported through London. Hill could have accessed this information by examining the official manuscript bills at the Customs House offices, on the north bank of the Thames. Indeed, the prepositional phrase “at the *Custom-House*” seems to imply he went to the trouble of doing just this. But it would have been more convenient to consult the newsheet summaries of the bills, which were printed every non-Holy day, and distributed throughout the City of London.<sup>35</sup> In either case, Hill identifies crucial documents of mercantile projection and locates the site of their production in authoritative fashion -- suggesting access to archives.

The bills in this passage furnish Hill with a single figure: 1,900 tons, the volume of foreign oil imported to London between May and August 1714. Hill uses this number to estimate annual oil consumption for the metropolis (“above Seven Thousand Tun”), and then extrapolates a national total (“Eight and Twenty Thousand Tun”) by factoring in foreign oil imported through Bristol and “the Northern Ports.” The “very moderate Calculation” that Britain imports 28,000 tons of oil per year is conservative according to

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<sup>35</sup> See John McCusker, *Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic World* (London: Routledge, 1997), 149-155.



Hill, who provides these estimates in order to gesture beyond the realm of numbers in the conclusion that home-grown oil could never want for customers. *An Impartial Account* transforms customs data into an index of market demand by presuming that Britain's olive oil consumers would accept, if not prefer, a beech substitute. Forecasting consumer demand on the basis of old records was standard mercantile practice in eighteenth-century Britain, and this was exactly Hill's point: to present himself as a savvy and conforming man of business rather than a fantastical projector. Citing the bills of entry showcases Hill's analytical facility with an important information source, as well as his recognition that quantitative "proof" would be necessary to enlist investors. *An Impartial Account* attests to the exigency of beech oil by characterizing its author as a knowledgeable trade analyst conversant with readerly expectations of the business proposal genre.

The evidence Hill pressed into service in support of his enterprise was both narrative and quantitative. *An Impartial Account* incorporates a letter from one W. Cecil, a Parisian noble who remarks that France contains abundant beech forests that could be harvested should England suffer a bad crop.<sup>36</sup> In another pamphlet, *An Account of the Rise and Progress of the Beech-Oil Invention*, Hill copies a letter from James I encouraging his lord lieutenants to cultivate an English silk industry by planting mulberry trees. The king's subjects were apparently unmoved, a fact Hill recounts at great pain:

And what do you think was the Effect of all [James's] Reasons? Why scarce a Man thought decently of his Attempt: Not a seed was sown; Not a Tree was planted; But the merry Creatures laugh'd immoderately at their good old Sovereign's being turn'd Projector, while they universally neglected and

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<sup>36</sup> *Impartial Account*, 17-19.

espised the Excellence of his Intention. (22)

Hill reproduces this royal directive to historicize and uproot British bias against new invention just as critics were beginning to malign beech oil as a baseless piece of legerdemain devised to swindle patrons of their investments. The letter also permits Hill to identify with an innovative and altruistic sovereign to the extent that they shared similarly-minded enemies and a similar raw material: trees. The letter, which stretches across four pages, appends beech oil to a long tradition of improvement whose authors included Hill and a caregiving monarch. *An Impartial Account* demonstrates sweeping historical consciousness by sympathizing with the first Stuart monarch, James, while flaunting the authenticating seal of the last one, Anne.

Hill also compared beech oil within more contemporary enterprise. In his *Proposals for Raising a Stock* (1715), he quotes at length from John Evelyn's *Sylva, or A discourse of forest-trees, and the propagation of timber in His Majesties dominions* (1664), which states that beech oil seeds yield a "sweet Oil, which the Poor People eat most willingly."<sup>37</sup> According to Evelyn as quoted by Hill, the mast itself has "even supported Men with Bread."<sup>38</sup> By copying passages from a book that "few Gentlemans Studies have been without for these last Forty Years," Hill reproduces an acclaimed work of natural philosophy to verify beech oil's edibility.<sup>39</sup> More so, *Proposals* suggests that Hill imagined at least some of his readers were wealthy gentry who could afford to purchase massive folios like *Sylva* and outfit their homes with "studies." The residential study itself would provide an amenable setting to read about beech oil, Hill believes. This private and privileged space

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<sup>37</sup> *Proposals*, 23.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

would encourage the forms of interested reading that preceded investment, he thought, where the discordant coffee-house fostered static chatter and demeaning discourse.

The image of a “gentlemen’s study” also implies an ideal collection of books that could be read alongside *Proposals*. Hill lays the groundwork for this bibliographical architecture by quoting Evelyn, and fortifies it by directing readers to other sources through in-text citation: he references “Sir Hugh Platt in Jewel-House of Art, and Nature, Page 189” and “Lawson’s Natural History of Carolina, Page 94.”<sup>40</sup> Hill brandishes his debts to the fields of botany and geography by inviting readers to track erudite references to the precision of page number. In so doing, he embeds *Proposals* within a community of knowledge-producing documents, making a project proposal imitate the citational density and documentary pluralism of scholarship.

### **Publishing Oil**

*An Impartial Account* concludes by turning from textual representations of beech oil to the stuff itself. The last page refers to “small Parcels” of mast “fastn’d to the Books,” and offers directions for breaking the nuts and extracting their oil:

Pull of the outward Husk, then break the Kernel to Pieces, take the smallest Bit you can find, no bigger than a Pins Head, lay it upon the Nail of your left Thumb, and squeeze it hard with the Nail of your right Thumb. By this means the Oil will come out upon both your Nails, and by the Quantity which Issues from so small a Bit, you will no longer wonder that a Bushel shou’d produce Two Gallons. (31)

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 24.

Hill invites readers to judge his venture by handling some mast, pressing its oil, tasting a few drops, and watching them burn with a bright blaze in candle flame. Instead of heeding “idle Rumours,” or even taking Hill’s pamphlet at its materialized word, readers could perform their own experiments, make deductions, and “no longer wonder.”<sup>41</sup> Where *An Impartial Account* opens with the testimony of the royal patenter, it closes by inviting readers to verify beech oil’s saturating plenitude firsthand. The text can describe but not encompass this manipulation of plant matter. Hill’s recourse to tactile experience essentially repurposes his pamphlet as seed packaging, a wrapper irreducible to its words.

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### **Projects in Verse**

### **The Bust**

### **Forging Evidence**

### **Oil Bubbles**

### **Lost Tickets**

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<sup>41</sup> *Impartial Account*, 31.