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Satire as Event

John McTague

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This chapter focusses on three ‘practical satires,’ all of which attach themselves to particular events, which are of dubious, if not baldly fallacious, historicity. The episodes in question are the alleged impersonation of a mountebank, Alexander Bendo, by John Wilmot, 2nd Earl of Rochester, in the summer of 1676; the prediction of the death of the astrologer John Partridge by Jonathan Swift, and the ‘confirmation’ of that prediction’s fulfilment, in the spring of 1708; and Alexander Pope’s surreptitious administration of an emetic draught to the bookseller Edmund Curll on 28 April 1716. These satires are being thought of as ‘practical’ for two reasons. Firstly, as kinds of practical joke, they appear to involve or invite kinds of extra-textual participation, especially encouraging what Kate Loveman has called ‘feigned credulity’, a more socially-engaged species of suspended disbelief.¹ Secondly, they reflect an anxiety regarding satire’s limited ‘practicality’ or real-world efficacy, comically overstating the consequences of satire in the world (incredible gullibility, vomiting and stooling, death). Reading these three episodes together, it is hard to ignore their shared interest in mortality and the fragility and permeability of bodies. In these hoaxes and deceptions, mortification lives up to its morbid and bodily etymology. Certainly, they embarrass their victims. Yet that mortification is achieved in ways that relate to the older, more physical and literal senses of

¹ See *Reading Fictions, 1660-1740: Deception in English Literary and Political Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 66-69.

the verb: ‘to render necrotic’; ‘to lose life or vitality, to waste away’, ‘to destroy or inhabit the vitality, vigour, activity, or potency of’; ‘To deprive of life; to kill, put to death’, ‘to render insensible’ (OED, ‘mortify, v.’). The means by which Swift and his coadjutors ‘mortify’ Partridge, after all, is by pretending that he is dead, and by so pretending over a period of years. Indeed, the extended limbo in which Partridge is suspended by the hoax brings to mind one final shade of meaning: ‘To make (raw meat, game, etc.) tender by hanging, keeping, etc.’

Interested as they are in broadcasting their specific effects on specific people, these practical satires can seem particularly vindictive. Their combination of violence and shaming recalls an old-fashioned honour code of retributive violence.² In the *Dunciad Variorum* (1729), Pope responds to the criticism that the ‘dunces’ he had attacked in *The Dunciad. An Heroic Poem* (1728) ‘are too obscure for Satyre’, beneath his dignity as a satirist.³ He figures his satire as a form of extra-legal redress:

[O]bscurity renders them more dangerous, as less thought of: Law can pronounce judgement only on open Facts, Morality alone can pass censure on Intentions of mischief; so that for secret calumny or the arrow flying in the dark, there is no public punishment, but what a good writer inflicts.⁴

The tendency for the dunces to publish their attacks on Pope anonymously, shooting arrows in the dark, is presented as a kind of cowardly sniping. There is an almost obscured allusion

² Shaun Regan notes that Pope’s account of the poisoning of Curll in his letter to John Caryll ‘[draws] upon a gentlemanly model of retribution against rogues’ (“Pranks, Unfit for Naming”: Pope, Curll, and the “Satirical Grotesque”, *The Eighteenth Century* 46 (2005), 37-59, 37.

³ Pope, *Poems* (Longman), iii. 129.

⁴ Pope, *Poems*, (Longman), iii. 130.

here to Francis Bacon's 1625 essay, 'Of Revenge': 'Some, when they take *Revenge*, are Desirous the party should know, whence it commeth: This is the more Generous. . . . But Base and Crafty Cowards, are like the Arrow, that flyeth in the Darke.'⁵ Bacon is conflating elements from Psalm 91 ('Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; Of the pestilence that stalks in darkness, Or of the destruction that lays waste at noon'.⁶) He, and perhaps Pope, may also have in mind 'the wicked' who 'shoote in the dark' in Psalm 11.2.⁷ Pope adopts the image of the arrow flying in the dark from the Psalms, via Bacon, to suggest that the dunces' anonymity or obscurity is not just a sign but a guarantee of their wickedness, justifying his personal attacks as a means of dragging such 'Base and Crafty Cowards' into the full glare of justice. However, what looks like a forensic tracing of origins might really be a way of taking aim, disguised. In the 1728 *Dunciad*, the dunce's names were obscured by partial blanks (i.e., 'C—I' for 'Curll'), deliberately encouraging speculation.⁸ So, whilst the passage above suggests that Pope's particular satire used a kind of ballistic analysis to retrace the parabola of the dunces' arrows, at least a part of Pope's strategy in 1728 was to loose one in the general direction of Grub Street, in order to see who yelped.⁹ This difficulty of determining who started it, to use the language of the

⁵ Francis Bacon, *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall*, ed. Michael Kiernan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 17.

⁶ KJV Psalms 91:5-6. Kiernan notes that Bacon makes the same conflation in the 'Charge against Somerset' (188 *n.* 27-8).

⁷ The wicked 'shoote in the dark' in the version familiar to English Catholics (Douay-Rheims (1635, vol. 2), where the Psalm is numbered 10). In the King James Version, they 'privily shoot'.

⁸ On the complex games of identification provoked by Scriblerian texts, see Freya Johnston, 'Alexander Pope: Unlocking the Key' *RES* (published online March 19, 2016).

⁹ Thomas Alcock describes Rochester's impersonation as a similarly speculative ('Experimentall') attack on the title page of his manuscript account: 'he aim'd at Physicall Practise | and shott his *Experimental Darts* | at the

playground, is both a problem and an opportunity for practical satire. As attacks masquerading as defences, they purport to identify and punish malefactors, but really engineer circumstance or fabricate history, forcing their targets to confess a ‘truth’ that would never otherwise pass their lips, thereby justifying their punishment. If one goes back far enough etymologically, to revenge means ‘to force to speak’.¹⁰ Bacon tells us that ‘a Man that studieth *Revenge*, keeps his owne Wounds greene, which otherwise would heale, and doe well’.¹¹ The vindictive person’s wounds are ‘greene’ not because they are mortifying or rotting, but ‘greene’ as in ‘recent, fresh, unhealed, raw’, a past injury forced to speak to the present.¹² These three practical satires seek to harness and maintain something like the potential energy of the invisible arrow hanging in the air, keeping wounds green, unhealed, and raw.

The counterfeit’s example

John Wilmot, 2nd Earl of Rochester (1647-1680), was a restoration courtier, poet, and dramatist whose reputation as a rake and mischief-maker has been preserved and expanded by his poetic self-representations, contemporary rumour and lampoon, and posthumous

Greedy to be wounded’ (Thomas Alcock, *The Famous Pathologist or The Noble Mountebank* ed. Vivian de Sola Pinto (Sisson and Parker: Nottingham, 1961), 23. My emphasis). Elsewhere, Bacon warns that ‘the arrow that flies by night’ makes ‘men die other men’s deaths,’ because ‘it hath no aim and certainty’ (*Essayes*, 188 n. 27-8).

¹⁰ The verb ‘revenge’ deriving from Latin vindicare, formed through the following combination: ‘*vim*, accusative singular of *vīs* force + *dic-*, stem of *dīcēre* to say’ (*OED*, vindicate v., etymology).

¹¹ Bacon, *The Essayes*, 17.

¹² *OED* green, *adj.* 7. B.

anecdote.¹³ According to his early biographer, Gilbert Burnet, the earl ‘took pleasure to disguise himself as a porter or as a beggar; sometimes to follow mean amours’. ‘[A]t other times,’ Burnet continues, ‘merely for diversion, he would go about in odd shapes’.¹⁴ Rochester’s alleged impersonation of the Italian mountebank, Alexander Bendo, is the most notorious of these ‘odd shapes’. The pamphlet that Rochester’s editor Harold Love has given the title of ‘Alexander Bendo’s Brochure’ most probably appeared in the summer of 1676. This ‘sympathetic impersonation’ of doctors’ handbills is the most reliable documentary evidence we have of Rochester actually impersonating the mountebank, but as evidence of a ‘real’ performance, it is inconclusive at best.¹⁵ It spends much of its time engaged in broad political satire, playing with the non-distinction between the ‘real’ and the counterfeit, offering miraculous but unaccountable cures to the public, to women in particular, before closing by inviting readers to visit Bendo at the sign of the Black Swan in Tower Street. Bendo opens by inveighing against a ‘company’ who have ‘impose[d] upon the people . . . in Physick, Chymical and Galenic, in Astrology, Physiognomy, Palmistry, Mathematicks, Alchimy and even Government it self; the last of which I will not purpose to discours of, or meddle at all in’.¹⁶ It would not take a particularly sophisticated reader to notice that the mountebank was protesting too much, especially as ‘Government’ comes at the end of a list

¹³ Many of these anecdotes are collected in John Adlard, ed., *The Debt to Pleasure* (New York: Routledge, 2002). For a briefer summary, see Anne Richter, ‘John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester’, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 53 (1967), 47-69, 50-55.

¹⁴ Adlard, 52.

¹⁵ ‘Sympathetic impersonation’ is Love’s phrase (*The Works of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 437).

¹⁶ Rochester, *Works*, 112.

featuring some dubious sciences, rubbing shoulders with alchemy.¹⁷ Rochester is setting up a situation in which distinctions are eroded or discernment fails: apparently legitimate disciplines (Mathematicks) are mixed indifferently with quackery (Palmistry). This is elaborated on in a passage no critic of this pamphlet has allowed to pass unremarked:

[I]f I appear to any one like a Counterfeit, even for the sake of that ought I to be construed a true man, who is the Counterfeits example, his original, and that which he employs his industry and pains to copy; is it therefore my fault if the Cheat by his Wits and Endeavours makes himself so like me, that consequently I cannot avoid of resembling him'.¹⁸

Here indifference bleeds into a kind of mimetic infection, as the counterfeit does not just ape but contaminates the real. Anne Righter notes that, in this passage, Rochester 'overthrows . . . the basic conviction of antithesis'.¹⁹ Bendo is not simply suggesting that the true can sometimes be mistaken for the false, but that in a certain sense, or 'in a world like this', they are *effectively* identical.²⁰ That said, it is possible to overstate Bendo's relativism. He is interested in essential distinctions, but insists that they can only be perceived by way of various kinds of mortifying experience.

Bendo gives four examples of apparently opposed characters—brave men and cowards, bankrupts and rich men, politicians and fools, true and false physicians—and draws

¹⁷ Don Bourne reads the pamphlet as one of Rochester's 'sharpest criticisms of Charles II' in "'If I Appear to Any One Like a Counterfeit': Liminality in Rochester's *Alexander Bendo's Brochure*", *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700* 32 (2008), 3-17, 3.

¹⁸ Rochester, *Works*, 113.

¹⁹ Righter, 49.

²⁰ Rochester, *Works*, 113.

attention to the identity of their behaviours. However, while ‘the difference betwixt all these’ is ‘nice in all appearance’, it remains ‘infinite in effect’.²¹ If Bendo comically undervalues the ‘real’ distinctions between these figures (courage, for instance, is ‘only one point of honour’), he remains unwilling to discard them, emphasising the process by which such differences are found out. That process resembles the playing out of a hoax. It is ‘real Cash’ which makes the difference between the bankrupt and the solvent merchant, ‘a great defect indeed, and yet but one, and that the last found out, and still then the least perceived’. The bankrupt is full of potential only for as long as he is able to defer discovery. Whilst such a discovery may be inevitable, there is no guarantee it will be made quickly; that his ‘defect’ is the last found out (when he is unable to pay his debts) suggests that ‘true’ knowledge comes with a price tag. The discoveries of the coward and the false doctor are even more mortifying. ‘Courage’ is a point of honour which ‘only one trial can discover’ (i.e. ‘trial’ by combat).²² The exposure of the coward may be embarrassing; it may also involve their death, or that of those they are supposed to protect. Finally, and with the most understated comedy, Bendo declares that when it comes to impostor quacks and true physicians, ‘’tis only your experience must distinguish betwixt them’.²³ This revelation comes by way of an experience that is doubly mortifying. Firstly, one way of being sure that a doctor is not a ‘true’ one is to be killed by them. Secondly, Rochester implies that the only way of determining whether Bendo is a real doctor or not would be to turn up at his premises, leading to mortification of a different kind.

²¹ Rochester, *Works*, 114.

²² Courage and cowardice may have been playing on Rochester’s mind, having fled the scene of a fatal brawl in Epsom on 18 June 1676. See James William Johnson, *A Profane Wit: The Life of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester* (Rochester, NY: The University of Rochester Press, 2004), 245-261, esp. 250-51.

²³ Rochester, *Works*, 114.

Kirke Combe points out that Bendo names no essential difference between the politician and the fool. He is being straightforwardly satirical, but also hinting that politicians are especially difficult to ‘find out’.²⁴ This is developed in a comparison of the mountebank and politicians, whose unifying quality is their ability to defer revelation. Like Swift’s Bickerstaff, Rochester openly courts the possibility of exposure.²⁵ ‘I’ll only say something to the honour of the Mountebanck,’ he continues, ‘in case you discover me to be one’:

[H]e draws great companies to him by undertaking strange things which can never be effected. The Politician (by his example no doubt) finding how the people are taken with specious, miraculous, impossibilities, plays the same game, protests, declares, promises I know not what things, which he's sure can ne’re be brought about; the people believe, are deluded and pleased, the expectation of a future good which shall never befall them draws their eyes off a present evil: Thus are they kept and establish’d in Subjection, Peace, and Obedience; he in Greatness, Wealth, and Power.²⁶

The hoaxer and the politician are able to keep their subjects in tow for as long as they are able to keep them in suspense. As befits an advertisement, Rochester’s pamphlet stimulates a desire that can only be maintained by people who are willing forgo experience, to uphold the fiction that Alexander Bendo is ‘real’ (either really a true doctor or really a false doctor, it

²⁴ *A Martyr for Sin* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware, 1995), 127.

²⁵ ‘Besides,’ writes Bendo, ‘I hope you will not think I could be so imprudent, that if I had intended any such foul play my self, I would have given you so fair warning by my severe observations upon others’ (*Works*, 113). In *A Vindication of Issac Bickerstaff*, Bickerstaff asks if it would ‘be probable I could have been so indiscreet, to begin my Predictions with the only Falshood that ever was pretended to be in them’, Swift, *Works* (Cambridge), ii. 72.

²⁶ Rochester, *Works*, 114.

matters little), in the face of the clear knowledge that he is not. To the attentive reader, the advertisement effectively promises disappointment by way of mortifying experience; it also challenges them to subject themselves to the fiction regardless.

One such reader was Rochester's former servant, Thomas Alcock, who sent a transcription of Bendo's brochure to the earl's daughter Ann Baynton and her husband Henry on New Year's Day 1688. Alcock prefaced the transcription with a supposedly eyewitness account of Rochester's 'practice' as Bendo. This account has generally been too readily accepted as authentic. Loveman's take on it is instructive. She warns, '[e]arly modern readers . . . were particularly fond of recounting the credulity of other readers'. 'The performance aspect of this hoax,' she continues, 'either never happened, or was subject to exaggeration from the first report'.²⁷ Indeed, Alcock describes a production that would not have looked out of place at Drury Lane Theatre: supported by a cast of characters pretending to make mysterious medicines (and dressed like the witches in *Macbeth*), Rochester is costumed 'in an old overgrown Green Gown . . . lyned through with exotick furs of diverse colours, an antique Cap, a great Reverend Beard,' and 'a Magnificent false Medal . . . w^{ch} the King of Cyprus (you must know) had given him for doing a signal Cure upon his darling Daughter the Princess Aloephangina, who was painted in a banner'.²⁸ This is more than reportage. Bendo's medallion is made, according to Alcock, of 'Prince's mettle', a cheap alloy that imitates brass or gold. Alcock is offering the perspectives of an audience member or victim and perpetrator by turns, bolstering his claims to first-hand knowledge. The King of Cyprus and his bawdily-named daughter are supposedly a part of the fictional world Alcock wants us to believe that Bendo had constructed. The revelation that the medallion was made of a 'false' alloy, on the other hand, is a sort of backstage knowledge. However, these are not production notes, but a

²⁷ Loveman, 13-15.

²⁸ Alcock, 28-9.

kind of meta-commentary. ‘Aloephangina’ is a purging medicine, the name of which has the ring of ‘vagina.’²⁹ It enables Alcock to impute that the ‘signal cure’ Bendo administered to the King of Cyprus’s daughter was sexual, a move in line with bawdy jokes elsewhere.³⁰ ‘Prince’s mettle’ is also functioning allegorically in ways that it could not in a ‘performance’ intended to trick people.³¹ Alcock enters into the spirit of Rochester’s pamphlet, certainly, but his descriptions are full of entertaining excursions intended to test the Baynton’s credulity, or their willingness to feign it. As with the ‘lying games’ Loveman describes, Alcock mixes obscure ‘factual’ detail with invention.³² Bendo’s acquaintance with the ‘King of Cyprus’ shores up his claim to an Italian background. The reference is to Charles Immanuel II (1634-1675), the recently deceased Duke of Savoy, whose ancestors adopted the title ‘King of Cyprus’ in 1396, and who lived in Turin. Although the Duke of Savoy had ‘a vigorous sexual life’ resulting in five illegitimate children by three mistresses, none of them were named ‘Aloephangina’.³³

Yet, since Vivian de Sola Pinto’s discovery and publication of the Alcock manuscript, critics have generally taken this extension of Rochester’s hoax at face value, and in doing so, revealed some of the ways in which practical satire operates. For instance, at the end of his

²⁹ On the uses of aloephangina pills, see J. Pechey, *A Plain Introduction to the Art of Physick* (1697), 331.

³⁰ See the description of Rochester’s cross-dressing seduction of female clients, 26-7.

³¹ If Bendo told the audience his medallion was made of ‘prince’s mettle,’ he would alert them to the fakery of his practice; if he did not say such a thing to the audience, they would assume it was brass (or, indeed, gold).

Alcock may be picking up on the original pamphlet’s reference to ‘false Metal,’ which can only be discovered ‘by trial’, 113.

³² Loveman, 66-69.

³³ Robert Oresko, ‘Maria Giovanna Battista of Savoy-Nemours (1644-1724): daughter, consort, and Regent of Savoy’ in Clarissa Campbell Orr, ed., *Queenship in Europe 1660-1815: The Role of the Consort* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 16–55, 24.

account, Alcock writes, ‘It was some time rumour’d that they were an Incharnted Crew, raised and laid by Necromancie’ (30). He is exaggerating readerly credulity for Ann Baynton’s entertainment. Rochester’s biographer Johnson, however, reports the joke as fact.³⁴ To intimate that there really were ‘customers’ who thought such a thing is not to analyse but to perpetuate Alcock’s shamming. Similarly, Combe writes, ‘[w]e as in-the-know readers enjoy the [hand]bill *because* we know other, less informed readers are fooled by it’.³⁵ However, though we, like contemporaries, might like to imagine credulous victims—and while the hoax might *require* us to imagine such victims—to say that we ‘know’ the hoax has succeeded is to take as read practical satire’s representation of its own successes.³⁶ Such interpretations are driven by an assumption that a practical satire requires real victims suffering in the world. However, victims are less necessary than participants—people like Alcock—who can furnish representations of dupes. Practical satire appeals to a persistent and powerful desire to report the credulity of others, but participation is a felicity from which we need to absent ourselves to properly understand these episodes, and to avoid mortifications of our own.

As Dead as Dr Partridge

In December 1687, while Alcock was busy writing his account, there appeared a pamphlet called *Mene Tekel*.³⁷ In it, the radical Whig astrologer John Partridge predicted the death of

³⁴ ‘Dr. Bendo’s sudden disappearance was reported by his baffled clients to be the effect of necromancy’ (*A Profane Wit*, 257).

³⁵ Rochester, *Works*, 125.

³⁶ Loveman’s reading of the tales of people ‘duped’ by *Gulliver’s Travels* as ‘a Scriblerian game’ demonstrates a more sensible approach to such accounts (166-7).

³⁷ Alcock dates his transcription 13 December 1687 (38).

the king, James II, or at least did so by implication. The following year, James II was dethroned, but, of course, did not die. Undeterred, Partridge reissued his prediction, with the brazen qualification that the king had suffered ‘a civil death,’ which he insists was ‘worse than *Death*’.³⁸ That is, Partridge represents the success of his own prediction, flying in the face of mortifying experience. Jonathan Swift arrived in England in January 1689. Whether or not he saw Partridge’s *Mene Tekel* and its sequel at that time, he was familiar enough with them by the spring of 1708 to parodically commemorate Partridge’s activities.³⁹ In *Predictions for the Year 1708*, probably published in February, Swift poses as Isaac Bickerstaff, a gentleman minded to reform the science of astrology.⁴⁰ Having stated this intention, he gets straight down to business: John Partridge, he says, will ‘infallibly dye upon the 29th of *March* next’.⁴¹ Naturally, Partridge did not die. Just as naturally, Swift insisted that he did, in a mock-elegy and epitaph, and *The Accomplishment of the First of Mr. Bickerstaff’s Predictions*, in which an ‘impartial’ observer attends Partridge’s death bed.⁴² In his almanac for 1709, Partridge reassured his readers that he was still breathing. Swift was unable to resist this invitation, and in *A Vindication of Isaac Bickerstaff* refuted that fact with a serious of

³⁸ John Partridge, *Mene Mene, Tekel Upharsin* (1689), sigs. A3-A3^v. Italics inverted.

³⁹ On *Mene Tekel* and Swift’s knowledge thereof, see N. F. Lowe, ‘Why Swift Killed Partridge’, *Swift Studies* 6 (1991) 70-82. For details of Partridge’s career as a radical whig propagandist, see *ODNB*; John McTague, ‘“There is no such man as Isaack Bickerstaff”: Partridge, Pittis, and Jonathan Swift’, *ECL* 35.1 (2011), 83-101; ‘A Letter from John Partridge To Isaac Manley, 24 April 1708: Provenance and Authenticity’, *N&Q* 59.3 (2012), 197-202, 198; and Rumbold’s Headnote to *Predictions*, in Swift, *Works* (Cambridge), ii. 36-40.

⁴⁰ On dating, see Rumbold, *Parodies*, 642-643, and G. P. Mayhew, ‘Swift’s Bickerstaff Hoax as April Fools’ Joke’, *Modern Philology* 61 (1964), 270-280.

⁴¹ Rochester, *Works*, 49.

⁴² See Mayhew, ‘Swift’s Bickerstaff Hoax’ and Rumbold, ‘Burying the Fanatic Partridge: Swift’s Holy Week Hoax’ in Claude Rawson, ed. *Politics and Literature in the Age of Swift: English and Irish Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 81-115.

brilliantly absurd arguments. As well as Bickerstaff being adopted by Steele and Addison as the voice of their influential periodical, *The Tatler*, in April 1709, a number of continuations and rejoinders emerged in ensuing years.⁴³

One reason for the Bickerstaff hoax's success is the sheer comic joy attendant on addressing a living person as though they were dead. Against this kind of appeal Partridge could do little, and (with one exception) his responses served as more grist to the satirist's mill.⁴⁴ In 1709's *Vindication of Isaac Bickerstaff*, for instance, Bickerstaff gleefully reports the response of 'Above a Thousand Gentlemen' to Partridge's insistence that he was yet living: 'They were sure,' he writes 'no Man alive ever writ such damned Stuff as this. Neither did I ever hear that Opinion disputed: So that Mr. *Partridge* lies under a *Dilemma*, either of disowning his Almanack, or allowing himself to be, *No Man alive*'.⁴⁵ Bickerstaff recasts Partridge's continued existence as an unaccountably impolite obstinacy:

[I]f an *uninformed* Carcass walks still about, and is pleased to call it self *Partridge*, Mr. *Bickerstaff* does not think himself any way answerable for that. Neither had the said Carcass any Right to beat the poor Boy, who happen'd to pass by it in the Street, crying, *A full and true Account of Dr. Partridge's Death, &c.*⁴⁶

'Partridge's' response to this doubly mortifying experience is understandable enough, but only the first layer of the joke. Rumbold sees in '*uninformed*' an allusion to Aristotelian form

⁴³ For an account of some of these responses see *Parodies*, 645-7.

⁴⁴ The exception is the preface to Partridge's *Merlinus Redivivus* for 1714, which engages wittily with the comic potential of death and resurrection (see John Partridge, *Merlinus Redivivus* (1714), sig. A1^v, and Rumbold, 'Burying', 101-2).

⁴⁵ Swift, *Works* (Cambridge), ii. 71.

⁴⁶ Swift, *Works* (Cambridge), ii. 72.

or soul, that which gives shape and purpose to matter.⁴⁷ Losing his temper, Partridge is barely able to hold himself together; he is also said to be disintegrating in more fundamental ways. Indeed, to be ‘as Dead as Dr. Partridge’ came to mean something quite specific: to suffer a kind of ‘civil death’, or a slaying of reputation.⁴⁸ At the end of the *Vindication*, Bickerstaff complains that he has been ‘employed, like the General, who was forced to kill his Enemies twice over, whom a *Necromancer* had raised to Life’.⁴⁹ In 1710, Defoe wrote that Partridge, having suffered ‘a Death without a Grave,’ ‘was mercifully admitted to walk about after he was dead.’⁵⁰ Defoe recognises that, despite Bickerstaff’s complaints, the transformation of John Partridge into an undead punch-bag is precisely the point.

Keeping the punch-bag suspended and swinging became more important as the hoax progressed. In the first pamphlet, Bickerstaff is explicit in his request for a fair hearing: ‘A little time will determine, whether I have deceiv’d others, or my self; and I think it no very unreasonable Request, that Men would please to suspend their Judgements till then’.⁵¹ This seems to set the parameters of the hoax, or the space in which it will operate: from publication until 29 March. Like Bendo, Bickerstaff submits to the prospect of being ‘hoot[ed] . . . for a cheat and an impostor’ by ‘*Partridge*, and the rest of his clan’ should his predictions fail. In the *Vindication*, po-faced, he reports, ‘several of my Friends had the

⁴⁷ Swift, *Works* (Cambridge), ii. 72 n. 26.

⁴⁸ The phrase is used of Richard Steele by William Wagstaffe, and refers to the damage done to Steele’s reputation by the furore surrounding 1713’s *The Importance of Dunkirk Consider’d*: ‘Our Author has given his reputation such a Stab, that I can scarcely think but he is in some Measure guilty of self Murder, and as dead as Dr. *Partridge*, or any other Person he *killed* formerly’ (*Miscellaneous Works of Dr William Wagstaffe* (London, 1726 [1725]), 135).

⁴⁹ Swift, *Works* (Cambridge), ii. 74.

⁵⁰ Daniel Defoe, *A Condoling Letter to the Tatler* ([1710]), 7.

⁵¹ Swift, *Works* (Cambridge), ii. 57.

Assurance to ask me, Whether I were in Jest? To which I only answered coldly, *That the Event would shew*'.⁵² Swift is mocking astrology's supposed reliance on this kind of confirmation, but the success of this practical satire was never really dependent on a real 'event'. In the midst of the hoax, Swift realises the importance of suspension and participation, developing into what Rumbold identifies as his 'impressive blend of fertility and detachment in relation to the Bickerstaff project'.⁵³ The first sign of this is his decision to pull one of his punches: *An Answer to Bickerstaff*, originally intended to follow on the heels of *Predictions*, did not emerge until after his death. Rumbold contends that Swift refrained because publication 'would have brought the hoax to what would in the event have been a premature end'.⁵⁴ This pamphlet is written in the voice of a sceptical 'Person of Quality', who sees through *Predictions* for the hoax it is: 'it is a *bite*: he has fully had his jest, and may be satisfied.'⁵⁵ This is quite final: crying 'a bite' marked the end of a sham.⁵⁶ *An Answer* also suggests that Bickerstaff's prognostications might be more coercive than predictive:

[I]f [Partridge] . . . has any faith in his own art, the prophesy may punctually come to pass by very natural means. As a gentleman of my acquaintance, who was ill-used by a mercer in town, writ him a letter in an unknown hand, to give him notice that care had been taken to convey a slow poison into his drink, which would infallibly kill him in a month; after which the man began in earnest to languish and decay, by the mere

⁵² Swift, *Works* (Cambridge), ii. 74.

⁵³ Swift, *Works* (Cambridge), ii. xxxvi.

⁵⁴ 645. For Loveman, Swift's withholding of this 'explanation of the bite . . . shows that there was a widespread understanding of how shams worked and were to be enjoyed' (161).

⁵⁵ Swift, *Works* (Cambridge), ii. 574.

⁵⁶ See Loveman, 154-5.

strength of imagination, and would certainly have died, if care had not been taken to undeceive him before the jest went too far.⁵⁷

Swift encountered this reading of prophecy as scaremongering in Pierre Bayle's 1705 account of the predictions Partridge made in 1688.⁵⁸ *An Answer* rather bluntly explains what its replacement, *The Accomplishment*, dramatizes: the former precludes the feigning of credulity before the jest has gone not 'too far,' but not far enough. Abandoning closure and explication in favour of continuation and performance, Swift decides to show rather than tell. In *The Accomplishment*, the impartial observer asks an ailing Partridge 'whether the Predictions Mr. *Bickerstaff* had published relating to his Death, had not too much affected and worked on his Imagination':

He confess'd he had often had it in his Head, but never with much Apprehension, till about a Fortnight before; since which Time it had the perpetual Possession of his Mind and Thoughts, and he did verily believe was the true Natural Cause of his present Distemper.⁵⁹

Satire is operating here less like medicine than like a placebo, as *Bickerstaff's* Partridge confesses the 'real' (i.e. psychosomatic) efficacy of prediction as coercion.⁶⁰ By choosing *Accomplishment* over *An Answer*, Swift does not just keep Partridge in limbo for a little

⁵⁷ Swift, *Works* (Cambridge), ii. 574.

⁵⁸ See Lowe, 'Why Swift Killed Partridge'.

⁵⁹ Swift, *Works* (Cambridge), ii. 62.

⁶⁰ On the metaphorical connections between satire and medicine, see Noelle Gallagher, 'Satire as Medicine in the Restoration and Early Eighteenth Century: The History of a Metaphor' *Literature and Medicine* 31 (2013), 17-39.

longer, but inaugurates the ‘Possession’ of Partridge’s voice that is the key to furnishing him with a death without a grave.

The riotous *Squire Bickerstaff Detected*, a pamphlet which has proved difficult to attribute, but which is certainly not by Swift, is driven by the kind of wish fulfilment that motivates Alcock’s account, exaggerating not just the severity but the duration of Bickerstaff’s effect on Partridge, whose voice the pamphlet appropriates.⁶¹ ‘Partridge’ complains of a succession of his neighbours invading his house or haranguing him on the street, united in their insistence upon his being dead. Although the pamphlet helps to give Partridge a death without a grave, ‘Ned, the Sexton’ tries hard to give him a grave without a death. He asks the astrologer, ‘whether his Grave is to be plain or brick’d?’ Partridge, having answered his door ably enough, denies his decease (‘you know I am not dead’). With indignation, Ned retaliates, ‘Alack-a-day, Sir . . . why, ’tis in Print, and the whole Town knows you are dead’.⁶² For Ned, the public signs of death (an announcement in print, church bells) trump the flesh-and-blood man with whom he converses. Ned is modelling the kind of participation that practical satire requires. He is not simply a gull. Nor, for that matter, is Partridge. Practical satire works not by ‘tricking’ unsuspecting ‘victims’, but by persisting belligerently in spite of everyone’s consciousness of its fakery. ‘Partridge’ describes the effects of this obstinacy not just on his business, but his health: ‘In short, what with Undertakers, Embalmers, Joiners, Sextons, and your damn’d Elegy-Hawkers . . . I got not one Wink of Sleep that Night, nor scarce a Moment’s Rest ever since’.⁶³ The imagined effect here is one of suspended agitation, a state in which Partridge is maintained for a long time. The assumption has generally been that *Squire Bickerstaff Detected* followed quickly on the heels

⁶¹ On attribution, see Rumbold, *Parodies*, 565-6.

⁶² Swift, *Works* (Cambridge), ii. 569.

⁶³ Swift, *Works* (Cambridge), ii. 570.

of *Predictions* in 1708.⁶⁴ However, we can say with some confidence that it appeared on 19 August 1710, when an advertisement in the newspaper *The Post Boy* says it was published ‘this day’. The advertisement is not for a second or later edition, but the first appearance. A bantering notice written by Joseph Addison in *The Tatler* no. 216 (for 26-29 August) warns that ‘an ignorant Upstart in Astrology has publicly endeavoured to persuade the World that he is the late John Partridge, who died the 29th of March, 1708.’ ‘Beware of Counterfeits’, it continues, ‘for such are abroad’.⁶⁵ Addison is picking up on ‘Partridge’s’ reluctant cry of protest in *Squire Bickerstaff Detected*: ‘The famous Dr. *Partridge!* No Counterfeit, but all alive!’⁶⁶ In a letter to Thomas Wharton on 24 August, Addison writes: ‘Among the prints which I send you by this Post, the “Essay upon Credit” is said to be written by Mr. Harley, and that of ‘Bickerstaff detected’, by Mr. Congreve.’⁶⁷ The attributions are gossip—the ‘Essay on Credit’ is Defoe’s—but the fact that said *Essay* is advertised on in *The Post Boy* for August 15 1710 confirms that Addison is passing on new publications to Wharton, strongly suggesting in turn that this is the first appearance ‘Bickerstaff detected’. Finally, Defoe’s *Condoling Letter to the Tatler* (discussed above) was published around 20 September 1710, and latches on to the Bickerstaff persona in ways that suggest a recent reading of *Squire*

⁶⁴ Herbert Davis dates the piece to April 1708, without saying why: Swift, *PW*, ii. xiv. In her edition, Rumbold says it appears ‘presumably during 1708’ (Swift, *Works* (Cambridge), ii. 565), though she notes the 1710 advertisement discussed below in ‘Burying’, 109. W. A. Eddy gives ‘1709 [?]’ in ‘The Wits vs. Partridge the Astrologer’, *Studies in Philology* 29 (1932), 29-40, 39. More recently Claude Rawson suggested ‘ca. 1710,’ following D. F. McKenzie, whose Congreve edition dates the piece from the Addison letter also discussed below (‘Congreve and Swift’ in Ashley Marshall, ed., *Representation, Heterodoxy, and Aesthetics: Essays in Honor of Ronald Paulson* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), 21; Congreve, William, *The Works of William Congreve*, ed. D. F. McKenzie, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), III.269).

⁶⁵ *Tatler*, iii. 135.

⁶⁶ Swift, *Works* (Cambridge), ii. 571.

⁶⁷ *The Letters of Joseph Addison*, ed. Walter Graham (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), 232.

Bickerstaff Detected.⁶⁸ So, rather than quick-wittedly contributing to a barrage of harassment in April and May 1708, *Squire Bickerstaff Detected* encourages readers to imagine a John Partridge who has had ‘scarce a Moment’s Rest’ for the past two and a half years.⁶⁹

Quiv’ring there

Five and a half years later, Pope disturbed the repose of the bookseller, Edmund Curll, by tricking him into drinking an emetic draught, a ‘*Revenge by Poison*’ that was suited to Curll’s crimes.⁷⁰ On 26 March, Curll released *Court Poems*, a slim volume containing three poems by Pope’s friends, John Gay and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, which were published without their knowledge.⁷¹ A preface insinuated authorship of the whole by these two poets in turn, before finally reporting the opinion of ‘a distinguished Gentleman’ that the author was Pope. He responded to this malicious misattribution by forcing Curll to speak publicly what he never did in private (in accordance with the etymology of ‘vindicate’). Summoning

⁶⁸ Note particularly their shared interest in graves. For date see Paula R. Backscheider, *Daniel Defoe: His Life* (Baltimore, London: John Hopkins UP, 1989), 329.

⁶⁹ The unrest is imaginary: on the appeal and fallaciousness of the idea that John Partridge’s almanac was ‘stopped’ by Swift’s hoax and that the hoax affected his personal and political life permanently see Richmond P. Bond, ‘John Partridge and the Company of Stationers’, *Studies in Bibliography*, 76 (1963): 61-80), and John McTague, ‘A Letter from John Partridge To Isaac Manley’, 201-202.

⁷⁰ The act is so labelled in the title: *A Full and True Account of a Horrid and Barbarous Revenge by Poison on the Body of Mr. Edmund Curll, Bookseller* (1716).

⁷¹ Of the three episodes examined by this chapter, this the one most likely to have taken place in something like the manner described (see Paul Baines and Pat Rogers, *Edmund Curll, Bookseller* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2007), 82, and Curll’s own matter-of-fact report of the incident in *The Curliad* (1729), 20-21.) Baines and Rogers give a detailed account of the affair (63-110).

Curll to a meeting through the offices of his publisher Lintot on 28 March, the poet questioned him about *Court Poems*, and appearing to accept an explanation, drank the bookseller's health. Curll duly drank Pope's, unwittingly consuming the poison dissolved in his wine. Pope's pamphlet, *A Full and True Account*, then picks up the narration from inside Curll's home, where he is taken violently ill, summons some of his business associates, and proceeds to make 'a verbal Will'.⁷² This is really a catalogue of his ill deeds, which in its limp apologetics reflects the kind of moral apathy Pope constantly associates with the commodification of literary endeavour. As the market debases literature into so much paper, so Curll's 'purging' begins as a confession and ends as so much effluent. At first, Curll manages to speak 'between the Intervals of his Yawnings and Reachings', but as the account progresses, the difference between involuntary retching and speaking collapses.⁷³ When 'Mr. Pemberton' objects to an item in Curll's will, we are told, '*some Dispute might have arisen, unbecoming a dying Person, if Mr. Lintott had not interposed, and Mr. Curll vomited.*' That indifferent 'and' between Lintott's interposition and Curll's vomit mischievously suggests equivalence, leaving it comically unclear which intervention is the more effective. Later, the 'Confusion and Imperfection' of the *Account* is attributed to Curll's being 'perpetually interrupted by Vomitings'; Pope's pamphlet mimics Curll's 'dissolution' as the famous lines in his 1711 poem, *An Essay on Criticism*, perform the metrical effects they describe (as when we hear that 'ten low Words oft creep in one dull Line').⁷⁴ Curll's voice shifts in tandem with his bowels, too: '*In this last Paragraph Mr. Curll's Voice grew more free, for his Vomitings abated upon his Dejections [i.e. excrements].*'⁷⁵ That strange sense of location—the idea that

⁷² *Full and True Account*, 3.

⁷³ *Full and True Account*, 3.

⁷⁴ *A Full and True Account*, 5; 6; Pope, *Poems* (Twickenham), i. 276-283 (ll. 337-373).

⁷⁵ *Full and True Account*, 3.

Curll's voice grew more free 'in this last Paragraph'—indicates Pope's reduction of Curll to print: his body is subsumed into text. hilariously, Pope implies that in reported speech such as 'I have vilify'd his Grace the Duke of M——gh', Curll is *speaking* in the partial blanks his publications used as a means of evading prosecution. The interruption of these names may represent the effect (and precise timing) of Curll's 'Vomitings', cementing the impression that he has become identical with the tricks of his own publications.

According to E. V. Chandler, Pope published his two accounts of the poisoning 'to make sure that his trick was publicly immortalized'.⁷⁶ That Curll's private condition was rendered public is vital, but Chandler has the events in the wrong order. Rather, Pope poisoned Curll so that he could 'publicly immortalize' the trick: the event is subordinate to the satire. Pope takes the decision to poison Curll not, as has been suggested, because his disability left him unable to give the bookseller a drubbing, but because of the particular metaphorical opportunities that a vomiting and defecating bookseller afforded.⁷⁷ For Regan, Pope's '*inscription* of bodily debasements was a productive process which actively constituted its target, rather than one which described the already available facts of his victim's carcass'.⁷⁸ Like Swift and Rochester, Pope is not interested in finishing Curll off. The poisoning gives him the opportunity to appropriate Curll's person. In its last paragraph, *A Full and True Account* leaves Curll suspended, stinking, on the brink of death:

The poor Man continued for some Hours with all his disconsolate Family about him in Tears, expecting his final dissolution; when of a sudden he was surprizingly

⁷⁶ E. V. Chandler, 'Pope's Emetic: Bodies, Books, and Filth,' *Genre* 27 (1994), 351-376, 362.

⁷⁷ Maynard Mack suggests the revenge takes this form because of Pope's being 'incapable of giving Curll the caning he deserved' (*Alexander Pope: a Life* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1985), 296). See also E. V. Chandler, 'Pope's Emetic: Bodies, Books, and Filth,' *Genre* 27 (1994), 351-76, 353.

⁷⁸ Regan, 38.

relieved by a plentiful foetid Stool, which obliged them all to retire out of the Room. Notwithstanding, it is judged by Sir *Richard Bl[ackmor]e*, that the Poyson is still Latent in his Body, and will infallibly destroy him by slow Degrees, in less than a Month. It is to be hoped the other Enemies of this wretched Stationer, will not further pursue their Revenge⁷⁹

Recalling both the *Predictions* and *An Answer to Bickerstaff*, this conclusion marks out an interval of time, at the end of which its victim will ‘infallibly’ die. The hope that Curll’s enemies ‘will not further pursue their revenge’ is to be read ironically as an invitation. When *A Further Account of the Condition of Edmund Curll* appeared in August 1716, its title page said that it was ‘To be published weekly’. This was less a genuine ambition than an encouragement to collaborators.⁸⁰ Suspended sentences like these give readers space in which they can maintain their feigned credulity.

In the loosest sense, Pope found some collaborators in the shape of the boys of Westminster School, though it took longer than a month. In retaliation for Curll’s surreptitious and error-ridden publication of a funeral oration given by their head boy, they summoned him on 2 August, and, amongst other humiliations, tossed him in a blanket.⁸¹ Samuel Wesley junior, a staff member at the school, then published *Neck or Nothing*, a poem in the voice of the eccentric bookseller John Dunton, mockingly commiserating with Curll and describing his punishments, which are illustrated in an engraved frontispiece.⁸² According to Regan, Wesley sought in his verse to ‘maintain [Curll] in the impolite postures

⁷⁹ *Full and True Account*, 6. On the ‘latency’ of the poison in Curll’s body, see Regan, 49.

⁸⁰ See also the puzzling ‘Part I.’ on the first page of *Squire Bickerstaff Detected*.

⁸¹ See Baines and Rogers, 94-97. Pope has Curll refer to being ‘toss’d in a Blanket’ in *A Further Account of the most Deplorable Condition of Edmund Curll* (1716), 14.

⁸² Reproduced in Baines and Rogers, 96.

of physical abjection and social humiliation depicted in the illustration.’ Like Pope’s pamphlets, he argues, *Neck or Nothing* is compensating for ‘the truncation, or temporally delimited nature, of Curll’s punishment’.⁸³ In a collision of narrative and plastic art that anticipates, oddly enough, moments in Keats’s ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’, Wesley’s Curll is agitated yet still, hung, ‘quiv’ring there’, like a mortifying piece of meat (‘For ever warm, and still to be enjoyed?’).⁸⁴ These lines ekphrastically anticipate the frontispiece engraving:

. . . aerial thou

Aloft shall thy Proportion show;

For ever carv’d on Wooden Plate,

Shalt hang I’th’ Air like Mahomet.

Whatever thine Effigy might do,

Thy Person could not hover so.⁸⁵

That Curll’s ‘Effigy’ can hover in ways his ‘Person’ could not is the key to the allure of suspension, for Wesley, and the other practical satirists examined here. The problem with Curll’s ‘person’ is its dull dependence on gravity, from which his effigy releases him. *Neck or Nothing*, *A Full and True Account*, Alexander Bendo’s brochure, and *A Vindication of Isaac Bickerstaff* are successful practical satires because they chastise their targets whilst

⁸³ Samuel Wesley, *Neck or Nothing: A Consolatory Letter from Mr. D-nt-n to Mr. C-rl upon his being tost in a Blanket* (1716), 47.

⁸⁴ Wesley, *Neck or Nothing*, 9; Keats, ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ in *The Complete Poems* ed. John Barnard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 345.

⁸⁵ Wesley, *Neck or Nothing*, 10.

managing, with their readers' collusion, to keep the mortifying experience of coming back down to earth forever in prospect.

Pope was also quite capable of collaborating with himself, and he does so nowhere more fully than in *The Dunciad* (major versions in 1728, 1729, 1742, and 1743). Serving as it does, in part, as an updateable catalogue of injuries suffered and inflicted by Pope, it is unsurprising to find the Curll poisoning enshrined in Book II. During a series of scatological games, Curll emerges both victorious and 'Obscene with filth' from a running race.⁸⁶ Having teased him with a number of phantom poets, the goddess Dulness eventually gives him a prize more tangible: a tapestry depicting the practical punishments endured by authors such as Defoe, Tutchin, Ridpath, and Roper. Amongst them, suspended in the air, is Curll:

Himself among the storied Chiefs he spies,

As from the blanket high in air he flies,

And oh! (he cry'd) what street, what lane, but knows

Our purgings, pumpings, blanketings and blows?

In ev'ry loom our labours shall be seen,

And the fresh vomit run for ever green!⁸⁷

The tableau depicted in the frontispiece to *Neck or Nothing* forms the basis of Pope's 'emblem' for Curll. Folding his own chastisement of the bookseller into Wesley's, he commemorates a particular detail from *A Full and True Account*, where the 'contents' of

⁸⁶ Pope, *Poems* (Longman), iii. 219.

⁸⁷ Pope, *Poems* (Longman), iii. 231.

Curll's vomit are said to be 'as Green as Grass'.⁸⁸ In 1716, the greenness served to indicate Curll's choleric disposition.⁸⁹ In these lines, however, like the 'green' wounds of the vindictive man, the vomit is 'forever green', fresh and raw, the past forced to speak to, and in, the present. In his landmark study of the *Dunciads*, Aubrey Williams defended Pope's exaggerated caricaturing of the dunces as 'a necessary part of the "distancing" of the ephemeral in art, of getting the bee into the amber.'⁹⁰ Granted, the suspension of Curll here, and in *Neck or Nothing*, feels more like a pinioning than an embalming. Nevertheless, as Wesley's Curll is 'forever carv'd in Wood', so here his vomit remains 'for ever green', held in a suspended agitation maintained by print's fundamental iterability.

One of the *Dunciad*'s triumphs is the way it makes historical events and persons seem as if they exist only in order to be included in its verse and paratexts, pressing event into the service of satire. Indeed, as the 'publisher' of the first version of the poem explains: 'the *Poem was not made for these Authors, but these authors for the poem*'.⁹¹ The identity of the 'real' dunces, Pope pretends, matters little, for he has a supply as constant as fresh greenery to decorate his fireplace: 'I should judge,' says the 'publisher', 'that they were clapp'd in as they rose, fresh and fresh, and chang'd from day to day, in like manner as when the old boughs wither, we thrust new ones into a chimney'.⁹² This 1728 version, we might recall, is the one populated by those indeterminate blanks that yawn for a name, as a fireplace does for a bough. At the outset of the *Dunciad*'s long life, and throughout it, Pope stresses the

⁸⁸ *Full and True Account*, 3.

⁸⁹ In humoral medicine, cholera causes an excess of irritability, and is identified with or found in (green) bile (*OED cholera*, *n.*).

⁹⁰ Aubrey Williams, *Pope's Dunciad: A Study of its Meaning* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1955), 62.

⁹¹ Pope, *Poems* (Longman), iii. 15.

⁹² Pope, *Poems* (Longman), iii. 15-16.

important of maintenance, creating space for satirical activity, and policing it. In its refusal of closure, its appropriation of its targets' voices, and its deployment of the trappings of historicity to obscure the liberties it takes with 'events', the *Dunciad* resembles, and may have learned from, the practical satires discussed here. Pope, continually tinkering with his most expansive satire, is reluctant to put the dunces down. While they are often falling about, they are also figured by the poem as a swarm, 'conglob'd' around their goddess, 'quiv'ring there' in pointless orbit.⁹³ Retaliating against the arrows flying in the dark for which he held them responsible, Pope turns the precipitate dunces into projectiles that will—that can—never land.

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⁹³ Pope, *Dunciad in Four Books*, 285.

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