Background for "My Dearest Friend"

Ross Levine
Stanford University
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Overview

This imagined letter in Adam Smith's voice marks the 250th anniversary of Smith's public tribute to David Hume: the letter to William Strahan, dated Kirkaldy, 9 November 1776, and published with Hume's *My Own Life* in 1777. Unlike the earlier letters in this series, which rest chiefly on *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (TMS) or *The Wealth of Nations* (WN), this one rests chiefly on correspondence: the *Correspondence of Adam Smith*, ed. E. C. Mossner and I. S. Ross, vol. VI of the Glasgow Edition (cited below as Corr., with the Glasgow letter number and date), together with TMS (cited by the Glasgow Part.section.chapter.paragraph numbering) and one passage from WN. Every quotation in the letter and in this paper was checked against the Glasgow texts (Liberty Fund reprints). Quotations retain the original spelling and capitalization ("unoccupyed," "shoud," "disposd," "Misfortune").

Anyone interested in this remarkable friendship and in their views should read the engaging and enlightening book *The Infidel and the Professor: David Hume, Adam Smith, and the Friendship That Shaped Modern Thought* by Dennis C. Rasmussen (Princeton University Press, 2017). It significantly and enjoyably shaped my understanding of both men.

The letter advances the following claims:

1. Smith's brief account of Hume's last illness, published alongside Hume's autobiography, drew far more public abuse than *The Wealth of Nations*: it "brought upon me ten times more abuse than the very violent attack I had made upon the whole commercial system of Great Britain" (Corr. 208, to Andreas Holt, 26 Oct. 1780).

2. Hume was, to his contemporaries, Britain's most notorious unbeliever — "the Great Infidel" — and was, by the standard set out in Section 3 below, Smith's closest friend.

3. The friendship was largely conducted at a distance and by letter, with Hume pressing Smith to visit: the chamber kept ready (Corr. 149), and the jest that, had the island of Inchkeith offered lodging, Hume would have challenged Smith to remain there "till we were fully agreed on all points of Controversy" (Corr. 121).

4. Hume teased Smith about the reception of TMS while working to advance it (Corr. 31).

5. The two disagreed on several of their central subjects — historiography, money and banking, the American colonies, the foundations of morality and justice — and, in the sense specified in Section 6, on religion; these disagreements never led to a withdrawal of affection and, characteristically, were accompanied by invitations to meet (Corr. 12, 121, 131, 149, 150; Corr. 36; TMS IV.2.3).

6. In his last year, Hume asked Smith to see the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* into print after his death; Smith refused, citing the clamor he foresaw and his own quiet; Hume called the scruples groundless, yielded Smith discretion in May, then arranged publication through others and renewed his requests in August; and the two spent part of Hume's final summer together (Corr. 156, 157, 165, 172, 177A–B, 178).

7. The teasing continued to within days of Hume's death: Smith's joke about the carrier and the penny (Corr. 166) drew a dictated reply two days before Hume died, whose farewell — "Adieu My Dearest Friend" — gives the letter its title (Corr. 168).

8. Smith's published verdict distinguished Hume's philosophy, about which "men will, no doubt, judge variously," from his character and conduct, concerning which "there can scarce be a difference of opinion," and closed by calling him "as approaching as nearly to the idea of a perfectly wise and virtuous man, as perhaps the nature of human frailty will permit" (Corr. 178); the abuse that followed is documented by Smith himself (Corr. 208) and noted by the Glasgow editors ("Letter 178… was violently attacked").

As in the earlier background papers, I back each claim with the texts, and where the letter extends beyond what the record states, I identify the extension as mine.

1. The Spine

Letter's claim: *"Such friendship is among the great pleasures of life. It rests on esteem earned over time, not agreement on every question. It is built on affection, virtue, and character, not 'the giddy admiration of shining accomplishments.' And it is great enough that a person will tell a friend they are wrong, and tell the world it is wrong about their friend."*

Textual Basis

The paragraph is mine; the first three sentences synthesize passages in TMS, the final sentence is my own formulation (below), and the preceding sentence in the letter — "David practiced what I had only described: mutual regard that renders friends 'happy in one another'" — quotes TMS directly.

"Happy in one another" is from Smith's account of the social passions: "Their mutual regard renders them happy in one another, and sympathy, with this mutual regard, makes them agreeable to every other person" (TMS I.ii.4.2).

"Among the great pleasures of life" states TMS VI.iii.15, where hardness of heart, "by excluding him from the friendship of all the world, excludes him from the best and most comfortable of all social enjoyments."

"Esteem earned over time, not agreement on every question" draws on TMS VI.ii.1.18: of all attachments to an individual, that "founded altogether upon the esteem and approbation of his good conduct and behaviour, confirmed by much experience and long acquaintance, is, by far, the most respectable." The same paragraph provides the contrast the sentence draws: the "hasty, fond, and foolish intimacies of young people," founded "upon their agreement in some singular principle or opinion, not commonly adopted… can by no means deserve the sacred and venerable name of friendship." The letter's phrase interprets that contrast; the paragraph does not state it in those words, and it rejects intimacies founded on a shared opinion rather than declaring belief irrelevant to character.

"The giddy admiration of shining accomplishments" is quoted from TMS VI.i.9, on the prudent man's friendships: "a sedate, but steady and faithful attachment to a few well-tried and well-chosen companions; in the choice of whom he is not guided by the giddy admiration of shining accomplishments, but by the sober esteem of modesty, discretion, and good conduct."

The final sentence — telling a friend they are wrong and telling the world it is wrong about a friend — is my synthesis. Smith nowhere states it as a maxim. The letter's warrant for it is conduct, not text: the first half is enacted in the Dialogues episode (Section 7), and the second in the Letter to Strahan and its aftermath (Section 8). I state it in the letter as something Smith learned from the friendship, not as a doctrine of TMS.

The letter's retrospective voice draws on Smith's writings across his lifetime: the social-passions passage (I.ii.4.2) stood in the first edition of 1759, while Part VI — the source of VI.i.9, VI.ii.1.18, and VI.iii.15 — first appeared in the sixth edition of 1790, after Hume's death ("Part VI was added in ed. 6," Glasgow TMS, textual note).

2. The Opening: Ten Times More Abuse

Letter's claim: *"Two hundred and fifty years ago this day, I dated a letter to my publisher describing the last illness of a friend. I thought it harmless. But after it was published, it 'brought upon me ten times more abuse than the very violent attack I had made upon the whole commercial system of Great Britain.' That attack you now call* The Wealth of Nations*."*

Textual Basis

The dating is exact: the Letter to Strahan is headed "Kirkaldy, Fifeshire, Nov. 9, 1776" (Corr. 178), and the letter is published on 9 November 2026. The quotation is from

Smith's letter to Andreas Holt, Commissioner of the Danish Board of Trade and Economy, written four years later:

"A single, and as, I thought a very harmless Sheet of paper, which I happened to Write concerning the death of our late friend Mr Hume, brought upon me ten times more abuse than the very violent attack I had made upon the whole commercial system of Great Britain." (Corr. 208, 26 Oct. 1780)

"I thought it harmless" renders Smith's "as, I thought a very harmless Sheet of paper," and supplies the letter's title for its sixth section. The identification "That attack you now call *The Wealth of Nations*" is mine, added to help a reader who does not know the Holt letter make the comparison; Smith's "very violent attack… upon the whole commercial system" is his own description of WN, and the identification puts no word in his mouth.

"The Great Infidel" was Hume's contemporary epithet (Rasmussen 2017). The letter attributes it to "respectable Britain," not to any named person.

3. "My Best Friend"

Letter's claim: *"To me, David was my best friend."*

Textual Basis

"My best friend" is my characterization of Hume's place in Smith's life, not a quotation. Smith did use the phrase once elsewhere, of Hew Scott, the Duke of Buccleuch's brother, in a letter written within hours of Scott's death in Paris: "I returned in less than half an hour to do the last duty to my best friend" (Corr. 98, 19 Oct. 1766). The characterization of Hume therefore rests not on a unique phrase but on the record this section collects.

The nearest thing to an explicit ranking in Smith's hand is private. Eleven days before Hume died, Smith closed a letter to Alexander Wedderburn by asking after another friend's health: "After Hume there is scarce anybody I would more sincerely regret" (Corr. 163, 14 Aug. 1776).

The published tribute uses the superlative register throughout: "Thus died our most excellent, and never to be forgotten friend," and the verdict that Smith had "always considered him, both in his lifetime and since his death," as approaching the idea of a perfectly wise and virtuous man (Corr. 178).

The trust was mutual and Smith extended it first: in 1773, before leaving for London with WN unfinished, Smith made Hume his literary executor — "As I have left the care of all my literary papers to you" — leaving publication of the astronomy fragment "entirely to your judgement," directing that specified other papers be "destroyed without any

examination," and excepting the papers he was carrying to London (Corr. 137, 16 Apr. 1773); Hume's reciprocal request followed in 1776.

And Smith's two printed tributes to Hume, each unnamed and each attached to a disagreement, carry praise of an intensity rare in his published work: "an ingenious and agreeable philosopher, who joins the greatest depth of thought to the greatest elegance of expression" (TMS IV.1.2), and "by far the most illustrious philosopher and historian of the present age" (WN V.i.g.3).

Smith had other intimate friends — Joseph Black, James Hutton, and Alexander Wedderburn among them — and sent warm salutations to several correspondents. What sets Hume apart is the record collected here: the private ranking of Corr. 163, the reciprocal trust, and the public tribute. Rasmussen's (2017) account of the friendship supports the use of the modern phrase: best friend.

The letter's title, "My Dearest Friend," is documented on both sides of the correspondence: it is how Smith addressed Hume (Corr. 82, 103, 166, among others) and how Hume's last letter to Smith both opens and closes (Corr. 168; Section 7).

4. An Island Between Us

Letter's claim: *"We lived, almost always, in different towns. When I was at Kirkcaldy and David at Edinburgh, the Firth of Forth lay between us. The friendship lived in letters and visits. He kept a room ready all the same: 'Your Chamber in my House is always unoccupyed: I am always at home: I expect you to land here.'"*

Textual Basis

"Almost always" is deliberate. Across the friendship, the two were generally based in different towns — Smith at Glasgow (1751–64) and Kirkcaldy (1767–73), while Hume lived principally in Edinburgh, with Smith in France and London for most of the interval — though they spent stretches together on visits; the record does not support "never," and the letter does not claim it. The scene the paragraph sets, Kirkcaldy and Edinburgh facing each other across the Firth of Forth, is the setting of the Inchkeith letter (Corr. 121, below) and of Hume's invitation:

"Your Chamber in my House is always unoccupyed: I am always at home: I expect you to land here." (Corr. 149, 8 Feb. 1776)

The paragraph joins two moments rather than one exchange. The Inchkeith letter of 1769 (below) places Hume at Edinburgh and Smith at Kirkcaldy; the chamber invitation of 8 February 1776 was addressed to Smith in London — "To Adam Smith Esqr at the British Coffee-house, Charing cross London" — and asks whether he still intends "to settle with

us this Spring" (Corr. 149). The chamber in Edinburgh stood ready in either case; the letter states the standing invitation without dating it.

The same letter carries Hume's dark joke on his failing health, not used in the letter for length: "I weighed myself t'other day, and find I have fallen five compleat Stones. If you delay much longer, I shall probably disappear altogether."

Letter's claim: *"Having heard nothing of my work for some time, he wrote: 'I am positive you are in the wrong in many of your Speculations, especially where you have the Misfortune to differ from me.' He added that he would challenge me to meet him on Inchkeith, the empty island between us, if there were lodgings there — and that neither of us would leave the place 'till we were fully agreed on all points of Controversy.'"*

Textual Basis

The passage is from Hume's letter of 20 August 1769, written from Edinburgh — to which Hume had just returned, as its opening says — with Smith across the Forth at Kirkcaldy:

"I am glad to have come within sight of you, and to have a View of Kirkaldy from my Windows: But as I wish also to be within speaking terms of you, I wish we coud concert measures for that purpose. I am mortally sick at Sea, and regard with horror, and a kind of hydrophobia the great Gulph that lies between us… I want to know what you have been doing, and propose to exact a rigorous Account of the method, in which you have employed yourself during your Retreat. I am positive you are in the wrong in many of your Speculations, especially where you have the Misfortune to differ from me. All these are Reasons for our meeting… There is no Habitation on the Island of Inch-keith; otherwise I shoud challenge you to meet me on that Spot, and neither of us ever to leave the Place, till we were fully agreed on all points of Controversy." (Corr. 121)

"Having heard nothing of my work for some time" renders Hume's demand for "a rigorous Account of the method, in which you have employed yourself during your Retreat": the verdict of error precedes any sight of the work, which is the joke. "He added that he would challenge me… if there were lodgings there" renders "There is no Habitation on the Island of Inch-keith; otherwise I shoud challenge you," preserving the conditional; "lodgings" stands for "Habitation." The Glasgow text prints "neither [of] us," with the editors supplying "of"; the letter paraphrases that phrase outside quotation marks and quotes only "till we were fully agreed on all points of Controversy," which is verbatim. "The empty island between us" renders "no Habitation" and the island's position in the Firth. "We would be there still" is mine.

5. Book Reviews

Letter's claim: *"When my* Theory of Moral Sentiments *appeared, I was desperate to learn of its reception in London, where David then lived. He began a long letter promising to describe its fate. But the letter kept breaking off for other news — university business, literary gossip, a warning that popular judgment is worthless. At last came 'the melancholy News': my book had been 'very unfortunate: For the Public seem disposd to applaud it extremely.'"*

Textual Basis

The letter is Hume's of 12 April 1759, from Lisle Street, Leicester Fields (Corr. 31). Its structure matches the letter's description: Hume announces that he has delayed writing "till I cou'd tell you something of the Success of the Book, and coud prognosticate with some Probability whether it shoud be finally damnd to Oblivion, or shoud be registerd in the Temple of Immortality"; twice breaks off — "But I have been interrupted in my Letter by a foolish impertinent Visit of one who has lately come from Scotland," and again, "A Plague of Interruptions!… here is one that has broke in upon me again" — to report on Glasgow University business, Ferguson's manuscript, Lord Kames's *Law Tracts*, and Paris literary news; delivers the mock-stoic warning ("A wise man's Kingdom is his own Breast… Nothing indeed can be a stronger Presumption of Falshood than the Approbation of the Multitude"); and only then:

"Supposing, therefore, that you have duely prepard yourself for the worst by all these Reflections; I proceed to tell you the melancholy News, that your Book has been very unfortunate: For the Public seem disposd to applaud it extremely." (Corr. 31)

"A warning that popular judgment is worthless" compresses the mock-stoic passage. "Where David then lived" is the letter's address; Hume was in London seeing his *History* through the press. "I was desperate to learn of its reception" is my characterization of Smith's side; Hume's teasing presumes exactly that eagerness, and his letter was written to prolong it.

Letter's claim: *"Meanwhile he had been giving away copies to the very judges whose opinion could make the book's reputation. He was promoting my success while making sure I did not grow too solemn about it."*

Textual Basis

From the opening of the same letter:

"Wedderburn and I made Presents of our Copies to such of our Acquaintance as we thought good Judges, and proper to spread the Reputation of the Book. I sent one to the Duke of Argyle, to Lord Lyttleton, Horace Walpole, Soames Jennyns, and Burke, an Irish Gentleman, who wrote lately a very pretty Treatise on the Sublime." (Corr. 31)

"The very judges whose opinion could make the book's reputation" renders "good Judges, and proper to spread the Reputation of the Book." The second sentence is my gloss on the letter's double character — promotion and teasing in one document.

Letter's claim: *"I had written a book about our longing for approval — and what happens when it goes wrong. David made sure I knew the book's author was not exempt."*

Textual Basis

The characterization of TMS is a gloss, not a quotation. In the book Hume reviewed — the first edition of 1759 — the longing for approval drives the account of ambition and the distinction of ranks (TMS I.iii.2) and the misdirected ambition of the poor man's son (TMS IV.1.8). The chapter on "the corruption of our moral sentiments, which is occasioned by this disposition to admire the rich and the great" (TMS I.iii.3), the subject of the second letter in this series, was added in the sixth edition of 1790 ("This chapter was added in ed. 6," Glasgow TMS, textual note) and was not part of the book Hume read. The final sentence is my inference about Hume's design, drawn from the structure of Corr. 31; it attributes to Hume an intention that the letter's staging makes evident, though he nowhere states it.

6. What We Disagreed About

Letter's claim: *"A lot. We disagreed about where to start a history of England, about paper money and banks, about Britain's American colonies, and about the foundations of morality and justice themselves. When* The Wealth of Nations *appeared, David wrote: 'If you were here at my Fireside, I shoud dispute some of your Principles.' And we differed on religion — or at the least, on how much of one's doubts a person ought to print."*

Textual Basis

Each item of the list is documented:

Where to start a history of England. The first surviving letter between Hume and Smith opens in the middle of this dispute: "I confess, I was once of the same Opinion with you, and thought that the best Period to begin an English History was about Henry the 7th," before Hume defends beginning with the Stuarts (Corr. 12, 24 Sept. 1752).

Paper money and banks. During the credit crisis of June 1772, Hume wrote: "We are here in a very melancholy Situation: Continual Bankruptcies, universal Loss of Credit, and endless Suspicions… Do these Events any-wise affect your Theory? Or will it occasion the Revisal of any Chapters?" (Corr. 131, 27 June 1772). The question shows the challenge, not the doctrines. The substantive difference stands in WN itself: discussing the years in which Hume published his Political Discourses, Smith attributes

the rise in Scottish provision prices to the badness of the seasons rather than to the multiplication of paper money (WN II.ii.96) — rejecting the inference that Hume's "Of Money" invites. Paganelli (2025) reads WN's treatment of money as a sustained, friendly correction of Hume.

The American colonies. "The Duke of Bucleugh tells me, that you are very zealous in American Affairs. My Notion is, that the Matter is not so important as is commonly imagind. If I be mistaken, I shall probably correct my Error, when I see you or read you" (Corr. 149, 8 Feb. 1776).

The foundations of morality and justice. Hume's objection to TMS, by his own description, went to "the Hinge of your System": "I wish you had more particularly and fully prov'd, that all kinds of Sympathy are necessarily Agreeable… Now it woud appear that there is a disagreeable Sympathy, as well as an agreeable," with the illustration that otherwise "an Hospital woud be a more entertaining Place than a Ball" (Corr. 36, 28 July 1759). On the other side, Smith's TMS disputes Hume's utility-based account of moral approbation: "The same ingenious and agreeable author who first explained why utility pleases, has been so struck with this view of things, as to resolve our whole approbation of virtue into a perception of this species of beauty…" — a view the chapter then argues against (TMS IV.2.3). Hume's hospital objection did not go unanswered: Smith added a footnote in the second edition, at the passage Hume had singled out (I.iii.1.9), distinguishing the pain of a sympathetic emotion from the pleasure of observing the concord of sentiments; a draft went to Gilbert Elliot with Letter 40 ("The footnote was added in ed. 2," Glasgow TMS, textual note).

The foundations of justice. Smith argues that what originally interests us in the punishment of wrongs done to individuals is concern for the injured person, not "a regard to the preservation of society": "The concern which we take in the fortune and happiness of individuals does not, in common cases, arise from that which we take in the fortune and happiness of society" (TMS II.ii.3.10). Hume had grounded the moral approval of justice in sympathy with the public interest (Treatise III.ii.2). The letter's "foundations of morality and justice" rests on this opposition.

The fireside sentence. From Hume's letter on WN: "Euge! Belle! Dear Mr Smith: I am much pleas'd with your Performance… If you were here at my Fireside, I shoud dispute some of your Principles. I cannot think, that the Rent of Farms makes any part of the Price of the Produce… It appears to me impossible, that the King of France can take a Seigniorage of 8 per cent upon the Coinage" (Corr. 150, 1 Apr. 1776). The letter quotes the fireside sentence; the particulars (rent, seigniorage) are recorded here.

Religion. The letter's formulation — "or at the least, on how much of one's doubts a person ought to print" — is deliberately the narrower, documentable claim. The public

gap was as wide as Britain could conceive: Hume published his skepticism and was "the Great Infidel"; Smith's published religion is natural theology, and he never endorsed Hume's attacks. Whether the private doctrinal gap was large is uncertain, and the evidence is genuinely mixed. What is documented beyond dispute is the difference the letter states: Hume printed his doubts and pressed Smith to print more of them; Smith declined, softened the private record for the press, and directed that most of his papers be destroyed. The letter therefore asserts the difference at the level of conduct and leaves the question of belief exactly as Smith left it.

Letter's claim: *"Mark what the disagreement never contained: a withdrawal. My errors were simply additional reasons to spend time together. His disputes came with invitations to visit."*

Textual Basis

"Additional reasons to spend time together" reflects Hume's own logic in the Inchkeith letter: after declaring Smith wrong, "All these are Reasons for our meeting" (Corr. 121). The pattern of dispute-with-invitation appears four times over seven years: the Inchkeith challenge itself (Corr. 121); the 1772 plan — "Come hither for some weeks about Christmas; dissipate yourself a little; return to Kirkaldy; finish your Work… Execute this plan faithfully; and I forgive you" (Corr. 134, 23 Nov. 1772); the unoccupied chamber in the same letter as the America disagreement (Corr. 149); and the fireside sentence, in which the disputes themselves are "fit only to be discussed in Conversation; which, till you tell me the contrary, I shall still flatter myself with soon" (Corr. 150).

7. A Difficult Request

Letter's claim: *"In his last year David asked the most difficult thing he ever asked of me: to see his* Dialogues concerning Natural Religion *— his most dangerous work — into print after his death. I was unwilling, and told him so. It was not that I had ceased to esteem the author. I dreaded the clamour the book would raise, and I prized my quiet."*

Textual Basis

Hume's will of January 1776 left Smith his papers with the request that the *Dialogues be published*; the request and Smith's resistance are documented in Smith's summary to Strahan after Hume's death: "I once had persuaded him to leave it entirely to my discretion either to publish them at what time I thought proper or not to publish them at all… but it never should have been published in my lifetime"; and "The latter tho' finely written I could have wished had remained in Manuscript to be communicated only to a few people… I am resolved, for many reasons, to have no concern in the publication of those dialogues" (Corr. 172, 5 Sept. 1776). "His most dangerous work" is my description;

Smith's "for many reasons" is unspecific, and the letter supplies the two he put on paper that autumn:

"I am still uneasy about the clamour which I foresee they will excite…" (Corr. 177A, draft to Strahan, Oct. 1776)

"I am much obliged to you for so readily agreeing to print the life, together with my addition separate from the Dialogues. I even flatter myself that this arrangement will contribute, not only to my quiet, but to your interest." (Corr. 177B, to Strahan, Oct. 1776)

"I dreaded the clamour the book would raise, and I prized my quiet" is built from those two sentences, using Smith's own nouns. "It was not that I had ceased to esteem the author" is my sentence; its basis is "tho' finely written" (Corr. 172) and the tribute of Corr. 178. The letter does not assert that prudence exhausted Smith's reasons.

Letter's claim: *"He thought my scruples groundless, and said so. But he quietly arranged for others to print it."*

Textual Basis

"He thought my scruples groundless, and said so" is documented verbatim: "I think, however, your Scruples groundless" (Corr. 156, 3 May 1776). The same letter holds the section's whole pattern in one document: it argues the point, looks forward to disputing WN — "these points will be the Subject of future Conversation between us" — and closes, "I regret much, in leaving Edinburgh, that I shall lose much of your Company, which I shoud have enjoy'd this Summer."

Hume's pressure and his judgment of the manuscript: "On revising them (which I have not done these 15 Years) I find that nothing can be more cautiously and more artfully written. You had certainly forgotten them. Will you permit me to leave you the Property of the Copy, in case they shoud not be published in five Years after my Decease?… My State of Health does not permit me to wait Months for it" (Corr. 165, 15 Aug. 1776). The concession had come earlier: "I am content, to leave it entirely to your Discretion at what time you will publish that Piece, or whether you will publish it at all" (Corr. 157, 3 May 1776). The other arrangements were two instruments: a codicil of 7 August left the manuscripts to Strahan with a request to publish the Dialogues within two years, and a further codicil returned the property to Hume's nephew if they were not published "within two Years and a half after my Death" (Glasgow n. 1 to Corr. 165). Smith reports Hume's explanation, quoting Hume's letter of 23 August, where the term is given as three years: "There is no man in whom I have a greater confidence that Mr Strahan; yet have I left the property of that Manuscript to my Nephew David in case, by any accident, it should not be published within three years after my decease" (Corr. 172). The letter compresses this sequence into two sentences and does not date the steps. The sequence is

as given here: discretion granted in May, arrangements through others completed in August, pressure on Smith renewed in the same August letter that offered him a copy.

Letter's claim: *"This was a difficult matter between us. / But we still had a summer we wished to spend together. / I spent part of it in Edinburgh to be near him. By August even conversation exhausted him, and at his request I returned home to Kirkcaldy."*

Textual Basis

The summer's wish is Hume's, in the fireside letter: the disputed points "are fit only to be discussed in Conversation; which… I shall still flatter myself with soon. I hope it will be soon: For I am in a very bad State of Health and cannot afford a long Delay" (Corr. 150). The Edinburgh residence and the departure are Smith's published account: "At his own desire, therefore, I agreed to leave Edinburgh, where I was staying partly upon his account, and returned to my mother's house here, at Kirkaldy, upon condition that he would send for me whenever he wished to see me" (Corr. 178). "Partly upon his account" licenses "to be near him"; the condition attached to the departure is recorded here.

Letter's claim: *"Even as he weakened, the jokes continued. Three days before the end, I teased him for sending me a letter by the slow carrier — a dying man, saving a penny on the mail. His reply — dictated, for he could no longer rise — bade me farewell: 'Adieu My Dearest Friend.'"*

Textual Basis

The chronology is exact. Smith's tease is dated 22 August: "I have this moment received your Letter of the 15 inst. You had, in order to save me the sum of one penny Sterling, sent it by the carrier instead of the Post; and (if you have not mistaken the date,) it has lain at his quarters these eight days and was, I presume, very likely to lie there for ever"; the same letter asks Hume to return an enclosure "by the Post and not by the carrier" (Corr. 166). Hume's reply is dated 23 August: "I am obliged to make use of my Nephews hand in writing to you as I do not rise to day… Adieu My Dearest Friend / David Hume / P.S. It was a strange blunder to send your Letter by the Carrier" (Corr. 168). Hume died on 25 August, at four in the afternoon, as Joseph Black's letter to Smith reports (quoted in Corr. 178). "Three days before the end" counts from the 22nd; "dictated, for he could no longer rise" renders "I am obliged to make use of my Nephews hand… as I do not rise to day." In the manuscript, the farewell stands above Hume's signature, and the postscript follows it, so the letter says the reply "bade me farewell" rather than that it ended with the phrase.

"Saving a penny" is a paraphrase, not a quotation. The original is "in order to save me the sum of one penny Sterling": postage was then commonly paid by the recipient, so the

penny saved was Smith's. The letter omits whose penny it was as immaterial to the jest the letter tells — a dying man choosing the slow mail; the detail is recorded here.

"A dying man" is the letter's gloss, set off from the reported tease: Smith's letter of 22 August teases only the carrier and the penny, and elsewhere holds to "my own hopes" that the illness would not prove his last; the dark frame is the narrator's, supplied in retrospect. And "could no longer rise" strengthens Hume's "as I do not rise to day" — a finality the event supplied two days later, but beyond the sentence itself.

8. A Very Harmless Sheet of Paper

Letter's claim: *"It was not the death Britain expected of its Great Infidel. Some who abhorred his opinions had waited for the terror that must surely seize the unbeliever at the last; a few came to his door to see it. There was nothing to see."*

Textual Basis

That Hume's composure confounded expectation is the burden of Smith's published account: "Mr. Hume's magnanimity and firmness were such, that his most affectionate friends knew, that they hazarded nothing in talking or writing to him as to a dying man"; "though Mr. Hume always talked of his approaching dissolution with great cheerfulness, he never affected to make any parade of his magnanimity" (Corr. 178). James Boswell's visit on 7 July 1776 documents the expectation of deathbed terror and the curiosity it bred, recorded in his "An Account of My Last Interview with David Hume, Esq." (see Rasmussen 2017). "A few came to his door to see it" is a compression: the visitor documented here is Boswell, who put the question of death to Hume directly and recorded the unshaken answer; the broader fascination with how the Great Infidel would die is the subject of Rasmussen's account. The plural stands for that fascination rather than for named additional callers.

Letter's claim: *"So I wrote down what I had actually witnessed, and had it printed: the cheerfulness, the jokes, the generosity to the end. People would always disagree about his philosophy, I said. But concerning his character and conduct there could scarce be a difference of opinion. And I set down the sentence that would cost me more than I guessed: that I had always considered him 'as approaching as nearly to the idea of a perfectly wise and virtuous man, as perhaps the nature of human frailty will permit.'"*

Textual Basis

"The cheerfulness, the jokes, the generosity" is the content of Corr. 178: the cheerfulness throughout; the jokes above all the Charon passage, quoted here because the letter does not use it —

"'I could not well imagine,' said he, 'what excuse I could make to Charon in order to obtain a little delay… Have a little patience, good Charon, I have been endeavouring to open the eyes of the Public. If I live a few years longer, I may have the satisfaction of seeing the downfal of some of the prevailing systems of superstition.' But Charon would then lose all temper and decency. 'You loitering rogue, that will not happen these many hundred years… Get into the boat this instant, you lazy loitering rogue.'" (Corr. 178)

— and the generosity: "Even in the lowest state of his fortune, his great and necessary frugality never hindered him from exercising, upon proper occasions, acts both of charity and generosity" (Corr. 178). "People would always disagree about his philosophy… scarce a difference of opinion" renders: "concerning whose philosophical opinions men will, no doubt, judge variously, every one approving or condemning them, according as they happen to coincide or disagree with his own; but concerning whose character and conduct there can scarce be a difference of opinion" (Corr. 178). The verdict sentence is quoted exactly. "The sentence that would cost me more than I guessed" aligns with the Holt letter's "as, I thought a very harmless Sheet of paper" (Corr. 208): Smith did not anticipate the scale of the reaction.

"What I had actually witnessed" is likewise a compression. Smith left Edinburgh before the end, and the published account expressly incorporates the reports of others: it quotes Doctor Black's letters for the final days, including Black's account of the death (Corr. 178). The "charity and generosity" sentence describes Hume's character across his life, not acts observed in the final hours. The letter's phrase marks the account's standing — testimony set against rumor — and the mixed basis of that testimony is recorded here.

Letter's claim: *"The most virtuous man I had known — and the most notorious infidel in Britain. Respectable opinion could believe only one of those at a time, and it had long since chosen. Readers who could not forgive his unbelief could not forgive my praise of his character. The abuse followed. Britain, I learned, could pardon an attack on its commerce more readily than kindness toward its infidel."*

Textual Basis

The paragraph is my construction. The abuse is drawn from Smith's own report (Corr. 208, Section 2) and the Glasgow editors' note: "The Dialogues caused no uproar, but Letter 178 addressed to Strahan, dated 9 Nov. 1776, was violently attacked" (editors' note to Corr. 177). It also has a citable face in the Glasgow volume itself: George Horne's pamphlet, *A Letter to Adam Smith, LL.D. on the Life, Death, and Philosophy of his Friend David Hume Esq.*, by "One of the People Called Christians" (Oxford, 1777), printed as Corr. 189 — "You have been lately employed in embalming a philosopher; his body, I believe I must say; for concerning the other part of him, neither you nor he seem to have entertained an idea sleeping or waking." The Glasgow editors note that "this kind

of thing was the 'abuse'" of which Smith complained to Holt. Horne's objection was not that an unbeliever could not be agreeable company; it was that Hume's attacks on religion destroyed the ground for calling him virtuous — the kind of objection the letter's explanation compresses. The final sentence restates the Holt comparison as a lesson, keeping Smith's "ten times" as his own emphatic arithmetic, not a measured count; "kindness toward its infidel" is my phrase. The explanation offered ("Readers who could not forgive his unbelief could not forgive my praise of his character") is an interpretation of objections of Horne's kind, not a quotation from any attacker.

9. Come Over

Letter's claim: *"You will soon gather around your tables for Thanksgiving. Perhaps someone came to mind as you read this: a friend of the wrong opinions, whose kindness you have had years to know, whose company you keep postponing until the work is finished. The work will not be finished. My arguments with David were never finished either. And his answer was always the same: come over. / I wish I had gone more often."*

Textual Basis

The modern turn is mine throughout. Its claims about the friendship are documented above: the arguments that never finished (Corr. 121: "till we were fully agreed on all points of Controversy" — a condition never met; Corr. 150: "a hundred other Points… fit only to be discussed in Conversation"); the standing invitation (Corr. 121, 134, 149, 150; and from Smith's side, Corr. 70, 22 Feb. 1763: "You have been long promising us a visit at Glasgow… it will give me the greatest pleasure to see you"). "His answer was always the same: come over" compresses that record; "come over" is mine, chosen for the crossing of the Forth that the letter's second section establishes. "I wish I had gone more often" is imagined: no surviving sentence of Smith's states the regret. Its basis is the record of postponement — Hume's repeated invitations above, and Smith's own confession of epistolary neglect: "I should be ashamed to write to you, if I had not long ago conquered all modesty of that sort… my long silence did not arise from any want of the most affectionate and most grateful remembrance of you" (Corr. 146, 9 May 1775). The regret is invented; no surviving sentence of Smith's expresses it. Other phrases in the letter likewise supply interior narration rather than recovered testimony — "I was desperate" (Section 5), "the most difficult thing he ever asked of me" (Section 7), "cost me more than I guessed" (Section 8) — literary reconstructions from documented circumstances, not additional evidence. The regret is placed last so that it reads as the letter's conclusion rather than as a report. "David practiced what I had only described" is the same kind of sentence: self-deprecating imagined narration, not a report that Smith failed to practice friendship.

10. What the Letter Omits

Material that bears directly on the friendship and was left out for length, recorded so that its absence is not mistaken for ignorance:

Smith's own teasing of Hume. The letter shows Smith teasing only once (the carrier). It ran the other way as well: Smith showed Hume's letter about his Paris celebrity "to some of our female friends notwithstanding your injunction of secresy; We all laughed heartily at your pretending not to be pleased with the flattery you have met with. You see how modesty is rewarded in this world" (Corr., Appendix E, fuller text of the letter of 12 Dec. 1763).

The executor reciprocity. Smith asked first: Corr. 137 (Section 3). The Dialogues episode is the second half of an exchange of trust, not a one-sided request.

The Wedderburn letter. Corr. 163, Smith's private account of the dying Hume. The "Whining Christian" sentence is Smith's own; the rawer Charon ("the churches shut up, and the Clergy sent about their business") is Hume's imagined speech to Charon as Smith reports it — reporting is not endorsement. Both were softened for publication (Glasgow editors' n. 4 to Corr. 163). It is relevant private evidence on the question Section 6 leaves open, not a conclusive statement of Smith's beliefs, and it is confined to this paper.

The sixth-edition revisions. Ed. 6 (1790) removed the concluding paragraph of TMS II.ii.3 — the atonement passage, printed in eds. 1–5; the Glasgow apparatus records the replacement at II.ii.3.12 and gives the paragraph in Appendix II — while retaining the book's providentialist passages elsewhere; Rasmussen (2017) reads the late revisions as movement toward Hume. The letter takes no position, for the reason given in Section 6.

The postscript of Hume's last letter. "P.S. It was a strange blunder to send your Letter by the Carrier" (Corr. 168) — the last words Hume wrote to Smith, answering the tease. Omitted from the letter because the exchange it closes (Smith's letter of 22 August asked that an enclosure be returned "by the Post and not by the carrier," Corr. 166) is a chain too long for the letter to carry.

Hume's closing sentence. "But our Friendship does not depend on these Ceremonials" (Corr. 150) — the friendship's principle in Hume's own words, omitted only because the letter's length could not hold it.

11. Sources

Primary: Adam Smith, *The Correspondence of Adam Smith*, ed. Ernest Campbell Mossner and Ian Simpson Ross, 2nd ed., Glasgow Edition vol. VI (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), cited by letter number; *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie, Glasgow Edition vol. I; *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. R. H. Campbell, A. S. Skinner, and W. B. Todd, Glasgow Edition vol. II; James Boswell, "An Account of My Last Interview with David Hume, Esq.," in

Boswell in Extremes, 1776–1778, ed. Charles McC. Weis and Frederick A. Pottle (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), 11–15; David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (III.ii.2); [George Horne], *A Letter to Adam Smith, LL.D. on the Life, Death, and Philosophy of his Friend David Hume Esq.* (Oxford, 1777), printed as Corr. 189.

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