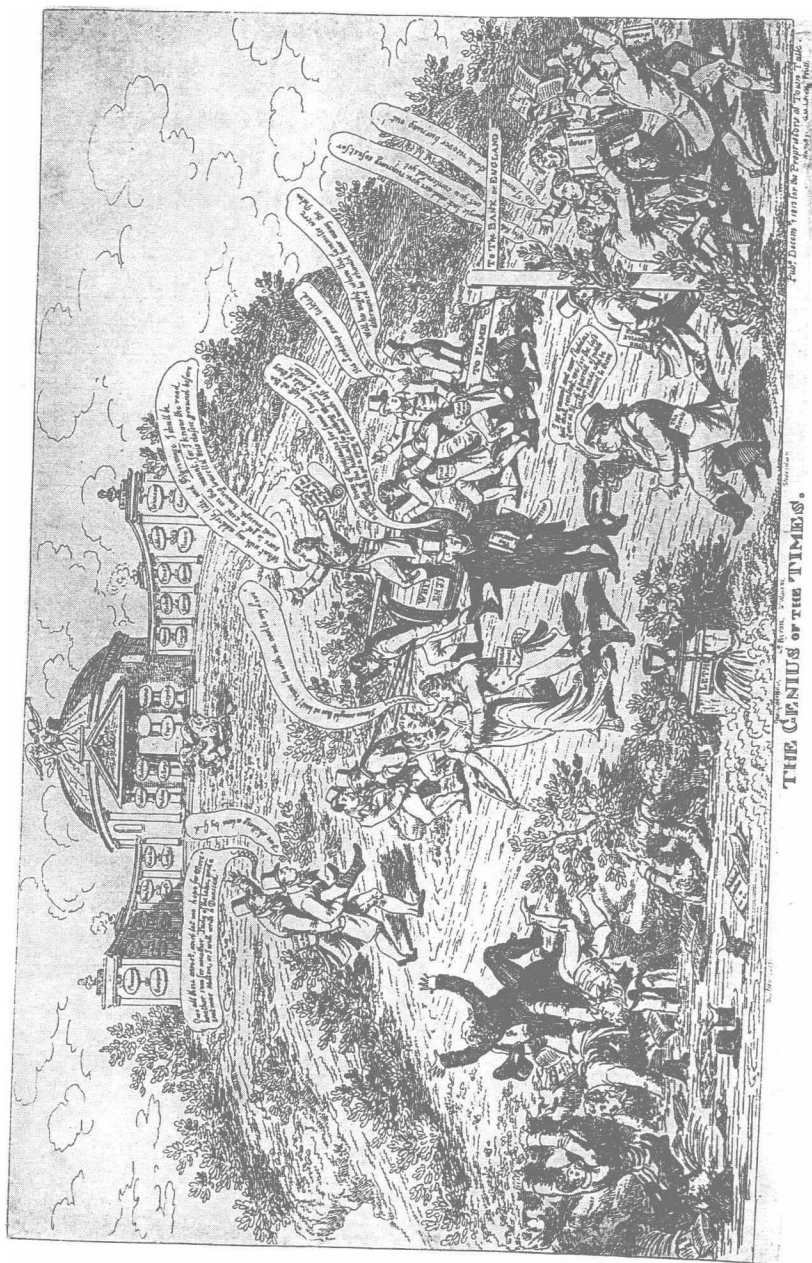


Parodies of the romantic age.

Stones, Graeme.





C. Williams, 'The Genius of the Times' (plate for *Town Talk*, 1 December 1812)

# PARODIES OF THE ROMANTIC AGE

VOLUME 2

*Edited by John Strachan*

COLLECTED VERSE PARODY

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JOHN STRACHAN

## INTRODUCTION

This anthology offers a selection of the parodic verse of the Romantic period, as well as parody representative of the period immediately before 1789 and several Victorian parodies which engage critically with Romantic period poetry. It aims to combine familiar examples of Romantic period parody (the *Peter Bell* parodies of 1819, selections from Hogg's *Poetic Mirror*) with hitherto little-known material (by Rose, Smith, Stephens, Wolcot and several anonymous contributors to periodicals). It is not the intention of this introduction to rehearse the critical arguments of the general introduction to *Parodies of the Romantic Age* and, furthermore, each item has been provided with an extensive introductory note which aims to be both critical and contextual. However, a few general points regarding the selection of material for the volume might usefully be made.

Romantic period parody does not spring fully formed into life on 20 November 1797 with the publication of the first number of *The Anti-Jacobin, or Weekly Examiner* and I have addressed its antecedents with examples of parodic writing of the 1780s, a period of some significance in the development of modern parody. Though one should always be wary of making generalisations about such a rich and diverse literary period as 'the eighteenth century', I think it fair to argue that although acerbic idiomatic parody exists before the 1780s it is not common in the eighteenth century (though there are honourable exceptions such as Henry Carey's splendidly acidulous parody of Ambrose Philips, 'Namby Pamby: or, A Panegyric on the New Versification Addressed to A. P., Esq'). The anthology begins with selections from the 1785 *Probationary Odes for the Laureateship*, a collection which marks a crucial moment in the move away from the predominance of generic and uncritical idiomatic burlesque towards substantive critical parody.

Perhaps more important in the first half of the eighteenth century is verbatim parody, that unsettling literary form used so powerfully by Pope, and I include examples of the form by William Gifford and John Wolcot ('Peter Pindar'). As several of these early items suggest, this anthology seeks to trace the antecedents of *The Anti-Jacobin* in Ellis's work on the *Probationary Odes* and in Gifford's *The Baviad*. It also addresses the later influence of the journal in Frere's *Whistlecraft*, Byron's *Beppo* and in the work of Richard Harris Barham and J. Brunton Stephens.

One eighteenth-century tradition which survives in robust health into the nineteenth century is idiomatic parodic burlesque in the manner of John Philips's *The Splendid Shilling* (1701) and the collection includes examples by Thackeray and the anonymous parodist of Felicia Hemans. Maginn's parody of Shelley, 'Elegy on my Tom Cat', though it also borrows from the burlesque tradition of mock odes on the death of a favourite animal to pour maledictions upon the 'Cockney School', is another example of the form. Furthermore, the burlesque strategies of Philips's own imitator, Isaac Hawkins Browne, inform the most commercially successful collection of parodies published in the Romantic period, James and Horace Smith's *Rejected Addresses* (1812), which went through at least eighteen editions by 1833.

Though this edition is entitled *Parodies of the Romantic Age*, I think it justifiable to include examples of generic burlesque in this particular volume. Traditional burlesque still exists in the Romantic period; it is too easily forgotten that that fine example of the form, Cowper's 'On the Death of Mrs. Throckmorton's Bulfinch' was published in the same year as the fall of the Bastille. I would argue that non-idiomatic burlesque still had considerable life in the Romantic period, as attested by the fact that Frere's *Whistlecraft* marks a new departure in the form. It also seems remiss to neglect a genre which is also of such importance to the emergence of Byron's mature comic manner. There are also interesting mutations of burlesque in the Romantic period, as demonstrated by Hood and Reynolds who infuse new life into the mock ode in their 1825 collection *Odes and Addresses to Great People*. Furthermore, to include idiomatic burlesque such as the brothers Smith's *Rejected Addresses* and yet ignore generic burlesque such as

*Whistlecraft* is also perhaps questionable. Such an omission would neglect an important context to such substantive Romantic period parody as Reynolds's *Peter Bell. A Lyrical Ballad*.

I am likewise conscious that this edition's nomenclature is also somewhat contradicted by the fact that the current anthology contains a small number of parodies of Romantic poets (Coleridge and Hemans) which were composed and published during the Victorian period. These are included to provide what one might call a posthumous context for Romantic period parody and to complement the attention to its antecedents evident in the anthology's earliest items. Furthermore, there is some danger in the critical tendency to construct a grand narrative about the critical vacuity of Victorian parody as compared to that of the Romantic period. Victorian parody of the Romantic poets lacks the political edge and urgency of the parody of the period between 1789 and 1830, but it is not without critical perspicuity (see Prowse's 1868 'The Ancient Philosopher' for a notable example). The anthology does not attempt to represent Victorian parody as a whole; enforcing a critical judgment of Solomon, it takes only from that portion of later nineteenth-century parody which addresses Romantic period models. It also attempts to widen the geographical focus evident in previous work on Romantic parody by including examples of American work (by Robert Rose and Samuel Smith) and of Australian parody (by J. Brunton Stephens). One of the main premises underpinning our collection is a conviction that parody is an important critical form and the response afforded the Romantic poets by interpretive parody from outside Great Britain, in America most notably, should not be neglected.

The anthology also includes a number of examples of writings by what we now label 'the Romantic poets' themselves: Byron, Coleridge, Shelley and Southey. The parodic impulse is widespread in this period and it would misrepresent the age not to include work by the Romantic poets as well as parodies of them. The focus of the anthology is upon literary parody, but of course it would be a gross misreading to argue that Romantic parody is simply formal manoeuvring. Much of this material is deeply political, from the left (Reynolds, Shelley, the Benjamin-poet) and from the right (Barham, Gifford, Maginn). From the

*Probationary Odes* onwards, parody and partisan political sentiment go hand in hand and the anthology aims to capture parody's role as a vehicle for political debate. My introductory notes on each relevant item focus on the sociopolitical context of the individual parodies. The diverse positions represented in the anthology also perhaps testify to the fruitlessness of overarching critical debate as to whether or not parody is innately 'conservative' or 'radical'; the reader is best encouraged to address the implications and significance of each individual parody on its own terms. Though my emphasis is, in the main, upon the political force of parody which uses literary formal models, it should nonetheless be recognised that there are a significant number of radical writings of this period which employ parody of 'non-literary' models.<sup>1</sup> The anthology includes William Hone's remarkable occasional piece, *The Political House that Jack Built*, as representative of this body of work.

Though of course one cannot, by definition, know what proportion of the work of anonymous parodists of this period is by women, it must be acknowledged that only a small proportion of declared or attributed parody of the Romantic period is by female authors. Nonetheless, devotees of women's writing can draw some comfort from the fact that the only poem by a woman included, Catherine Fanshawe's 'Fragment in imitation of Wordsworth', is a magnificent effort and, indeed, has been described as 'the best parody in the English tongue'.<sup>2</sup> Though it seems that women did not in general write much parody in the Romantic period, female authors were not infrequently the subject of parody and the critical and editorial attention currently being paid to women's writing of the Romantic period is reflected here in the anthology's inclusion of parody of women poets (Hemans and Landon). Thomas Moore's two efforts from *The Fudges in England* (1835) also parody writing by women, though not of a particular female poet.

On the basis of our bibliographical researches, the most parodied authors of the Romantic period would appear to be Byron. Scott and Wordsworth, with Coleridge, Moore<sup>3</sup> and Southey in a kind of imitative second division. Parody of Byron abounds in the 1810s and 1820s. There are numerous parodies of *Don Juan* and some of *Beppo*, but the main focus is upon *Childe Harold*, the first two cantos most

particularly. Much parody of Byron is undistinguished, as the sections devoted to the poet in Walter Hamilton's parodic scrap books *Parodies of the Works of English and American Authors* (1884-9) demonstrate. I include two of the finest, Horace Smith's 'Cui Bono?' and Thomas Love Peacock's 'There is a fever of the spirit' (1818), able exercises in the black bile which contain a suitable level of attitudinising 'Byronic' world-weariness and misanthropy. Parody of Scott, as the present volume's 'A Tale of Drury Lane' by the brothers Smith and *Warreniana*'s 'The Battle of Brentford Green' demonstrate, tends to rely upon inappropriate modernisation and the burlesque comic misapplication of the poet's antiquarianism and romantic topography. More adventurous, if only partially successful, parody of Scott is to be found in George Colman's 'The Lady of the Wreck' (1812). Parody of Southey focuses either upon his orientalism or his political tergiversation. The former is represented here by James Smith's 'The Rebuilding'. On the latter, space precluded the inclusion of either of those significant radical parodic critiques of Southey, Hone's *A New Vision* and Byron's *The Vision of Judgment*; the reader is referred to *Warreniana*'s 'Carmen Triumphale' which addresses the same issues: the Laureate's apostasy, meretriciousness and clumsy metrical experiments. Coleridge parody of the period often focuses upon the poet's supposed status as an incomprehensible metaphysician and his thematic grotesquerie, with 'Christabel' and the 'Ancient Mariner' the most frequent models (see the items by Hogg, Peacock and Prowse below). With *Warreniana*'s 'The Dream', the present edition offers a representative account of Coleridgean parody. It also includes Stephens's obscure but delightful parody of Coleridge's 'Love'.

The anthology attempts to trace the development of Wordsworthian parody during the Romantic period. Robert Rose's 1804 American parodies of Wordsworth, preoccupied as they are with Wordsworth's simplicities, are typical of the parodic reception granted the poet from the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* and the *Poems in Two Volumes* (1807) until the appearance of *The Excursion* in 1814. Here, as in early English parodies such as 'Barham Downs; or Goody Grizzle and her Ass' and as in such satirical attacks as William Mant's *The*



*Simpliciad; A Satiric-Didactic Poem* (1808), the emphasis is upon Wordsworth as a purveyor of, to echo Byron's criticism of the *Poems in Two Volumes*, 'language not simple, but puerile'. Publication of *The Excursion* offers new targets for parody and Hogg's three 1816 blank verse parodies of the poem concern themselves with the epic Wordsworth. Hogg's critical position also echoes that other critical commonplace about Wordsworth, that the poet 'attaches exquisite emotions to objects which excite none in any other human breast.'<sup>4</sup> Or as Reynolds's *Peter Bell. A Lyrical Ballad* (1819), another onslaught upon Wordsworth's tendency to philosophise the mundane, puts it, 'Out of sparrows' eggs have I hatched great truths, and with sextons' barrows have I wheeled into human hearts, piles of the weightiest philosophy.' The pompous and self-preoccupied 'Preface' to Reynolds's poem, where Wordsworth declares 'I love to read my own poetry: it does my heart good' also exemplifies the parodic response to the idea of Wordsworth's 'egotistical sublime'. Finally, after the publication of *The Excursion*, as Byron's 'Dedication' to *Don Juan* and a perhaps over-familiar parody by Hartley Coleridge argue, Wordsworth is often seen as manifesting a mystical opacity and obscurity:

Behind a cloud his mystic sense,  
Deep-hidden, who can spy?  
Bright as the night, when not a star  
Is shining in the sky.<sup>5</sup>

As well as attacks on the 'Lake School', the anthology also includes examples of imitative criticism of what *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* labelled the 'Cockney School of Poetry', with examples by Hook, Maginn and, very probably, Deacon. Hook's 'Verses supposed to be written by the Editor of the Examiner' and Maginn's 'Don Juan Unread' (like Barham's 'London University') are also significant in that they see the eighteenth century practice of imitation given a political edge. Imitation of Cowper, Wordsworth and *The Anti-Jacobin* is used to make political capital. And Barham's poem, like Hood's two washerwoman poems, also testifies to the fact that Romantic period parodic writing was often used as a vehicle for satirical social commentary. Contemporary sociopolitical polemic is echoed in

parody just as critical writing is complemented, indeed sometimes led, by imitative critical discourse.

Readers of the anthology may well lament its absences (most probably its omissions of fine contemporary parodies of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey). These reflect restrictions on space which have, of course, been exacerbated by the extended time-scale and wide geographical range of the anthology. Excluding *The Vision of Judgment* was a particularly hard decision, as was the omission, on the grounds of length, of Maginn's masterpiece, '“Luctus” on the Death of Sir Daniel Donnelly, Late Champion of Ireland' (1820). Several other *Blackwood's* parodies did not obtain the place which they deserved in the anthology. Indeed, an anthology purely devoted to the parody of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* could (and indeed should) be made. Despite the fact that over a third of the parodies originally appeared in literary periodicals or newspapers, the anthology only scratches the surface of the large body of parodic writing to be found in these sources.

The anthology's general, but not invariable, rule has been to use first published editions. In the eighteenth-century items, I have removed the old face 's' and there are a small number of silent corrections, which are set out in an appendix.

JOHN STRACHAN

NOTES

- 1 As Marcus Wood demonstrates in his *Radical Satire and Print Culture 1790–1822* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).
- 2 George Kitchin, *A Survey of Burlesque and Parody in English* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1931), pp. 235–6.
- 3 Space precluded the inclusion of any Moore parodies in the present volume, but there is a representative example, targeted (as so often in Romantic period parody of Moore) on the libidinous overtones of the *Little* poems in the 'Appendix' to *Warreniana* in volume 4 of this edition.
- 4 The phrase is Arthur Aikin's, in his review of *Poems in Two Volumes* (*Annual Review; and History of Literature; for 1807*, VI (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1808), p. 529).
- 5 Hartley Coleridge, 'He Lived Amidst Th'Untrodden Ways', ll. 5–8 (*Inspector, Literary Review and Magazine*, II (1827), p. 40).

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

(to *Probationary Odes for the Laureateship*, George Ellis, 1785)

Acerbic idiomatic parody exists before the 1785 *Probationary Odes for the Laureateship*, but it is not common in the eighteenth century. In the *Probationary Odes* we see a pivotal moment in the move away from the predominance of generic and uncritical idiomatic burlesque towards substantive critical parody. The *Odes* are a hybrid parodic collection which combine exercises in the mock ode with critically partisan parody (notably of Macpherson and Gray). And in George Ellis, the collection boasts an author who has a fair claim to be the founding father of Romantic period parody, perhaps of modern English parody as a whole.

The *Probationary Odes*, by diverse hands, appeared around the time of the 1785 appointment of Thomas Warton as Poet Laureate, following the death of the incumbent William Whitehead. It envisages a number of contemporary pro-ministerial worthies offering odes on the King's birthday to the Lord Chamberlain in pursuit of the office of Laureate. The major contributors to the *Probationary Odes* were the able political satirist Richard Tickell, Richard Fitzpatrick and George Ellis, later to become a leading light in *The Anti-Jacobin*. All had been involved in the earlier *Criticisms on the Rolliad*<sup>1</sup> (1784–5), Whig satire on the Pitt administration and upon the hapless Tory MP John Rolle in particular. Thomas Moore describes the *Rolliad* thus:

Mr. Rolle, the hero of *The Rolliad*, was one of those unlucky persons, whose destiny it is to be immortalised by ridicule . . . The chief writers of these lively productions were Tickell, General Fitzpatrick, Lord John Townshend, Richardson, George Ellis, and Dr. Laurence . . . Mr. Ellis showed the versatility of his wit, as well as of his politics, by becoming one of the most brilliant contributors to *The Antijacobin*.<sup>2</sup>

Like the *Rolliad*, the *Probationary Odes* are politically motivated; Ellis and his colleagues are aware that one well-constructed parody is worth more than any number of bromides on the iniquities of the Tory administration. The partisan tone is in turn caustic and playful, and on occasions verges on the cloacal. L. Rice-Oxley notes primly that 'The *Rolliad* is well constructed and contains much humour, but it is also very personal and scandalous, while the *Probationary Odes* are so to the verge, and beyond, of indecency'.<sup>3</sup>

The *Probationary Odes* mix literary and political satire; Pitt and his administration are lampooned alongside the current poetic preoccupation with the medieval, Gothic and sublime (the concerns of what we now denominate 'preromanticism'). The sublimity of Gray's Pindaric ode 'The Bard' and the medievalism of Macpherson's *Ossian* provide the most notable targets. No. II, Ellis's 'Ode on the New Year', builds on the famous Arctic travels of the Pittite MP Lord Mulgrave to create a sprightly mock Pindaric, its sublime topography complemented by polar bears and whales. No. XX, 'Irregular Ode for the King's Birthday', is ascribed to General Sir George Howard and sees Ellis nose-thumbing both the king and his own future colleague, William Pitt. No. V, 'Duan in the true Ossian Sublimity', implies that Macpherson's work is little more than mannered medievalist fustian. It is the verse equivalent of the prose 'Ossianade', 'The Song of Scrutinaria', in No. VI:

tender is the youth of thy Leader; who droopeth his head like a faded Lily –  
leave not *Pitto* in the day of defeat, when the Chiefs of the Counties fly from  
him like the herd from the galled Deer. – The friends of *Pitto* are fed. He is  
alone – he layeth himself down in despair, and sleep knit up his brow. – Lo!  
the spirit of *Jenky* arose, pale as the milk of the morn, – twisted was his long,  
lank form – his eyes winked as he whispered to the child in the cradle. 'Rise.  
He sayeth – arise bright babe of the dark closet! The shadow of the Throne  
shall cover thee, like wings of a hen, sweet Chicken of the back-stair brood!'

As George Kitchin has written, the '*Probationary Odes* were worthy prototypes of the greater *Anti-Jacobin*'.<sup>4</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 There was no original *Rolliad*. See *Notes and Queries*, 12 (15 December 1855), p. 471: 'we have lately been informed that a gentleman, well read in general literature, has ransacked the five hundred and odd volumes of Catalogues in the British Museum for the original *Rolliad*, which, as he conjectured, elicited these clever satirical *Criticisms*'.
- 2 Quoted *ibid.*, p. 471.
- 3 *Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin*, ed. L. Rice-Oxley (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1924), p. xiv.
- 4 George Kitchin, *A Survey of Burlesque and Parody in English* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1931), p. 149. The selections have hitherto been unannotated.

From *Probationary Odes for the Laureateship*,  
George Ellis (1785)

N<sup>o</sup> II.

PROBATIONARY ODES  
FOR THE LAUREATSHIP.

ODE ON THE NEW YEAR,  
BY LORD M———VE.<sup>1</sup>

STROPHE!

O for a Muse of Fire,  
With blazing thumbs to touch my torpid lyre!  
Now, in the darksome regions round the pole,<sup>2</sup>  
Tigers fierce, and Lions bold,  
With wild affright would see the snow-hills roll,  
Their sharp teeth chattering with the cold,—  
But that Lions dwell not there—  
Nor beast, nor Christian—none but the *White Bear*!  
The white Bear howls amid the tempest's roar,  
And listening whales swim headlong from the shore!

ANTISTROPHE (By *Brother HARRY*.)

Farewel awhile, ye summer breezes!  
What is the life of man?  
A span!  
Sometimes it thaws, sometime it freezes,  
Just as pleases!  
If Heav'n decrees, fierce whirlwinds rend the air,  
And then again (behold!) 'tis fair!  
Thus peace and war on earth alternate reign:  
Auspicious GEORGE, thy powerful word

Gives peace to FRANCE and SPAIN,  
And sheaths the martial sword!

STROPHE II. (By *Brother CHARLES*.)

And now gay HOPE, her anchor dropping,  
And blue-ey'd Peace, and black-ey'd Pleasures,  
And Plenty, in light cadence hopping,  
Fain would dance to WHITEHEAD's<sup>3</sup> measures.  
But WHITEHEAD now in death reposes,  
Crown'd with laurel! crown'd with roses!  
Yet we with laurel crown'd his dirge will sing,  
And thus deserve fresh laurels from the KING.

Nº V.

DUAN.

IN THE TRUE OSSIAN SUBLIMITY.

BY MR. MAC PHERSON.

Does the wind touch thee, O Harp?  
Or is it some passing Ghost?  
Is it thy hand,  
Spirit of the departed *Scrutiny*?<sup>4</sup>  
Bring me the Harp, pride of CHATHAM!<sup>5</sup>  
Snow is on thy bosom,  
Maid of the modest eye!  
A song shall rise!  
Every soul shall depart at the sound!!!  
The wither'd thistle shall crown my head!!!  
I behold thee, O King!  
I behold thee sitting on mist!!!  
Thy form is like a watery cloud,  
Singing in the deep like an oyster!!!  
Thy face is like the beams of the setting moon!  
Thy eyes are of two decaying flames!  
Thy nose is like the spear of ROLLO!!!  
Thy ears are like three bossy shields!!!  
Strangers shall rejoice at thy chin!  
The ghosts of dead Tories shall hear me  
In their airy Hall!  
The wither'd thistle shall crown my head!  
Bring me the Harp!  
Son of CHATHAM!  
But Thou, O King? give me the launce! !

Nº XX.

PROBATIONARY ODES.

IRREGULAR ODE

FOR THE

KING'S BIRTH-DAY,

BY SIR GEORGE HOWARD, K.B.<sup>6</sup>

CHORUS.

Re mi fa Sol,  
Tol de rol lol.

I.

My Muse for George prepare the splendid Song!  
Oh may it float on Schwellenburgen's voice,  
Let Maids of Honour sing it all day long,  
That Hoggaden's<sup>7</sup> fair ears may hear it, and rejoice.

II.

What subject first shall claim thy courtly strains?  
Wilt thou begin from Windsor's sacred brow,  
Where erst, with pride and pow'r elate,  
The Tudors sate in sullen state.  
While Rebel Freedom, forced at length to bow,  
Retired reluctant from her fav'rite plains?  
Ah! while in each insulting tower you trace  
The features of that Tyrant Race.  
How wilt thou joy to view the alter'd scene!—  
The Giant Castle quits his threatening mien,



The levell'd ditch no more its jaws discloses,  
But o'er its mouth, to feast our eyes and noses,  
Brunswick hath planted pinks and roses,<sup>8</sup>  
Hath spread smooth gravel walks, and a small  
  bowling green.

### III.

Mighty Sov'reign! Mighty Master!  
George is content with lath and plaister!<sup>9</sup>  
At his own palace-gate,  
In a poor porter's lodge by Chambers<sup>10</sup> plann'd,  
See him, with Jenky,<sup>11</sup> hand in hand,  
In serious mood,  
Talking! talking! talking! talking!  
Talking of affairs of State  
All for his country's good!  
Oh Europe's pride! Britannia's hope!  
To view his turnips and potatoes,  
Down his fair Kitchen-Garden's slope  
The victor monarch walks like Cincinnatus!<sup>12</sup>  
See heavenly Muse! I vow to God  
'Twas thus the laurel'd hero trod.—  
Sweet rural joys! delights without compare!  
Pleasure shines in his eyes,  
While George with surprize,  
Sees his cabbages rise,  
And his 'sparagus wave in the air!

## IV.

But hark! I hear the sound of coaches,  
The Levée's hour approaches,  
Haste, ye Postillions! o'er the turnpike road  
Back to St. James's<sup>13</sup> bear your royal load!  
'Tis done—his smoaking wheels scarce touch'd  
the ground—  
By the old magpye and the new,

By Colnbrook, Hounslow, Brentford, Kew,  
Half choak'd with dust the Monarch flew,  
And now behold he's landed safe and sound.—  
Hail to the blest who tread this hallow'd ground!  
Ye firm invincible beefeaters,  
Warriors who love your fellow-creatures,  
I hail your military features!  
Ye gentle Maids of Honour, in stiff hoops  
Buried alive up to your necks,  
Who chaste as Phoenixes in coops,  
Know not the danger that await your sex!  
Ye Lords empower'd by fortune or descent,  
Each in his turn to change your Sovereign's shirt!  
Ye Country Gentlemen, ye City May'rs,  
Ye Pages of the King's back stairs,  
Who in these precincts joy to wait—  
Ye courtly wands,<sup>14</sup> so white and small,  
And you, great pillars of the State,  
Who at Stephen's<sup>15</sup> slumber or debate,  
Hail to you all!!

CHORUS.

Hail to you all.

## V.

Now heavenly Muse thy choicest song prepare;  
 Let loftier strains the glorious subject suit:  
 Lo! hand in hand advance th' enamour'd pair,  
 This Chatham's son,<sup>16</sup> and that the drudge of Bute.<sup>17</sup>  
 Proud of their mutual love,  
 Like Nisus and Euryalus<sup>18</sup> they move,  
 To Glory's steepest heights together tend,  
 Each careless for himself, each anxious for his friend!  
 Hail associate Politicians!  
 Hail sublime Arithmeticians,  
 Hail vast exhaustless source of Irish propositions!<sup>19</sup>

Sooner our gracious King  
From heel to heel shall cease to swing,  
Sooner that brilliant eye shall leave its socket,  
Sooner that hand desert the breeches pocket,  
Than constant George consent his friends to quit,  
And break his plighted faith to Jenkinson and Pitt!

C H O R U S.

Hail most prudent Politicians,  
Hail correct Arithmeticians,  
Hail vast exhaustless source of Irish Propositions!

VI.

Oh deep unfathomable Pitt!  
To thee Ierne<sup>20</sup> owes her happiest days!<sup>21</sup>  
Wait a bit,  
And all her sons shall loudly sing thy praise:  
Ierne happy happy Maid!  
Mistress of the Poplin<sup>22</sup> trade,  
Old Europa's<sup>23</sup> fav'rite daughter,  
Whom first, emerging from the water,  
In days of yore,  
Europa bore,  
To the celestial Bull!<sup>24</sup>  
Behold thy vows are heard, behold thy joys are full!  
Thy fav'rite resolutions greet,  
They're not much chang'd, there's no deceit,  
Pray be convinced, they're still the true ones,  
Though sprung from thy prolific head,  
Each resolution hath begotten new ones,  
All like their sires, all Irish, born and bred.  
Then haste Ierne, haste to sing,  
God save Great George! God save the King!  
May thy sons' sons to him their voices tune,  
And each revolving year bring back the fourth of June!<sup>25</sup>

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

(to *Bozzy and Piozzi, or, the British Biographers, A Town Eclogue*, John Wolcot ('Peter Pindar'), 1786)

During the 1780s, the satirical pamphlets of 'Peter Pindar', the pseudonym of John Wolcot (1738–1819), the doctor, clergyman and poet, simultaneously scandalised and delighted large sections of the English reading public. Wolcot was arguably the most notable oppositional satirist of the 1780s and the 1790s, and was certainly so after Ellis's conversion to Toryism and Tickell's suicide. In his gibes against Academicians, Poets Laureate and, most notably, the foibles of Court and the behaviour of King George III, Wolcot displays a raucously anti-establishment manner, though emphatically not a radical or Jacobin one (as the 'Ode to Mr Paine Author of Rights of Man' (1791) and the 'Hymn to the Guillotine' (1795) make clear). The underlying impulse of Wolcot's poetry, according to W. L. Renwick, is parodic rather than satirically didactic: 'analogous to parody rather than to criticism'.<sup>1</sup> Leaving aside the clumsy distinction between criticism and parody evident in his assertion, Renwick is right to stress the parodic aspect of Wolcot's work. Most of his oeuvre employs burlesque models, most notably in an endless stream of mock odes, from *Lyric Odes to the Royal Academicians* (1782) and *More Lyric Odes to the Royal Academicians* (1783) to *Odes to Ins and Outs* (1802). Wolcot's mock epic *The Lousiad* (1785) is a coarsely vigorous example of the form which is in places quite admirable (most notably in the various speeches of cook-major Dixon and his cohort of kitchen staff). However, Wolcot is at his best, and certainly at his funniest, in the 1786 mock eclogue *Bozzy and Piozzi, or, the British Biographers, A Town Eclogue*.<sup>2</sup> The poem envisages those indefatigable Johnsonians James Boswell and Hester Lynch Piozzi (formerly Mrs Thrale) competing for the 'palm of anecdote' before the musicologist, magistrate and executor of

Johnson's will, Sir John Hawkins (the same Hawkins who supposedly writes the 'Preliminary Discourse' to the *Probationary Odes*), with the winner to be awarded the right to 'write Sam's life'. In the end, Hawkins rebukes both candidates and, himself infected by 'Johnsonia', goes off to write his own life of the Doctor (Hawkins published *The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL.D. Together with his Life, and Notes on his Lives of the Poets* in eleven volumes between 1787–9). Here, as in *The Lousiad*, the self-constructed persona of 'Peter' is not overwhelming matters and Wolcot makes great sport with the insatiable appetite amongst Johnsonians for biographical minutiae, no matter how paltry they might be.

Wolcot had little time for Johnson, either for his manner ('I own I like not Johnson's turgid style/ That gives an inch the importance of a mile') or his politics ('surlly Sam, inflam'd with Tory rage'<sup>3</sup>). However, he had even less patience with purveyors of Johnsoniana. *Bozzy and Piozzi*, like its companion piece *A Poetical and Congratulatory Epistle to James Boswell*<sup>4</sup> (also 1786) was occasioned by the publication of Piozzi's *Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson* (1786) and, in particular, of Boswell's *Journal of a Tour of the Hebrides* (1785). Wolcot lets Bozzy and Piozzi point the finger of scorn directly at themselves; much of his poem relies upon that unsettling literary form, verbatim parody. 'Pindar' often simply versifies the prose of his sources and, throughout, he provides footnotes detailing the sources of his rhymes. In borrowing large chunks of Boswell and Thrale, the work's formal irony lies in the fact that Wolcot uses that supposedly parasitical literary form, parody, to support his thematic argument that the anecdotalists are themselves parasitical (Boswell is compared to a leech and Piozzi to a louse). In his *A Benevolent Epistle to Sylvanus Urban* (1790), Wolcot describes Boswell as 'panting for the echo of a name';<sup>5</sup> in *Bozzy and Piozzi*, he uses echo to condemn him.

As Leigh Hunt writes in his *Wit and Humour* (1846), *Bozzy and Piozzi* is 'masterly for its facility and straightforwardness, which doubles the effect of the occasional mock-heroic inversions'.<sup>6</sup> Wolcot's hilarious work sees Boswell and Piozzi competing to outdo each other in the lustre of their anecdotes, revealing themselves to be little more than purveyors of inane inconsequentialities. Let Hunt have the last word:

'Lear does not more surely move me to tears, or Spenser charm me, than I am thrown into fits of laughter when I hear these rhyming *Johnsoniana*. I can hardly, now this moment, while writing about them, and glancing at the copy which lies before me, help laughing to myself in private'.<sup>7</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 W. L. Renwick, *English Literature 1789–1815* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 113.
- 2 The text used is that of the first edition: 'Peter Pindar', *Bozzy and Piozzi, or, the British Biographers, A Town Eclogue* (London: G. Kearsley and W. Foster, 1786). This is the poem's first annotated publication.
- 3 'Peter Pindar', *A Poetical and Congratulatory Epistle to James Boswell, Esq.*, l. 52 (*The Works of Peter Pindar*, 4 vols (London: Walker and Edwards, 1816), vol. I, p. 242).
- 4 The satirical attack is similar here:  

Rare anecdotes! 'tis anecdotes like these,  
 That bring thee glory, and the million please!  
 On these shall future times delighted stare,  
 Thou charming haberdasher of small ware!  
 Stewart and Robertson from thee shall learn  
 The simple charms of hist'ry to discern;  
 To thee, fair hist'ry's palm, shall Livy yield,  
 And Tacitus, to Bozzy, leave the field! (ibid., p. 244).
- 5 'Peter Pindar', *A Benevolent Epistle to Sylvanus Urban*, l. 177 (*Works of Peter Pindar*, vol. II, p. 92).
- 6 Leigh Hunt, *Wit and Humour, Selected from the English Poets; with an Illustrative Essay, and Critical Comments* (London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1846), p. 351.
- 7 Ibid., p. 352.

*Bozzy and Piozzi, or, the British Biographers, a Town Eclogue,*  
John Wolcot ('Peter Pindar') (1786)

# BOZZY AND PIOZZI,

OR, THE

*BRITISH BIOGRAPHERS,*

A

TOWN ECLOGUE.

~~~~~

By PETER PINDAR, Esq.

~~~~~  
*———Arcades ambo,  
Et cantare pares, et respondere, parati!* VIRGIL.

~~~~~  
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