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Moore, Dafydd

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John Wolcot and "The Anecdotic Itch": Peter Pindar, Biography and Historiography in the 1780s

John Wolcot, under his nom de plume of Peter Pindar, was one of the most widely read poets of the late eighteenth century: his 50 odd poetic satires on divers subjects were one of the publishing phenomena of the age, with William Wordsworth, who generally affected a low opinion of Wolcot, forced to consider him as one of the 'great names' of satire.[1] If the scale of his popularity was likely subject to some contemporary hyperbole, nevertheless Donald Kerr's analysis of Wolcot's papers bears out the notion of Peter Pindar as a highly profitable publishing enterprise in which the book trade had significant commercial confidence.[2] Despite (or in part because of) this ubiquity, Wolcot has been neglected by scholarship, written off as a commercially-motivated trimmer devoid of principle or any commitment to higher ideals; a 'literary gadfly', in the words of Jeanne Griggs, 'harmless but irritating' who expended his talent on unworthy matters at a time of national emergency.[3]

Some, particularly more recent, accounts of Wolcot have sought a more sympathetic or complex response to his satiric method and output.[4] Efforts devoted to the critical rehabilitation of Wolcot have broadly fallen into two camps. The first, and larger, effort has looked to ascribe a politically meaningful and radical value to a satiric method that otherwise seems unduly invested in the treatment of trivial matters in a frivolous

fashion. Gary Dyer has interpreted Wolcot's refusal 'to treat satire, in neo-Juvenalian fashion, as a duty in a time of crisis' not as a moral failing or ducking of the important issues of the day, but instead as a refusal of the normative and inherited modes of satire and therefore as an anti-establishment gesture itself.[5] John Barrell has argued that the tone of good natured ribbing inherent in Wolcot's satire made it more not less subversive, not least because it allowed Wolcot's views to reach a wide range of audiences, including ones that were unreceptive to more strident and openly radical messages.[6] There is indeed evidence that Wolcot cultivated an image of innocuousness. In the ninth *Expostulatory Odes* Peter compares himself unfavourably with Charles Churchill. Churchill is a 'first rate man of war' compared to Peter's 'small cockboat bobbing at an anchor'; a 'blacksmith's sledge' compared to Peter's 'sugar hammer'. Yet ironic disavowals and self-deprecation are amongst the more common currencies in which the satirist trades, and here Wolcot ensures an association with Churchill that might not otherwise have been apparent since suggesting that they should not be mentioned in the same breath involves mentioning them in the same breath. The second sort of rehabilitation, best exemplified by Benjamin Colbert's 'Petrio-Pindarics' and Iain McCalman's overview of Wolcot, has sought to understand Wolcot's reputation and neglect in terms of the emerging (self) image of the Romantic canon. Colbert highlights Wolcot's unnerving (for the established Romantic view of the poet) interest in the demands of commercial print culture, while McCalman draws attention to Wolcot's liminal (to his disadvantage) position within the conventional ways in which literary history is periodised.[7] These are all significant interventions, but overall it remains the case that Wolcot is not as notable a beneficiary as some of his contemporaries of a wider critical project that has, in the words

of Steven E. Jones, worked to ‘decentre Romanticism and reorientate its canonical works and authors.’ [8] In 1999 McCalman’s verdict was that Wolcot ‘remains seriously underestimated by modern social historians and literary scholars’, and while today one might not put it in quite such stark terms, nevertheless he remains a neglected figure relative to his presence in his day.[9]

This article takes its cue from these various approaches while also breaking new ground in the ways Wolcot can be read. Informed by the previously central question of Wolcot’s politics as determined by the question of whether he is an anti-establishment or toothless writer, it will consider key Peter Pindar satires of the 1780s in terms of Wolcot’s interest in the use of anecdote within the writing of history and biography and his self-conscious interest in the business (figurative but also literal) of writing about Great Men. Through these interests, I shall argue, Wolcot is engaging in significant cultural debates about the meaning of greatness and significant achievement in the 1780s. Appreciating this engagement broadens our sense of the questions it is possible to pose about Wolcot as a writer beyond those to do with an attitude to ministerial policy during the Revolutionary period.

The essay is in four parts. The first section offers a relatively brief and necessarily broad outline of the immediate intellectual contexts of anecdote, history, politeness and commerce that provide the framework for the reading of Wolcot that follows. The aim is here to demonstrate how these various cultural and intellectual dynamics can be seen in vital relation to Wolcot’s work. The middle two sections offer reciprocal case studies of these matters. The first considers two poems in which Peter Pindar addresses the questions provoked by efforts to memorialise a figure of stature in the literary world in

71 the shape of the recently departed Samuel Johnson: *A Poetical and Congratulatory*
72 *Epistle to James Boswell, Esq on his Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with the*
73 *celebrated Dr Johnson* (1786); and *Bozzy and Piozzi, or, The British Biographers, A*
74 *Town Eclogue* (1786). In these poems we shall see how Johnson can only be understood,
75 and writing about him can only be guaranteed an audience, by focussing on the lowest-
76 common-denominator of scurrilous detail and base indignity. This is diagnosed as the
77 result of mass print culture, an obsession with gossip, and a base philistinism, the last of
78 which best encapsulated in the figure of King George III himself. If these poems set the
79 terms of the question or dilemma, my second set of examples offer Peter Pindar's own
80 solution to the question of mediating figures of eminence in the relationship he constructs
81 between poet (and satirist) and monarch, in his various poems of 1787 offering advice to
82 the Poet Laureate Thomas Warton with a particular focus on *Instructions to a Celebrated*
83 *Laureat; alias The Progress of Curiosity; alias A Birthday Ode; alias Mr Whitbread's*
84 *Brewhouse*. In this poem the critique of the King offered in the *Celebratory Epistle* is
85 extended but also inverted as Peter not only warms to his theme of royal imbecility but
86 suggests, in his reproach to Warton, that this is the only fitting way to write about the
87 King in a world where the values George represents defy the conventional language and
88 attributes of greatness. Or to put it another way, in *Bozzy and Piozzi*, the eponymous
89 biographers are chastised for writing mundane and trivial nonsense; in the *Instructions*
90 and *Advice*, Warton is chastised for writing anything other than mundane and trivial
91 nonsense. Separately the two sets of poems identify a mismatch between the subject of
92 the panegyric (be it Johnson or King George) and the grounds for, and manner of, the
93 celebration. Collectively they diagnose a wider cultural malaise to do with the meaning

and mediation of stature and what might count as significant achievement amongst a polite and commercial people. The essay will conclude with a final section summarising these findings and discussing how the issues explored might knit back into the issues outlined at the start of the introduction to do with Wolcot's place within late eighteenth-century literary studies.

I. "The Anecdotic Itch": History, Commerce, Virtue and the place of Anecdote

The use of the anecdotal method within the writing of history and biography in the eighteenth century has been the subject of significant recent enquiry. Such enquiries have tended to stress the multiple uses and interpretations available to the eighteenth century, something that Lionel Grossman, in his comprehensive anatomy of the anecdote and its various forms, calls, with admirable understatement, 'a complex matter'.[10] Rebecca Bullard's discussion of secret history narratives (to which the anecdotal method is closely allied etymologically and practically in the early eighteenth century) is perhaps most notable for arguing, in the face of previous interpretations, that 'there is no intrinsic connection between secret history and radical whig politics', but for the purposes of my engagement with Wolcot, this is less important than her approach to thinking about the secret – unsanctioned or unofficial – history as a 'rhetorical act of revelation', and a self-conscious one at that.[11] In what follows we shall see how Bullard's reading of secret history as a discourse that 'scrutinizes the ethical, epistemic, historiographical and political implications of its own revelatory gestures' chimes with Peter Pindar's highly

self-conscious examination of the most appropriate way of capturing the deeds of great men and the implications of his chosen approach. In this way his anecdotal approach offers an unusual but identifiable addition to the discourse of secret history during the eighteenth century.

As Grossman notes, the connection between anecdote and the revelatory secret history loosened through the eighteenth-century (without, as we shall see, entirely losing touch with it). The term lost its specific sense of embarrassing revelation about the powers-that-be and gained a wider currency as part of a historiographical method evolving in response to the priorities of a polite and commercial age. As the political and social priorities of civic humanism gave way to those of commercial humanism notions of moral and political virtue underwent a profound shift. To cite one just one famous example, this is Samuel Johnson on the ‘projectors’:

> I cannot conceived why he that has burnt cities, and wasted nations, and filled the world with horror and desolation should be more kindly regarded by mankind than he that died in the rudiments of wickedness; why he that accomplished mischief should be glorious, and he that only endeavoured it should be criminal.[12]

By ‘huddl[ing] together in obscurity and detestation’ both those conventionally considered the heroes of history and those failed criminals – both the Caesars and the Catilines, as he puts it – Johnson is revaluing the meaning of virtue for an age repelled by the warrior ethics of the past. This suspicion about the public actions of those that had previously been considered the heroes of history is also accompanied by a reconsideration of the proper materials of history. As history came to be understood not as the civic activity of the autonomous citizen but as the result of a complex series of

140 inter-relations, so understandings of the drivers of history and the ways in which history
141 should be articulated changed. This, in the words of Mark Salber Phillips, led to an
142 'enlargement of the boundaries of the historical' in order to take account for all those
143 things excluded from classical history but which commercial eighteenth-century Britain,
144 extrapolating from its own experience, saw as vital to the understanding of the past,
145 included 'the history of literature, of the arts and sciences, of manners and customs, even
146 of opinion and sentiment'.[13] For Phillips, one symptom of this is the growth in
147 importance of the sentimental biography as one of the constituent genres of history in the
148 late eighteenth century, private histories containing anecdotal scenes of everyday life and
149 of the domestic sphere not, as at the start of the century, as a way of revealing the sordid
150 motivations and immoral priorities behind the pieties of official public history, but out of
151 a growing sense that manners maketh the man. At such a cultural moment, anecdote can
152 serve as a way of recovering what Helen Deutsch has termed 'a lost embodied "real", an
153 undoing of larger, public historical narratives in order […] to bring the dead, particularly
154 the illustrious scholarly dead, back to life.'[14]

155 Johnson had made this point forcefully three years early than his comments in *The*
156 *Adventurer* in *The Rambler* 60. There he argues against the limiting perspectives of
157 public history and its 'false measures of excellence and dignity' (some of which he would
158 consider criminal in the later article) in favour of 'domestic privacies, and […] the minute
159 details of daily life, where exterior appendages are cast aside, and men excel each other
160 only by prudence and virtue.'[15] Yet Johnson recognises the challenges of such a history.
161 Challenges to do with the selection of material, since not everything that can be known is
162 worth knowing; and the challenges of perspective that comes from a position intimate

163 enough to its subject to be aware of those private habits worth knowing but able to retain
164 an independent and larger perspective, one that avoids seeing it 'an act of piety to hide
165 the faults and failings of their friends'. The answer, according to Johnson, remains firmly
166 rooted in the classical notion of history as exemplar, or, as he puts it with a Horation
167 rather than Plutarchean turn, to provide 'instruction or delight.' However, while Johnson
168 rests on this Horation editorial principle, Isaac Disraeli, in the most famous account of the
169 anecdote in England in the eighteenth century, goes one stage further in examining the
170 potential crisis of editorial judgement and priority within the anecdotal valuing of the
171 small details of life, a crisis summarised by Helen Deutsch as, 'if details like these are
172 important enough to record, then nothing is sacred, on the one hand, and nothing is
173 meaningless, on the other.'[16]

174 Disraeli is as clear as Johnson had been that if the proper study of history is the
175 human mind, then 'human nature, like a vast machine, is not to be understood by looking
176 at its superficies, but by dwelling on its minute springs and wheels.'[17] Disraeli maintains
177 that anecdote represents the essential means by which one understands the genius of men
178 and times and he therefore denies (in a way that Johnson perhaps would have done) that
179 there can ever be too many anecdotes collected and presented. Nevertheless he is clear
180 that it is the presentation of anecdote, its interpretation and the larger truths to which it is
181 taken to attest, that really matters. 'To collect anecdote is the humble labour of industry'
182 he suggests, the challenge if 'to present them with reflection, with acumen, and with
183 taste.'[18] In Disraeli's ideal anecdotal memoir, the memoirist collects exemplary episodes
184 and stories and presents them in such a way as to render himself invisible. The aim is to
185 set narrative and interpretation and anecdote off to such effect as to give the reader the

186 illusion of discovering the company of the great man for themselves rather than to insist
187 upon the activities of the memoirist. In this way the anecdotal is central to what David
188 Simpson calls a ‘culture of subjectification’ and the emergence of ‘middle class ideology’
189 during the period, not only because of the emphasis on the familiar and everyday closes
190 the gap between the traditionally elite and a middle class audience but also because of the
191 interpretative reading such an approach encourages: ‘to make significant meaning out of
192 fragments or anecdotes is to make a self for ourselves in the very act of so making.’[19]
193 Johnson and Disraeli both demonstrate a confidence and anxiety about the role of
194 what had hitherto been secret history to provide an account of men and times more
195 aligned with the values of their times. Indeed those values themselves were a matter of
196 contest. As J.G.A. Pocock reminds us (and as Phillips’s book amongst others charts)
197 ‘there is no greater and no commoner mistake in the history of social thought than to
198 suppose that the tension [between commercial and civic virtue] ever disappeared’.[20] The
199 superiority ascribed to polite and commercial society was tempered by a nostalgia – and
200 more in some quarters – for virtues it was easier to disavow than necessarily do without.
201 Reconciling sensibility and power was a key preoccupation of the middle decades of the
202 century across various fields and numerous texts can be read in this light: the moral and
203 political philosophy of Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson; the novels of Samuel
204 Richardson; the *Poems of Ossian*, which celebrate the impossible deeds of an impossible
205 hero who, in the words of Walter Scott, combined ‘the strength and bravery of Achilles,
206 with the courtesy, sentiment and high-breeding of Sir Charles Grandison’.[21] The 1780s in
207 particular saw increased anxieties, in the wake of the loss of the American colonies and
208 renewed threats to British interests in India that the fruits of a commercial empire would

209 be moral corruption and inexorable decline. For example, Robert W Jones has
210 demonstrated the various ways in which the literature and politics of Opposition sought a
211 range of masculine identities and rhetorical forms that met the challenges of commerce
212 and politeness during a disastrous war.[22] In this context the anecdotal is both an emblem
213 of the more expansive world of commerce and trade, of a complex, rich and sophisticated
214 society needing to be understood in terms of the 'secret springs' that motivate the actions
215 of complex modern individuals whose best and worst features were to be understood
216 within the everyday and domestic, and also a symptom, in Grossman's words, of 'the
217 decadence of taste and the intrusion of the commercial spirit into literature', the
218 overvaluing of a cult of the individual and their mannerisms at the expense of the
219 significant messages of history.[23] This cult of the individual helped created a celebrity
220 culture built out of 'an extensive, industrialised, and intertextual mode of gossip' in
221 which the details of lives stand for substantive achievement.[24] Depending on your point
222 of view the anecdotal is a solution to the opportunities and challenges of a new order, or
223 the symptom of the inherent corruption of that order, or both.

224 This then provides the context for Wolcot's exploration of the problems of finding
225 an appropriate discourse of memorialisation in an age whose values are increasingly
226 divorced from the traditional modes of valorisation and in which those responsible for
227 that memorialisation are making a living out of their work. As such, Wolcot's satire
228 engages in this important eighteenth-century debate about the means of reconciling
229 heroism and sensibility, the private and the public, the place of celebrity, and the most
230 appropriate way of establishing, what Jones terms 'a discursive mode capable of ensuring
231 the legibility of character' in an age of politeness and commerce.[25] It is now appropriate

232 to turn to some examples of the way in which Wolcot's interest in the nature of biography
233 and the business of its literary representation is aligned with key eighteenth-century
234 historiographical discourses and debates about the meaning and representation of the
235 great figures of history.

236

237 **II. "The Charming Haberdasher of Small Wares": James Boswell and the**
238 **Anecdotal Method**

239 The *Epistle to Boswell* and *Bozzy and Piozzi* were both exceptionally popular, the latter
240 going through ten editions in two years. They also had considerable longevity, appearing
241 alongside *The Lousiad*, as representative of Wolcot's work in Richard Griffin's *The*
242 *British Satirist, Comprising the Best Satires of the most Celebrated Poets from Pope to*
243 *Byron* (1826). They date from an important point in Wolcot's career. In 1782 he had
244 announced Peter Pindar's existence with his *Lyrical Odes to the Royal Academicians* and
245 in 1785 produced the first canto of the *Lousiad*, another four cantos of which would
246 appear over the next ten years. *The Lyrical Odes* (and its sequels) offer a demolition of
247 the pretensions of the Royal Academy's annual exhibition in which all but Sir Joshua
248 Reynolds come in for blunt abuse. The *Lousiad* is a broad attack on George III as an
249 oafish fool and domestic tyrant. The Boswell satires mark a turn towards a more specific
250 analysis of the relationship between poetry and power, and the poetic representation of
251 men of stature. They represent a satiric attack on the absurdity of biographies of Johnson
252 that focussed on the anecdotal and quotidian, and they seek to connect this to a broader
253 cultural interest in the inane and trivial most obviously articulated in the figure of George
254 III himself. Thus they inaugurate one of Peter's favourite topics in king-baiting –

255 George's childish love of obscure or worthless detail – and one of his favourite ways of
256 exploring it, the consideration of the proper object of poetry.
257 As is well known, Johnson's death in December 1784 inaugurated a frenzy of
258 speculation, planning and competition over the question of a biography of the great man.
259 In the event Boswell was first out of the blocks with his *Journal of a Tour to the*
260 *Hebrides* in September 1785, a revised edition of which appeared before the year was
261 out. Hester Piozzi's *Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson LL.D.* was published in March
262 1786. Sir John Hawkins's *Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D* would appear in March 1787
263 though he, as Johnson's official biographer, was known to be working on it well in
264 advance (as Peter's satires demonstrate).[26] Peter's *Congratulatory Epistle* appeared in
265 February 1786, in response to the revisions to the second edition of Boswell's *Journal*,
266 and *Bozzy and Piozzi* the following month in immediate response to the first edition of
267 Piozzi's *Anecdotes*. As Helen Deutsch's praise for Wolcot as 'perhaps the most brilliant
268 of the many contemporary critics of Boswell's penchant for anecdotes' reveals, these two
269 poems were not unique in addressing the vogue for unflatteringly anecdotal accounts of
270 Johnson. [27] Indeed Robert Vales records four other occasions upon which Wolcot himself
271 makes reference to Boswell's addiction to anecdote, including one in his notorious "Ode
272 to Lord Lonsdale" of 1792.[28] The *Congratulatory Epistle* and *Bozzy and Piozzi* are
273 however Peter's most sustained meditations on the subject.
274 *Bozzy and Piozzi* imagines the would-be memoirists Boswell and Piozzi locked in
275 competition over the right to publish the first biography of Johnson. This takes the form
276 of a debate over the relative merits of their previously published *Journal* and *Anecdotes*
277 adjudicated by Johnson's friend and executor, the magistrate Sir John Hawkins. The

278 poem opens with the consternation felt at the news of the death of Johnson amongst the
279 Olympians:
280 Minerva sighing for her fav'rite son,
281 Pronounc'd, with lengthen'd face the world undone:
282 Her owl too, hooted in so loud a style,
283 That people might have heard the bird, a mile:
284 Jove wip'd his eyes so red, and told his wife
285 He ne'er made Johnson's equal, in his life;
286 And that 'twould be a long time first, if ever,
287 His art could form a fellow half so clever.[29]
288 In the midst of what Peter terms the 'Johnso-mania', Boswell and Piozzi emerge as chief
289 amongst the 'pigmy planets' who 'catch their little lustre from the sun' of Johnson's life
290 and opinions. Vying for what Peter calls 'the palm of anecdote' they come before
291 Hawkins:
292 […] for vict'ry, both as keen,
293 As for a tott'ring bishoprick, a Dean,
294 Or patriot Burke, for giving glorious bastings
295 To that intolerable fellow Hastings. (p.9)
296 This introduction is characteristic of Peter's style with its debunking informality and a
297 general facetiousness deployed in an indiscriminate manner. So Edmund Burke's
298 agitations against Warren Hastings over his conduct of the Maratha War that had begun
299 early that year (and would of course culminate two years later with his four-day long
300 opening speech at Hastings' impeachment) are reduced to the stuff of schoolboy banter or

301 common room snobbery (‘glorious bastings’, ‘intolerable fellow’). Beyond that, the
302 mock-heroic representation of ‘Johnso-mania’ implicates Peter as part of a cultural
303 discourse that is unable to observe notions of literary decorum and congruity. Peter’s
304 voice is comically bathetic as he pursues his satiric target, but the cost of this method is
305 the undercutting of the sense of grandeur of its subject matter in just the ways that it will
306 accuse Boswell and Piozzi in due course. In other words, we assume that it matters
307 whether or not Hastings’s actions threatened British interests and influence in India and
308 that, to the anti-ministerial Wolcot, Burke represents a force for good in bringing
309 malpractice to light. In which case Hastings is more than merely ‘intolerable’ and the
310 facetiousness implied in ‘glorious bastings’ misplaced. Peter’s desire to be funny at all
311 costs compromises his ability to offer a voice of Juvenalian righteous indignation.

312 Hawkins instructs Boswell and Piozzi to trade stories about Johnson from their
313 *Journal* and *Anecdotes* respectively so as to determine who should earn the right to a full
314 biography. This functions as a convenient trigger, yet the reader is given no justification
315 for this method of arbitration and no sense of the basis upon which Hawkins will form an
316 opinion about Boswell and Piozzi’s relative merits via the anecdotes they relate (what, in
317 this context, does good look like?). The formlessness of the event is reinforced by the fact
318 that Boswell and Piozzi do not engage in debate, rebut or reinforce, rather they talk past
319 each other, refuse to acknowledge the other’s presence and instead bombard Hawkins
320 (and the reader) with unconnected anecdotes. One effect of this lack of discursive or
321 argumentative structure – which is the anecdotal method in its purest form of course – is
322 that the reader is encouraged to seek other patterns and make other senses. That being so,
323 what emerges, in a vestigial echo of the previously dominant notion of the anecdote as

324 complicit in the revealing of the secret (or unofficial or private) histories that offer
325 unflattering insights into the human frailties elided by more anodyne and public accounts,
326 is the impression that all the stories told show Johnson up in a bad light: his irascibility,
327 his gluttony, his desire to be funny or clever or have the last word. Each individual
328 anecdote is footnoted with a page reference within the *Journal* or *Anecdotes* at which the
329 original can be found. This cod-apparatus gives the debate the impression of rigour, and
330 anchors the dispute in reality by reassuring the (perhaps presumed to be incredulous)
331 reader that these are authentically from the texts in question. In fact this editorial joke
332 cuts two ways. On the one hand, the reader who goes back to the source texts to look up
333 these passages can join in the fun at Boswell and Piozzi's expense, satirically rereading
334 the passage in the light of what they know Peter has made of it, reading through Peter's
335 eyes as it were. On the other, there is a suspicious of a further neo-Scriblerian joke at the
336 expense of Peter himself and his overly serious-minded assumption that readers are going
337 to be interested (or be taking matters seriously enough) to go to the trouble of looking up
338 references.

339 The poem is punctuated with an interlude during which Hawkins takes a nap. In
340 fine epic style the ghost of 'the surly RAMBLER', appears to him in a dream, implores
341 him to stop Boswell and Piozzi writing their biographies ('nor crucify, through
342 biography, a friend' as Johnson puts it), and leaves after delivering a short speech on the
343 subject of none other than Peter Pindar:

344 Tell PETER PINDAR, should you chance to meet him,
345 I like his GENIUS---should be glad to greet him ---
346 Yet let him know, CROWN'D HEADS are sacred things,

347 And bid him rev'rence more, the BEST OF KINGS; (p.27)

348 This comically double-edged meta-textual moment (being told by a visitor from the
349 beyond that he is looking forward to meeting you is not comforting), is made more
350 farcical by a footnote in which Peter expresses puzzlement with this last couplet, given
351 what Peter understands Johnson's view to have been of a '*certain* GREAT
352 PERSONAGE'. The levels of recursive, mediated representation at this moment are
353 playful in the extreme, an example of what Kyle Grimes means when he characterises
354 Romantic parodic satire as 'a dialogising counter-movement to the implicit truth-claims
355 of all monological discourses.'[30] In this instance Wolcot has his imaginary author (Peter)
356 evoke via a highly self-conscious epic trope a literary representation of a real but dead
357 person (Johnson), and then has that imaginary author argue with what a figment of his
358 own imaginary imagination has to say. As with most meta-textual jokes it is less amusing
359 spelt out than experienced, but the larger point about the inherent fallacy of biographical
360 attempts to establish a single version of the messy complexity that goes to make up the
361 lives and opinions of their subjects is well taken.

362 Hawkins awakes and the action resumes, but with some differences. By now,
363 Boswell's stories have become entirely self-reflexive, and finally the protagonists round
364 on each other, each attacking the other's desire to scratch what Boswell terms the
365 'anecdotic itch'. They criticise each other's respective anecdotes for their triviality, their
366 inaccuracy, the fact that they are unflattering to Johnson; and they are finally reduced to
367 abusing the size and quality of each other's readerships. At this point Hawkins calls a halt
368 and a plague on both their houses:

369 For shame! For shame! For heaven's sake pray be quiet ---

370 Not Billingsgate exhibits such a riot.

371 Behold for scandal, you have made a feast,

372 And turn your idol, Johnson to a beast:

373 'Tis plain the tales of ghosts are arrant lies,

374 Or instantaneously, would Johnson's rise:

375 Make you both eat your paragraphs so evil ---

376 And for your treatment of him, play the devil. (pp.50-51)

377 Hawkins goes on in similar style, though his defence of Johnson is significantly undercut
378 when at the end of the poem he departs to write his own anecdotal biography. Hawkins'
379 biographical ambitions were of course known about even if the content of his offering
380 was as yet unrevealed. Peter suggests that this episode will have inspired Hawkins 'on
381 anecdote to cram' in order to 'vomit first, a life of surly Sam'. The disease of the British
382 biographers is apparently contagious and a symptom of a society that would appear to
383 have lost a vocabulary of the glorious, a way of articulating the profound and timeless.
384 We see explicitly the extent of Hawkins' infection, while in more subtle ways Peter
385 himself runs the risk of being accused of the elevation of the trivial and pettifogging
386 through his memorialisation of it in mock-classical style, complete with footnotes.

387 The *Epistle* of a month earlier addressed to Boswell alone has a more
388 straightforward rhetorical thrust: the ironic praise of Boswell and an encouragement to
389 him both to hold his nerve in the face of the criticism provoked by his *Journal* (and
390 revisions to the second edition suggested some such loss of nerve), and to beat Hawkins
391 and Piozzi to producing a full biography of Johnson. Yet whereas *Bozzy and Piozzi*
392 would only hint at the broader issues of literary taste at stake when abusing each other's

393 readerships, the *Epistle* engages in an explicit critique of the cultural malaise whereby the
394 great and the good are trivialised within a popular culture hungry for trivia and anecdote.
395 In doing so he also makes explicit links between the questions of the lowest-common-
396 denominator priorities of cheap print, the celebrity culture it embraces, the recalibration
397 of what counts as history this might involve, and between all this and the figure of
398 George III.

399 Peter widens and deepens his attack on contemporary print culture and its
400 commercial imperatives in the terms of his encouragement to Boswell to keep the faith in
401 the face of the outcry provoked by the first edition of the *Journal*:

402 Though Wilkes abuse thy brain, that airy mill,
403 And swear poor Johnson murther'd by thy quill;
404 What's that to thee? Why let the victim bleed ---
405 Thy end is answer'd, if the Nation read. (p.16)

406 Peter's mock-messianic invocation of the full biography had already forced home the
407 point that satisfying the public appetite for scurrilous gossip is the best way of achieving
408 longevity for a biography:

409 O Bozzy, still, thy tell-tale plan pursue:
410 The world is wond'rous fond of something new;
411 And, let but Scandal's breath embalm the page,
412 It lives a welcome guest from age to age. (p.14)

413 This is the most striking example of what Deutsch notes as Peter's habit of 'continually
414 evok[ing] [the] past as future spectacle', and as Peter elaborates on that 'something new',
415 he makes clear that it is not the stuff of conventional history:

416 Find when he eat and drank, and cough'd, and sneez'd –

417 Let all his motions in thy book be squeez'd:

418 On tales however strange, impose thy claw;

419 Yes, let thy amber lick up e'vry straw:

420 Sam's nods, and winks, and laughs, will form a treat;

421 For all that breathes of Johnson must be great! (p.19)[31]

422 Johnson is a victim several times over here of the creation of what, following Richard

423 Schickel, is today understood as 'the illusion of intimacy' at the heart of celebrity.[32] The

424 details of his personal life, his tics and habits, are paraded for the edification of the

425 reading masses and the profit and fame of the biographer. At the same time it is hard for

426 the reader not to feel some resentment towards Johnson himself as the minutiae of his life

427 are assumed to be of interest and imposed upon the reader.

428 The upshot of the successful pursuit of 'something new' is, says Peter, nothing

429 less than the recalibration of the pantheon of great historians, as he explicitly links the

430 question of anecdotal biography to writing of other sorts of history writing, and indeed

431 other forms of story-telling:

432 Stewart and Robertson, from thee, shall learn,

433 The simple charms of Hist'ry to discern:

434 To thee, fair Hist'ry's palm, shall Livy yield,

435 And Tacitus, to Bozzy, leave the field!

436 Joe Miller's self, whose page such fun, provokes,

437 Shall quit his shroud, to grin at Bozzy's jokes!

438 How are we all with rapture touch'd, to see

439 Where, when, and at what hour, you swallow'd tea!

440 How, once, to grace this Asiatic treat,

441 Came haddocks, which the Rambler could not eat.[33]

442 Boswell's achievements and methods overshadow the classical historiography of Livy
443 and Tacitus and the Scottish Enlightenment historiographical and sociological thinking of
444 William Robertson and Dugald Stewart, not to mention the achievements of Joseph
445 Miller (1684-1738), the comedy actor immortalised by John Mottley in his joke book *Joe*
446 *Miller's Jests, or the Wit's Vade-Mecum* of 1739. On one level this is facetious
447 hyperbole and an example of ambitiously extended zeugma as Bozzy's performance
448 simultaneously overtops that of Livy, Tacitus and the most famous joke-teller of the age.
449 But on another it is worrying at a problem within eighteenth-century historiography
450 discussed in section one, namely that a view of history as the representation of active
451 political virtue is being overtaken by a sociable, sentimental ideology whose implications
452 for the writing of history had yet to unfold but whose potentially levelling implications
453 were clear. As Phillips puts it, if it was 'increasingly hard to think of history as
454 exclusively concerned with the narrative of political action' then the editorial task of the
455 historian was suddenly increased beyond measure.[34] The same cultural moment has been
456 observed in the narrowing of the distance between biography and history to the point
457 where in the words of Grossman, 'history itself came to resemble a kind of national
458 biography.'[35] At the same time, according to Peter here with his references to Livy and
459 Miller, History has become a joke, or at least indistinguishable from it.

460 It is notable that all these comments throw an emphasis upon Boswell's profile as
461 an author, rather than on the subject his efforts should illuminate. In *Bozzi and Piozzi*

462 Boswell is variously described as a ‘mighty shark for anecdote and fame’; a ‘charming
463 haberdasher of small ware’; an assiduous labourer ‘amid the anecdotic mine’; a ‘lively,
464 bouncing cracker’ at the tail of Johnson’s comet; and ‘a very Laz’rus at the rich man’s
465 table’. Peter even describes Boswell as a ‘watchful cat’ who for 20 years ‘did’st mousing
466 sit before Sam’s mouth so wide, | To catch as many scraps as [he] was able’. In the
467 *Epistle*, the emphasis on acquisition, on the gathering of scraps, hunting and mining,
468 places the memoirist front and centre, his activity distracting attention from the supposed
469 subject of the work. This is not the kind of memoir Disraeli would have in mind a few
470 years later, with its emphasis not on the collection of anecdote but upon their disposal
471 into a form that allowed the allusion that the reader was creating the narrative. Small
472 wonder perhaps then that at the end of his *Dissertation* he would expressed a desire for a
473 native anecdotalist to rival the French masters of the mode, one who combines the
474 ‘learning’ of Joseph Warton, the ‘taste’ of Horace Walpole and the ‘faithfulness’ of
475 Boswell, where faithfulness might mean both loyalty to subject and to the task of
476 revealing all.

477 Wolcot may be responding satirically to pressures and movements within
478 historiographical writing that were felt by contemporaries to do with the editorial shaping
479 and selection of a richer history of people, characters and the times, but he also has a
480 particular figurehead for this cultural obsession with the trivial in the *Epistle*. Peter’s
481 claim that ‘pleas’d, on thy book thy sovereign’s eye-balls roll, | Who loves a gossip’s
482 story from his soul’ introduces a lengthy (over thirty line) account of the ‘one huge
483 cyclopedia of wit’ that makes up the King’s brain. In what would become the familiar
484 shape of his satires on George III, Peter emphasises the utmost triviality or mundane

485 practicality of almost everything the King knows, generating his comic charge from the
486 discrepancy between the power of majesty and ludicrous banality or penny-pinching
487 economy of most of the things he concerns himself with:

488 Which gard'ner hath most cabbages and peas,
489 And which old woman hath most hives of bees;
490 Which farmer boasts the most prolific sows,
491 Cocks, hens, geese, turkies, goats, sheep, bulls, and cows; (pp.10-11)

492 In later satires on George's husbandry (notably *The Royal Tour; or Weymouth*
493 *Amusements*), these preoccupations are integral to Peter's attack on the King's ill-placed
494 parsimoniousness; ill-placed, according to Peter, because the King's much trumpeted
495 frugality is often sharp-practice at the expense of the livelihoods of his own subjects. In
496 the *Epistle* they work to link Boswell's idea of a biography of a great man, and his sense
497 of the reading public's appetite for the inane or grubby details of such biographies, with
498 what passes for intellectual prowess with the sovereign. Both suggest a culture drowning
499 in a sea of inconsequential nonsense, of triviality and distasteful gossip.

500 The references to George III are then the most significant of several moves that
501 allow the *Epistle* to build from an attack on the impertinence of one man seeking to hitch
502 his star to the fame of a literary great to the identification of a more widespread cultural
503 malaise. One of the ironies of this is that Peter's argument is fundamentally anecdotal,
504 relying on taking the singular (Boswell's biographical activities) as representative of the
505 whole (a cultural taste for gossip). This shadows the larger question these two poems
506 repeatedly raise about the place of Peter himself within this critique, since the sheer
507 pyrotechnical brilliance and fascinated exuberance of his depiction of the 'charming

508 haberdasher of small wares' threatens to collapse the distinction between Peter and the
509 world he describes. If Boswell's celebrity relies on Johnson, then Peter's relies on
510 Boswell relying on Johnson. It is a deeply compromised position. More generally, the
511 culture of cheap print, the same culture that would soon be able to facilitate the
512 production of forty two and a half thousand copies of Peter's own works (though Peter's
513 print did not in fact come cheap), encourages the peddling of this mind numbing trivia.[36]
514 The cult of celebrity and personality, the same cult of celebrity and personality that has
515 people rush to enjoy the picaresque literary adventures and opinions of Peter in print,
516 fosters, according to Peter, an attitude in which admiration for greatness can only be
517 expressed perversely via an obsession with the intimate details of everyday habits. In this
518 way Peter is a part of the malady he diagnoses, creating and satisfying the appetite his
519 poems otherwise condemn. He is in these poems an example of the dynamic whereby
520 'even writers who lamented the degradation of literature and thought themselves as rising
521 above it, often became embroiled, willingly or unwillingly, in the culture of
522 commercialised celebrity.'[37] In the next section I want to turn to some of Wolcot's further
523 examinations of the relationship between writer and subject, and the problems of being a
524 public writer in a period where virtue has been replaced by celebrity and where it feels
525 like there is no longer a relevant public language of praise.

526

527 **II. "Tribute All Sincere": Brother Peter, Brother Tom, and the Poetic Discourse of**
528 **Majesty**.

529 The Boswell poems outline a problem caused by a mismatch between a figure of great
530 stature in the world of letters – Johnson – and the ways in which popular culture would

531 seem to seek to memorialise figures of stature via the anecdotal and the 'tell all' memoir.
532 It is as if the discourse of memorialisation has come adrift from the characteristics,
533 actions and behaviours traditionally considered worth memorialising. The Warton poems
534 suggest a similar but opposite mismatch, this time between a traditional discourse of
535 royal eulogy and a royal figure whose behaviours and values are more in tune with the
536 cultural values so lamented in the Boswell poems.

537 Thomas Warton was appointed Poet Laureate in 1785, and his output in this office
538 was subject to immediate and widespread derision in, for example, a collection of
539 *Probationary Odes for the Laureateship* of the same year.[38] Peter weighed in on three
540 occasions in 1787 (*Ode Upon Ode*; *Instructions to a Celebrated Laureat* […] *alias Mr*
541 *Whitbread's Brewhouse*; *Apologetic Postscript to Ode Upon Ode*) and again in 1788 with
542 *Brother Peter to Brother Tom*. The inconvenience of Warton's death in 1790 did not
543 curtail Peter's interest in the subject: his *Advice to the Future Laureat: An Ode* (1790)
544 laid out the poetic qualifications for filling the recently vacated post, while the subtitle to
545 one of his most famous poems, *The Royal Tour and Weymouth Amusements: A Solemn*
546 *and Reprimanding Epistle to the Laureat* (1795) makes clear that it is occasioned by
547 Peter's disapproval of the then incumbent Henry James Pye. In the meantime Peter also
548 offered various other animadversions on his relationship with the King and, by extension,
549 the relationship between poets and majesty.

550 The 'advice to the poet' ploy serves of course as a useful disclaimer that allows
551 Wolcot to claim that Peter is not attacking the King, but rather those who write about
552 him. Nevertheless it provides other satiric opportunities. In the case of the Warton poems
553 the examination of the relationship between the poet (and the notion of poetic merit) and

the subject matter at hand is a means of satirising the whole business of state-sponsored verse and through this the person of the King. It also provides an opportunity to explore, through the fictional poet Peter, the question of what kind of poet can be envisaged as flourishing in this culture, and beyond that it was an established method through which writers signalled a self-conscious interest in the writing of history. As Noelle Gallagher has most recently demonstrated, satirists from the Restoration onwards used the Advice to the Artist genre to 'situate their works within an English historiographical tradition' and make 'historical representation itself a central issue in the portrayal of past persons and events' in such a way as to suggest, in a position becoming familiar in this article, that 'history might be less comprehensible from a lofty vista than from beneath the narrowing lens of a microscope'.[39] Wolcot's own position is of course tending in the other direction in terms of its conclusions, focussing on the potentially negative consequences of the 'narrowing lens.' Yet it is important to be alert to the fact that he is working within a recognised tradition, albeit coming to a different conclusion than many that had come before, since it is another example of a way in which Wolcot's preoccupations can be seen within the context of a larger historiographical and intellectual framework.

Given Wolcot's interest in the ways in which Johnson might be memorialised for the 1780s, it is hardly surprising that he had Peter engage in conversation with Warton, since Warton in effect raises the same question when he favourably compares George, and the sorts of poems it is fitting to write about him, with poems written in praise of great men from the past. In effect Warton calls attention to the tensions discussed in section one of this article; what Adam Potkay has termed 'a cultural seam between two

577 ethical domains' represented by the 'sublime eloquence and political community' of
578 antique civic virtue and that of the 'subdued manners in private life' seen on as
579 essentially modern and polite.[40] In his *Ode on His Majesty's Birth-day, June 4 1787*
580 Warton considers the royal myth-making of Chaucer, Spenser and Dryden on behalf of
581 previous monarchs, before concluding:

582 Had these blest Bards been call'd, to pay
583 The vows of this auspicious day,
584 Each had confess'd a fairer throne,
585 A mightier sovereign than his own!
586 Chaucer had bade his hero-monarch yield
587 The martial fame of Cressy's well-fought field
588 To peaceful prowess, and the conquests calm,
589 That braid the sceptre with the patriot's palm:
590 His chaplets of fantastic bloom,
591 His colourings, warm from Fiction's loom,
592 Spenser had cast in scorn away,
593 And deck'd with truth alone the lay;
594 All real here, the bard had seen
595 The glories of his pictur'd Queen!
596 The tuneful Dryden had not flatter'd here,
597 His lyre had blameless been, his tribute all sincere![41]

598 In Warton's eyes valuing George III above Edward III involves valuing a different set of
599 arts and practices, a set more suitable for the modern, polished world. It is a distinction

600 lost on Peter, whose response in the *Instructions* to the 'laurell'd ODE-MAN' is blunt

601 ('smoking' in this context has the – already - archaic meaning of 'ridicule' or 'make fun

602 of'):

603 But, Thomas Warton, without joking,

604 *Art* thou, or art thou *not*, thy Sov'reign smoking?

605

606 How can'st thou seriously declare

607 That George the Third

608 With Cressy's Edward can compare,

609 Or Harry?----'tis too bad, upon my word.[42]

610

611 In his early *Ode for the New Year, 1787* Warton had in similar vein compared the 'rough

612 magnificence' and military adventuring of the Crusades with the 'worthier triumphs' of

613 Georgian England and its commitment to the values of 'commerce, peace and art'. The

614 opening section of Peter's *Ode upon Ode* paraphrases this position in a way that

615 highlights the difficulty of the poet whose frame of reference is caught between a world

616 of ancient eloquence and modern commercial politeness:

617 Great (says the Laureat) were the Poet's puffings,

618 On idle daring red-cross ragamuffins,

619 Who, for their childishness, deserved the birch:

620 Quoth Tom, a worthier subject now, thank God!

621 Inspires the lofty Dealer in the Ode,

622 Than blockheads battling for old Mother-Church.

623

624 Times (quoth our courtly bard) are alter'd quite;

625 The poet scorns what charm'd of yore the fight;

626 Goths, vandals, castles, horses, mares:

627 The polish'd poet of the present day

628 Doth in his tasty shop display,

629 Ah! vastly prettier-colour'd wares.[43]

630

631 Peter's characterisation of crusaders as 'red-cross ragamuffins' is a *reductio ad absurdum*
632 of Warton's position. It highlights the contradiction between Warton's platitudinous way
633 of writing about the past and the attitude he displays towards it when he dismisses it as
634 anachronistic. In effect Peter takes Warton at his word and in doing so shows Warton as
635 caught in a rhetorical trap of his own devising. Similarly, Peter's stanzas are animated by
636 a tension between two different rhetorical registers: on the one hand 'courtly bard' and
637 'polish'd poet' and on the other the notion of the poet as a shopkeeper displaying his
638 goods. This tension between the commercial and the civic is best encapsulated in the
639 phrase 'lofty Dealer in the Ode'. Peter's critique of Warton thus aims to demonstrate the
640 mis-match between the business of poetry and royalty, or at least its current embodiment.
641 Here and elsewhere Peter sees Warton's mistake in part as one of misunderstanding the
642 kind of poetry fit for the court of George III. If the values of the Georgian world are
643 different from those of his warrior-prince forebears, then there needs to be a different sort
644 of poetry and language, one that seems beyond Warton's grasp or imagining.

This dilemma about the appropriate memorialisation of the particular interests and achievements of George III is the context for the substantial matter of *Instructions to a Celebrated Laureate*. It is an extended anecdote about the royal birthday treat of 1787, a visit to Whitbread's Brewery aimed at satisfying royal curiosity as to the art of brewing. Such sustained anecdotes would come to serve Peter well in his satires of George and, according to John Barrell, were 'by 1795 much more corrosive of the King's majesty than […] Gillray's caricature'.[44] Peter presents this mock-epic account of the visit to Warton as a model for the appropriate expression of the qualities of the King in verse. Furthermore Peter offers himself as the poet best placed to match form and theme, language and subject. That said, and from the very start of the poem when Peter ascribes its epigraph '*sic transit gloria mundi*' to 'old sun dials' rather than any more elevated source, the reader is clear that this is a distinctly double-edged compliment. More sharply than in the Boswell poems, Wolcot has Peter act both as indicter and indictment of the discourse of triviality he attacks. In the former, Boswell and Piozzi are 'pigmy planets' who 'catch their little lustre from the sun' of Johnson. In the latter, there is no such incongruity between George and Peter because Peter's poetry of the inconsequential matches the character, actions and nature of the King and times. Whereas Boswell and Piozzi had presumed on the reputation of the great Johnson with their mundane tittle-tattle, Peter's jokey, colloquial informality, his fundamentally bathetic turn, resonates absolutely with the 'microscopic genius' of George in a way that the solemn platitudes of Warton had not.

The King's qualities can be summarised as stupidity, rudeness and selfishness. His stupidity comes in the apparently indiscriminate inanity of his interest in brewing:

668 And now his curious Majesty did stoop

669 To count the nails on ev'ry hoop:

670 And lo! no single thing came in his way

671 That full of deep research, he did not say

672 "What's this? hae, hae? what's that? what's this? what's that?" (p.15)

673 George's enquiries into 'the world of small' are inexhaustible. His numb-skull curiosity

674 on every matter must be satisfied however reductive and missing of the overall point. It

675 culminates in a moment that combines closely-observed social comedy and broad farce,

676 when Whitbread tells the royal party that if he laid all his barrels side by side in a row

677 they would reach Kew. George's response to this commonplace way of indicating the

678 large number of barrels Whitbread has in his possession demonstrates a literal minded

679 curiosity devoid of any effort to really engage with what he is being told:

680 "What? If they reach to Kew then, side by side,

681 What would they do plac'd end to end?"

682 To whom, with knitted calculating brow,

683 The Man of Beer most solemnly did vow,

684 Almost to Windsor that they would extend;

685 On which the King, with *wond'ring* mien,

686 Repeated it unto the *wond'ring* Queen:

687

688 On which, quick turning round his halter'd head;

689 The brewer's horse with face astonish'd neigh'd:

690 The brewer's dog too pour'd a note of thunder,

691 Rattled his chain, and wagg'd his tail for wonder. (p.16)

692 This emphasis on child-like literal-mindedness, while not supportive of George's dignity
693 has nevertheless been interpreted by Vincent Carretta as part of Wolcot's 'laughing
694 treatment of the King' – whom he finds 'embarrassing' rather than anything stronger –
695 within an overall 'rhetoric of disappointment, not disobedience' that stretches as far back
696 as Andrew Marvell.[45] The 'Peter Pindarian tone', according to Carretta, 'reveals no
697 serious discontent with the rule of George III' and indeed renders George harmless and
698 protects him from more searching political critique.[46] A similar point has been made by
699 Carol Percy in her consideration of the ways in which George's supposedly idiosyncratic
700 form of speech was rendered. It may have opened George up to a degree of ridicule, but
701 more profoundly it 'helped to craft his more public image as an ordinary man, able to
702 bridge the social gulfs mapped by linguistic difference.'[47] By contrast however, John
703 Barrell has reinvested the satires of the 1790s (poems such as *A Royal Tour*) with a more
704 pointed political meaning by interpreting them as an attack on George III's particular
705 brand of royal ideology of ordinariness and 'the irreconcilable desires of the King and
706 crowd alike for a monarch both majestic and familiar.'[48] Barrell does this by way of a
707 comparison with what he sees as less purposeful efforts in the 1780s. However, it is
708 possible to see the latent (and not so latent) viciousness of the later portraits of the King
709 in these earlier efforts, and a similar focus on the image of ordinariness as an image, and
710 a hypocritical one at that. This is apparent in what Peter depicts as George's habit of
711 asking multiple, indiscriminate questions:

712 Now Whitbread inward said, "May I be curst
713 If I know what to answer first".

714 Then search'd his brains with ruminating eye ---

715 But ere the Man of Malt an answer found,

716 Quick on his heel, lo, MAJESTY turn'd round,

717 Skipp'd off, and baulk'd the pleasure of reply. (pp.20-21)

718 This would not matter so much had Peter not previously been at such pains to emphasise

719 Whitbread's nervousness at the Royal visit and the 'Whitbread-rout of preparation' in

720 advance of the King's arrival. Whitbread's response to the arrival of the Royal party is

721 described in terms whose comic incongruousness derives from their colloquial matter-of-

722 factness:

723 Arriv'd, the King broad grinn'd and gave a nod

724 To Mr. Whitbread, who had GOD

725 Come with his angels to behold his beer;

726 With more respect he never could have met----

727 Indeed the man was in a sweat,

728 So much the BREWER did the KING revere. (p.14)

729 That we know such things makes the discomfort George causes Whitbread evidence of

730 not merely gracelessness but cruelty. He is too rude to wait for answers to his own

731 questions and tactlessly asks whether Whitbread's beer is as good as that of rival brewers

732 (a question that 'grat[es] like arsenic on his host's digestion'). As such the poem

733 anatomises that most subtle form of bullying, the hypocritical abuse of power in which

734 authority presumes familiarity while not submitting itself to the rules that govern

735 interactions between the genuinely equal. Carretta suggests that the 'domestication of the

736 regal image brought the viewer up to the King's level as much as it brought the king

737 down to his subjects', but the most significant point within these interactions is the
738 double-standard and hypocrisy that sits at the heart of this supposed ordinariness and
739 apparent parity.
740 George's questions appear trivial and random, but an interest in penny-pinching
741 runs through them. This is most marked when the King 'noteth notable things':
742 *Mem.*--- 'Tis hops that give a bitterness to beer ---
743 Hops grow in Kent, says Whitbread, and elsewhere.
744
745 *Quaere*.---Is there no cheaper stuff? Where doth it dwell----
746 Would not horse aloes bitter it as well?
747
748 *Mem.*---To try it soon on our small beer-----
749 'Twill save us sev'ral pounds a year.
750
751 *Mem.* ---To remember to forget to ask
752 Old Whitbread to my house one day ----
753
754 *Mem.----Not to forget* to take of beer the cask
755 The brewer offer'd me, away. (p.17)
756 The King makes his notes in 'a very pretty memorandum book,| With gilded leaves of
757 asses skin so white', reinforcing the hypocrisy of the penny-pinching. Equally the
758 laughter generated by the last quatrain, with its opposing impulses (though congruent
759 sentiments) united through rhyme scheme, feels more hollow later in the poem when the

760 royal family greedily tuck into the lunch offered by the Whitbreads, a mock-epic
761 decimation ‘Of flesh, and fish, and fowl of ev’ry nation.’
762 At the end of the anecdote Warton reproaches Peter with the question “[i]s this an
763 action, *Peter*? this a deed | To raise a *Monarch* to the sky?”. In effect Warton voices
764 Peter’s own critique of Boswell and Piozzi’s memorialisation of Johnson via unflattering
765 anecdote in the earlier poems. However Peter is unrepentant, refusing to concede that
766 this is an unacceptable way of celebrating George’s unique talents:
767 But this I tell thee, Thomas, for a fact,
768 Thy Caesar never did an act
769 More wise, more glorious, in his life.
770 Now GOD preserve all wonder-hunting KINGS,
771 Whether at Windsor, Buckingham, or Kew house,
772 And may they never do more foolish things
773 Than visiting SAM WHITBREAD and his brewhouse. (p.27)
774 The activation of the more conventional rhetoric of royal paean– the honorific Caesar, the
775 references to wisdom and glory – reminds the reader again of the questions of political
776 virtue and the representations of political virtue raised by Warton and applied literally for
777 satiric effect by Peter. Equally it shows Peter to be no nostalgic apologist for a previous
778 model of political virtue, for all that his satire attacks the modern notions of manners and
779 social virtue that have evacuated grandeur and meaning from high office. George is
780 recuperated by Peter giving thanks for a King about whom this is the worst that can be
781 said, an observation that perforce brings to mind all the much more unpleasant things

782 monarchs are capable of doing. It may be an act of royal recuperation, but it is one that
783 comes with the strength of a threat.
784 In all this Peter is of course assuming a position from which he can judge George.
785 Wolcot raises the stakes of this insight still further by exploiting the licence of this
786 fundamentally levelling perspective to conceive of the relationship between poet and king
787 in a radically different way. As Peter puts it in *Brother Peter to Brother Tom*:
788 The world may call me liar, but sincerely
789 I love him ----for a partner, love him dearly:
790 Whilst his great name is on the ferme, I'm sure
791 My credit with the Public is secure.
792
793 Yes, beef shall grace my spit, and ale shall flow,
794 As long as it continues George and Co.;
795 That is to say, in plainer metre,
796 George and Peter.[49]
797 Indeed, Peter can even posit a version of this partnership whereby he is the senior partner.
798 He concludes to dedication to Pye in the *Royal Tour* by taking matters one step further
799 when he says that he no more hates kings and queens than the hunter hates the wild boar:
800 May KINGS *exist*---and TRIFLE pig with Kings!
801 The MUSE desireth not more precious things----
802 Such sweet *mock-grandeur!*—so *sublimely garish!*
803 Let's have no WASHINGTONS: did *such* appear,
804 The MUSE and I had ev'ry thing to fear ----

805 Soon forc'd to ask a pittance of the parish.

806

807 *Such* want not praise---in native virtue strong:

808 Tis *folly, folly, feeds* the POET'S song.[50]

809 In another context the final line could be a Juvenalian rallying cry to the righteous

810 standard of satire. But Wolcot has too close an eye on the literal reality behind the dead

811 metaphor, and the immediately previous reference to Poor Relief makes the notion of

812 feeding the poet's song entirely inseparable from the imperative of feeding the poet.

813 In laying bare the profit motive in his satire Peter reveals that his commitment to

814 the radical cause to be one of financial expediency rather than principled opposition. Yet

815 to say that Peter portrays the relationship between poet and monarch to be one in which

816 the latter provides opportunities to the commercial advantage of the former is also to say

817 something rather far reaching about Wolcot's disrespect for the monarchy. He has Peter

818 reconfigure kings and queens as, at best, partners in the poet's business, and, at worst, a

819 commodity upon which the professional writer can trade. This might not be a particularly

820 idealistic or appealing way of understanding equality of station, but its grubby logic is all

821 the more deliberately undermining of royal authority for that.

822

823 **III. Conclusion**

824 The poems discussed here explore the literary representation and mediation of

825 'greatness', and suggest its deterioration from the noble Lives model of the ancients to

826 the triviality of celebrity culture either as a response to the demands of a crass

827 commercialism or as a result of the inherent inanity of its modern subject. Yet they also

828 reveal a fraught and contradictory position for the writer. On the one hand Wolcot
829 laments and satirises the absence of a recognised or applicable rhetoric of greatness: there
830 is no way of doing justice to Johnson, and no way but Peter's of doing justice to George.
831 Yet on the other hand he lambasts the hypocritical high-handedness of the representatives
832 of the political order who would be the beneficiaries of that rhetoric of greatness and who
833 Wolcot might otherwise be thought of as defending though this attack on the trivial
834 levelling of modern culture. Wolcot's ultimate attitude towards Warton is one of pity for
835 being lumbered with George III as a figure around which to attempt to create a model of
836 discourse of royal virtue for the modern world that dispenses with the ludicrous
837 anachronisms of previous royal paean. Peter Pindar is then a way of wrestling with the
838 paradoxes of an age suspicious of, or anxious about, the relevance of traditional ways of
839 mediating greatness yet unable to formulate a coherent or appealing alternative way of
840 articulating a more relevant set of values. Peter on Boswell on Johnson, and Peter on
841 Warton and Peter on George III represent Wolcot's satiric investigation of nature of
842 modern biography as surely as Disraeli on Anecdote offers a discursive one.

843 Peter Pindar emerges as both tenor and vehicle in this process, calling attention to
844 the pitfalls of the age in significant part by embodying them. Any effort to separate John
845 Wolcot and Peter Pindar completely would not only be naïve but fruitless. When, in the
846 first canto of the *Lousiad* (1785), Peter announces his switch to royal satire with the claim
847 that he 'LOVE and the SONS OF CANVAS quit[s] for Kings' he is collapsing the
848 distinction between the *Persian Love Elegies* that had appeared in 1773 under Wolcot's
849 name and Peter's own debut attacking the painters of the Royal Academy, the *Lyric Odes*
850 *to the Academicians* (1782). But regardless of such elisions, it is crucial to understand

851 Peter Pindar as other than Wolcot, an unreliable commentator who is as often as not the
852 butt of Wolcot's satire, calling out what Wolcot identifies as the idiocies of his age by as
853 often as not exemplifying them. Distinguishing Peter from John allows for an
854 understanding of Peter as a poetic creation, a character in Wolcot's imaginative world,
855 and the acknowledgement that he is as open to interrogation and indeed satiric
856 representation as any of the figures he is himself satirising.[51]

857 Understanding Wolcot and his creation Peter in such terms not only deepens our
858 sense of Wolcot's sophistication as a poet and satirist but also provides a richer context
859 for understanding the later Wolcot within of the range and subtlety of political responses
860 to the French Revolution in Britain. The last twenty years have seen significant insights
861 into the contexts and complexities, the debates and differentiations in what had
862 previously been interpreted as a neat dichotomy of radical/reactionary.[52] Of particular
863 importance has been the reconfiguring of the notion of political loyalism (especially in
864 historical studies) not only as a something with many hues but as 'an empowering
865 movement that gave its followers a public presence and political voice with which to
866 criticise the polity they sought to defend.'[53] Yet with a few exceptions the debate about
867 Wolcot has not moved beyond questions of apostasy and double-dealing. Or again, the
868 emphasis on competition between radical and loyalist writers over terms and ideas – what
869 Mori terms 'sites of contest and inspiration' – should open the door on contextualising
870 the practices of Wolcot discussed above in terms of others within the period. For
871 example, the work discussed in this article resembles what Kyle Grimes has termed
872 Romantic 'hacker satire', characterised as 'parasitic, derivative, opportunistic or
873 parodic'.[54] Grimes' account of William Hone's satiric voice as a 'parodic seizing of

cultural authority' that is 'definable by the role it plays in very immediate and historically specific discursive power struggles' offers a compelling way of revaluing Peter's interest in the local and, in the long view of history, trivial regardless of any judgement about the extent to which they shared a political position across generations.[55] It also articulates the opportunistic way in which Peter is both a mouthpiece for and a target of Wolcot's various satiric agenda, including the self-conscious and explicit consideration of the complicity between satirist and object of satire. The reader is invited to laugh at Peter almost as often as with him, and sometimes both with and at him at the same time.

Equally, to read Wolcot working in this way in the mid-1780s is to offer a contribution to the appreciation of what still seems like a lost decade in eighteenth-century poetry. Even sympathetic readings of Wolcot tend to focus on his output post-1789, and it is notable that many of the ideas and concepts deployed in this essay have had their most thorough and significant articulation in relation to periods either side of the work they are being asked to do here. It is n[56]otable then to see how Wolcot's poetry from the 1780s combines themes and preoccupations more usually understood in terms of earlier or later periods, but which he demonstrates exist in vital relation through his work. As such the insights generated are important not just for understanding the significance of Wolcot's work during this time, but for arguing for the importance of a decade itself frequently only understood in unflattering comparison with the one that followed. Through Peter Pindar, Wolcot diagnoses and critiques a crisis of cultural authority in his age, creating a spokesman for that crisis who anatomises, exemplifies and glories in its absurdities. Acknowledging this recognition is a further step towards the rehabilitation of

896 not only one of the most prolific poetic voices of the age, but one of unacknowledged

897 sophistication and importance.

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[1] As cited in Benjamin Colbert, "Petrio-Pindarics: John Wolcot and the Romantics". *European Romantic Review*, 16.3 (2005): 311-328. DOI: 10.1080/10509580500211343, p.312.

[2] Donald Kerr, " 'Satire is Bad Trade': Dr John Wolcot and his Publishers and Printers in Eighteenth-Century England." Cardiff Corvey: Reading the Romantic Text, 12. Online: Internet (28/09/2010): http://www.cf.ac.uk/encap/corvey/articles/cc12_n02.html. For example 42,500 copies of his 1794 collection *Pindariana* were printed.

[3] Jeanne Griggs, "Self-Praise and the Ironic Personal Panegyric of Peter Pindar", *The Age of Johnson* 8 (1997): 223-254, (p.254). See Tom Girtin's *Doctor with Two Aunts: A Biography of Peter Pindar* (London, 1959) for a sympathetic and now rather venerable, but still the most detailed and serviceable, account of Wolcot's career, life and the growth of these perceptions; and also Robert L Vales, *Peter Pindar (John Wolcot)* (New York, 1973).

[4] The hitherto most significant reassessments of Wolcot's achievements can be found in Grzegorz Sinko, *John Wolcot and his School: A Chapter from the History of English Satire* (Warsaw, 1962); Iain McCalman, "John Wolcot" in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture, 1770-1803*. gen. ed. Iain McCalman, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.765-66; Gary Dyer, *British Satire and the Politics of Style, 1789-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.31-7; Colbert, "Petrio-Pindarics"; John Barrell, *The Spirit of Despotism: Invasions of Privacy in the 1790s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp.118-144; Noah Herringman, ' "Manlius to Peter Pindar": Satire, Politics and Masculinity in the 1790s', *Romanticism and Patriotism: Nation, Empire, Bodies, Rhetoric*, A Romantic Circles Praxis volume, ed. Orrin N.C.Wang (2006) [8 June 2014].

[5] Dyer, *British Satire*, 3.

[6] Barrell *Spirit of Despotism*, 138. Other dimensions to Barrell's recuperation of Peter will be discussed below.

[7] See also the works of textual scholarship on Wolcot. There is an edition of *Bozzy and Piozzi* in John Strachan and Graeme Stone's *Parodies of the Romantic Age* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998) and of *The Lousiad* in volume 3 of Strachan's *British Satire 1785-1840* (2003)

[8] Steven E Jones, 'Introduction' to *The Satiric Eye: Forms of Satire in the Romantic Period*, ed Steven E Jones, (New York: Palgrave, 2003), p.1. See also his earlier *Satire and Romanticism* (London, 2000) and Colbert's 'Popular Romanticism: Publishing, Readership and the Making of Literary History' in *Authorship, Commerce and the Public: Scenes of Writing, 1750-1850*, ed E.J. Clery, Caroline Franklin and Peter Garside, (London: Palgrave, 2002), pp.153-68.

[9] McCalman, "John Wolcot", p.765

[10] Lionel Grossman, 'Anecdote and History', *History and Theory* 42.2 (May, 2003), 143-168 (p.154).

[11] Rebecca Bullard, *The Politics of Disclosure, 1674-1725: Secret History Narratives* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009), p. 37, p.11. Her argument that secret history is opposed to arbitrary and absolute government regardless of its political stripe differs from the Whig reading offered for example by Annabel Patterson in *Early Modern Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.183-5.

[12] Johnson, *The Adventurer* 99 (16 October 1753) in *Samuel Johnson*, ed Donald Greene, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp.273-77 (p.276)

[13] Mark Salber Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740-1820* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000), p.17.

[14] Helen Deutsch, *Loving Dr Johnson* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005), pp.178-9

[15] Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler* 60 (13-10-1750), in Greene (ed), pp.204-207 (p.205)

[16] Deutsch, *Loving Dr Johnson*, 9.
[17] *A Dissertation on Anecdotes*, in *Literary Miscellanies, a New Edition, Enhanced* (London: John Murray, 1801) p.27. The first edition appeared in 1793.
[18] Disraeli, *Dissertation on Anecdotes*, p.64.
[19] David Simpson, *The Academic Postmodern and the Rule of Literature: A Report on Half Knowledge* (Chicago: Univ. Chicago Press, 1995), p.56
[20] J.G.A.Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.122.
[21] Scott, *The Edinburgh Review* 6 (July, 1805), p.446. See Iain MacDaniel, *Adam Ferguson in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Roman Past and Europe's Future* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2013); John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Dafydd Moore, *Enlightenment and Romance in the Poems of Ossian* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp.87-112.
[22] Robert W. Jones, *Literature, Gender and Politics in Britain during the War for America 1770-1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
[23] Grossman, "Anecdote and History", p.154.
[24] Jason Goldsmith, 'Celebrity and the Spectacle of Nation' in *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture*, ed Tom Mole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 21-40, p.22.
[25] Jones, *Literature, Gender and Politics*, p.31.
[26] See Sir John Hawkins *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.*, ed O.M.Brack Jnr (Athens, GA, 2009)
[27] Deutsch, *Loving Dr Johnson*, p.8. For analysis of some of the more eye-watering examples of these see also pp.140-47.
[28] Vales, *John Wolcot*, pp.42-3. The "Ode to Lonsdale" was an ironic retraction of the previous year's "Commiserating Epistle to James Lowther, Lord Lonsdale" (in response to which Lonsdale had threatened legal action). Unfortunately for Wolcot, it was taken seriously as an act of craven backsliding, most notably by James Gilray in "SATAN in all his Glory" (1792), and became one of the central planks of the charge against Wolcot that he was lacking conviction and moral fibre.
[29] *Bozzy and Piozzi, Or, The British Biographers, A Town Ecologue, by Peter Pindar Esq* (London: G. Kearsley & W. Foster, 1786), p.4.
[30] Kyle Grimes, "Verbal Jujitsu: William Hone and the Tactics of Satirical Conflict" in Jones (ed), *The Satiric Eye*, 173-84, p.181. The phrase 'crown'd heads' is a direct reference, given its subject matter, to *The Lousiad*, making that another metatextual joke.
[31] Deutsch, *Loving Dr Johnson*, 9.
[32] See Schickel's seminal *Intimate Strangers: The Culture of Celebrity in America* (1985/2001). Closer to home, see Cheryl Wanko, "Celebrity Studies in the Long Eighteenth Century: An Interdisciplinary Overview", *Literature Compass* 8/6 (2011): 351-362. Doi 10.1111/j.1741-4113.2011.00806.x. See also Claire Brock, *The Feminisation of Fame, 1750-1830* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006); Mole (ed) *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture*; Frank Donoghue, *The Fame Machine: Book Reviewing and Eighteenth-Century Literary Careers* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1996).
[33] *A Poetical and Congratulatory Epistle to James Boswell, Esq. on his Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with the celebrated Dr Johnson, By Peter Pindar Esq* (London: G. Kearsley, 1786), pp.9-10.
[34] Phillips, *Society and Sentiment*, p.17.
[35] Grossman, 'Anecdote and History', p.157.
[36] See Dyer, *British Satire*, 32. As he points out though, Peter's 'colloquial, semi-doggerel style, connect[s] him to more popular traditions' in a way that aligns his work with populist cheap-print forms.
[37] David Higgins, 'Celebrity, Politics and the Rhetoric of Genius' in *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture 1750-1850*, ed. Tom Mole, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009), 41-59 (p.43).
[38] Robert Burns also used the occasion of ridiculing Warton's poems to George III for making political points. See Nigel Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral: Poetry and Improvement in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Oxford, 2010), p.141.
[39] Gallagher, "'Partial to Some One Side': The Advice-to-Painter Poem as Historical Writing", *ELH* 78.1 (Spring, 2011), 79-101 (p.80, p.98). See also her full length study *Historical Literatures: Historical Literatures: Writing About the Past in England, 1660-1740* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2012).
[40] Adam Potkay, *The Fate of Eloquence in the Age of Hume* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p.8
[41] Thomas Warton, *Poems on Various Subjects* (London: G & J. Robinson, 1791), p.244

[42] *Instructions to a Celebrated Laureat; Alias the Progress of Curiosity; Alias A Birth-Day Ode; Alias Mr Whitebread's Brewhouse, by Peter Pindar Esq*, 8th edition, (London: J & A M'Lean, 1788) p.8

[43] *Ode Upon Ode; Or, A Peep at St James's; Or, New Year's Day; Or What you Will* in *The Works of Peter Pindar Esq* 3 volumes, (London: J. Walker, 1797), vol.1, p.383-4.

[44] Barrell, *Spirit of Despotism*, 121.

[45] Vincent Carretta, *George III and the Satirists from Hogarth to Byron* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), p.269, p.5.

[46] Carretta, *George III and the Satirists*, p.280.

[47] Carol Percy, 'The King's Speech: Metalanguage of Nation, Man and Class in Anecdotes about George III', *English Language and Linguistics* 16.2 July 2012, 281-299 (p.296). doi: 10.1017/S1360674312000068.

[48] Barrell, *Spirit of Despotism*, 123-4.

[49] *Brother Peter to Brother Tom. An Expostulatory Epistle By Peter Pindar Esq*, 3rd edition, (London: G. Kearsley, 1788), p.13.

[50] *The Royal Tour; Or, Weymouth Amusements; A Solemn and Reprimanding Epistle to the Laureat by Peter Pindar Esq.* (Dublin: W Porter, 1796), p.iii

[51] Dyer notes that 'no poet's practice conveys more than Wolcot's how radically pseudonymity can differ from anonymity' (*British Satire*, 37).

[52] For a survey of key scholarship, see Emma Vincent Macleod, 'British Attitudes to the French Revolution', *The Historical Journal* 50.3 (Sept., 2007), 689-709. DOI: 10.1017/S0018246X07006310.

[53] Jennifer Mori, 'Languages of Loyalism: Patriotism, Nationhood and the State in the 1790s', *English Historical Review* 118.475 (Feb. 2003), 33-58 (p.33). See also Kevin Gilmartin, *Writing Against Revolution: Literary Conservatism in Britain, 1790-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

[54] Grimes, "Verbal Ju-Jitsu", 174.

[55] Grimes, "Verbal Ju-Jitsu", 182.

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