

The Roman Adversarial Dialogue in Eighteenth-Century Political Satire

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In the ‘Argument’ to his translation of Persius’ *Satire* 1 (1741), Thomas Brewster fleshed out the poem’s dramatic context in a way that would make sense to his eighteenth-century readers:

We may suppose the Author to be just seated in his Study, and beginning to vent his Indignation in Satire. At this very Juncture, comes in an Acquaintance, who, upon hearing the first Line, dissuades him, by all Means, from an Undertaking so perilous; advising him rather, if he needs must write, to accommodate his Vein to the Taste of the Times, and to write like other People.¹

Brewster’s elaboration of Persius’ rhetorical method was one of a number of eighteenth-century engagements with the Roman technique of structuring satire as an adversarial dialogue, pitting the satirist’s persona against a well-meaning, cautionary, or openly hostile interlocutor.² As Brewster’s gloss indicates, the point of the interlocutor (or *adversarius*) as eighteenth-century satirists understood it was to provide an injection of dramatic interest, a register of difference or dissent, and a rhetorical prompt for the satirist’s assertion of his own position. Formal disputation with an imaginary opponent was the way in which the satire was conceived to draw out error and arrive at truth.³ In this article I consider several instances of the appearance of an *adversarius* in eighteenth-century political verse, in order to demonstrate the flexibility of the dialogue as a model for political argument and sketch out the range of partisan applications it was capable of accommodating. My concern is with the assimilation of the Roman adversarial figure into ‘original’ verse satire and satiric imitations

of the period, rather than with politically motivated translations of particular Roman satires, although pointed renderings of specific poems – Samuel Johnson’s *London* (1738), for instance, in imitation of Juvenal’s *Satires* 3 – were a popular contemporary mode of political commentary.⁴

Eighteenth-century satirists who chose to imitate the Roman dialogue were able to draw on a number of adversarial models in Horace, Persius, and Juvenal, but the dialogues that they came to most readily were Persius’ *Satire* 1 and Horace’s *Satire* 2.1. Both poems use a sceptical *adversarius* to prompt the satirist’s persona into coming up with a convincing apology for his art, which made them appealing to eighteenth-century imitators as frameworks for self-representation and political comment. In *Satire* 2.1, Horace pits his own speaker against Trebatius, chief legal advisor to Julius and Augustus Caesar and a favourite at court. Trebatius counsels the poet’s speaker to stop writing ‘bitter verse’ and instead ‘tell of the feats of Caesar’ in panegyric.⁵ He is there to provide the grounds for Horace’s own assertions that he must indeed carry on writing satire, and no other kind of poetry will do. But despite his prudence Trebatius is, as Howard Weinbrot has shown, ultimately ‘a friend of Horace’s satire’, helpfully raising the arguments that Horace’s persona delights in answering, conversing urbanely on matters of mutual confidence and providing a direct channel to the ear of the prince.⁶ Persius’ *Satire* I, by contrast, dramatizes an argument between adversaries who could not possibly come to terms with each other. The authorial persona insists that he is far too principled to desist from attacking bad writing and corrupt networks of patronage. He is ‘antagonistic, aloof, even marginal’ in his convictions, and will not stay quiet for the sake of expediency.⁷ The *adversarius*, for his part, is stubbornly committed to the artistic and political norms that support his rotten literary establishment. The case seems hopeless, but for the purposes of Persius’ satiric argument the sheer inflexibility of the opponent is what makes him so valuable. As John Aden has shown, he is more of a straw man than a genuine

antagonist, participating unwittingly in the satire that denounces him and supplying a standard of false taste and political unscrupulousness against which Persius' persona can measure his own exceptional virtue.⁸ His function is to stand in for the kind of faithless political world that the satirist could never wish to be part of, and the dialogue dramatizes this feeling of disconnection by means of the pride and aloofness that Persius' persona cultivates, as well as the marked lack of mutual understanding or sympathy between the two interlocutors.

Pope imitated the dialogue structure in four of his 'Horatian' satires: *The First Satire of the Second Book of Horace Imitated* (1733), *An Epistle from Mr. Pope, to Dr. Arbuthnot* (1735), and the two dialogues of the *Epilogue to the Satires* (1738).⁹ These draw variously on elements of Horace's adversarial model in *Satire 2.1* and those of Persius in *Satire 1*. As Aden and Frank Stack have suggested, Pope's approach in *Arbuthnot* and the *First Satire* is to retain the largely ironic character of the debate in Horace's *Satire 2.1*, in which it is clear that Trebatius' intervention will have no effect whatsoever on the satirist's commitment to his art, and each participant is aware that the other is not entirely in earnest.¹⁰ In *Satir 2.1*, Pope's adversary Fortescue (who is labelled 'F.') is sympathetic and politically astute. Ostensibly, his function is to dissuade the poet's persona ('P.') from attacking his targets, but actually he is more of an undercover fellow-satirist, collaborating with P. in laughing at politicians and poets.¹¹ The two interlocutors are evenly matched and the lightness of their dialogic exchanges attests to their mutual understanding. In the *Epistle to Arbuthnot*, likewise, Arbuthnot shares the satirist's political world-view rather than opposing it. Implicitly, he supplies the questions that Pope's persona needs to defend himself and his art ('Why did I write?'), and the very manner in which he dissuades the satirist from attacking his targets allows him an extra laugh at their expense. He dismisses Hervey, for instance, as being barely worth the poet's breath: '*Sporus*, that mere white Curd of Ass's milk? | Satire or Sense alas!

can *Sporus* feel?’¹² Like Fortescue, Arbuthnot enjoys something of the function of fellow-satirist, confirming and compounding Pope’s satiric judgements even as he advises the poet to pick on someone his own size.

There is a marked change of approach in the two dialogues of the *Epilogue to the Satires*, written and published rapidly over the spring and summer of 1738 when Pope’s involvement in Opposition Whig politics was at its height.¹³ In these poems, the adversarial format loses its elements of playful accommodation and becomes antagonistic, staging a hostile encounter between Pope’s persona, ‘P.’ – independent-minded, public-spirited, fervently anti-ministerial – and ‘F.’, a sycophantic court-man who tries unsuccessfully to do the work of the government censor.¹⁴ F. is callow and squeamish (he turns his nose up at Pope’s ‘beastly Line’ about the similarities between literary patronage and hogs eating their own excrement), and he mocks P.’s political fervour, quashing the poet’s earnest praise of his Patriot friends in exile with a less noble reading of events: ‘I think your Friends are out, and would be in.’¹⁵ His arguments are so unsympathetic, ignorant, and intellectually corrupt that they barely need contesting, and in the second dialogue the poet even lets F. have the last word because there is not much he can do in the way of rhetorical damage. The expression of contempt here – preferring dignified silence to re-entering the fray – is also a form of contempt for dialogic exchange more broadly; a sense that it is not worth trying to come to terms with institutions and people so corrupt, and preferable instead to stand aloof from the whole dirty business.

This kind of tough partisan confrontation has little in common with the good-humoured debate of Horace’s dialogues, and several critics have noted that the development of a heightened adversarial mode in the late 1730s indicates that there was a growing irony attached to the ‘Horatian’ label of Pope’s *Imitations*, and a degree of real animus in his description of Horace as ‘delicate, nice’ and his style as ‘sly, polite, insinuating’ (*Epilogue to*

the Satires: Dialogue II, 11, 19). Pope could no longer share – if he ever had done – Horace’s faith in a ‘sustaining power’ in political life that would allow ‘good men and good poets to stand within the center of things’ and feel that their moral order was reflected in the moral order of governance.¹⁶ For the purposes of the *Epilogue to the Satires*, the antagonistic exchanges of Persius’ *Satire I* had more of the right oppositional associations and provided him with a sturdier model of political resistance. In 1738 P. is defiant in the way of Persius’ persona rather than cunningly ‘delicate’ like Horace’s, and F. has much more in common with Persius’ ignorant and stubborn *adversarius* than with Horace’s urbane sparring partners.

What Pope found in Persius was a rhetorical arrangement that allowed him to emphasize the distance, moral and intellectual, between the opportunism and bad faith he attacked and the public-spiritedness he prized. In the figure of P., a satiric speaker proudly defending his principles in the face of overwhelming odds, he could dramatize the disinterest and aloofness that he associated with praiseworthy political opposition, and he could admire virtuous citizenship for its sheer exceptionality, presenting the act of standing up to power as the courage of a single voice speaking out against a chorus of others:

P. The Wit of Cheats, the Courage of a Whore,

Are what ten thousand envy and adore.

All, all look up, with reverential Awe,

On Crimes that scape, or triumph o’er the Law:

...

Yet may this Verse (if such a Verse remain)

Show there was *one* who held it in disdain.

(165-72; my emphasis)

Dialogue form here embodies the speaker's principled refusal to engage with the common herd: it imagines him alone, 'one', asserting his proud singularity against the ignorance and weakness of 'ten thousand' who reverence ministerial 'crimes' and shady legal practice. But the posture it constructs also has wider ideological implications beyond Pope's personal convictions, as it taps into a particular mode of Opposition self-fashioning of which his mature satires are often emblematic. Patriot commentators during the later 1730s favoured a neo-Harringtonian politics of virtue that admired being *out* rather than in: they valued an ethos of civic action defined by its rejection of the compromised social machinery of party, commerce, and credit, which found itself most fully realized in exile, or away from centres of power and sociability.¹⁷ Pope's articulation of this position in the *Epilogue* rests on an understanding of the dialogue's effectiveness as a framework for staging forms of disaffection and independent-mindedness, as well as its ability to construct a ministerial enemy so unsympathetic that no one truly virtuous could wish to be associated with it.

Drawing on his example, a number of Opposition satirists during the later 1730s and early 1740s took Persius' *Satire* 1 as their structural model, on the basis that it represented a satiric response of a more earnest and immovable kind than the Horatian alternative would allow.¹⁸ There are corrupt ministerial opponents in Thomas Gilbert's *The World Unmask'd* (1738) and Benjamin Lovelace's *First Satire of Persius Imitated* (1740), for instance: Gilbert's 'Friend' urges the satirist to give up on political writing because he is likely to incur some powerful enemies ('Forbear to rail; 'tis safer to commend!'), and directs him to the safer ground of writing panegyric for 'Great *Augustus* ' Praises'.¹⁹ Likewise, Lovelace's adversary assures him that satire has no practical effect in the world ('few will read, and fewer still regard'), and asks warningly: 'Truths so invidious will a Court commend, | His Grace reward, a Minister befriend?'²⁰ Lovelace's is an especially obtuse opponent because he does not listen to what the satirist's persona (the 'Author') is saying, and continues to ask him

all the wrong questions. It ought to be clear enough from the Author's repeated professions of independence that he has no interest in 'reward[ing]' a lord or 'befriend[ing]' a minister, but these are the only canons of value that the Friend can understand. In both satires there is little or no intellectual common ground between the two opponents, and the role of the *adversarius* is merely to confirm the validity of the poet's rage by incriminating himself and the ministerial establishment he stands for. He is living proof, as Aden writes, that the satirist is 'not merely shadow-boxing when he registers his complaints against the corrupt modern'.²¹

In *Manners* (1739), another Opposition dialogic satire, Paul Whitehead presents his satiric persona as a proud Patriot exile, sequestered away in a 'calm Retreat' from the court. He describes himself as cultivating an austere form of '*Roman* virtue', disdaining the 'Stars', 'Plumage', 'Riband', and all the other 'tinsel Trappings' of power. His adversary is a 'Lord', firmly enmeshed in the corrupt establishment, who finds this politics of virtue inexplicable and demands to know why the satirist would not rather be 'in':

But whence this Rage at Courts? reply'd his Grace.

Say, is the mighty Crime, to be in Place?

...

Must All, All suffer, who in Courts engage,

Down from Lord Steward, to the puny Page?

Can Courts and Places be such sinful Things?

The sacred Gifts and Palaces of Kings.²²

Whitehead's 'All, All ... who in Courts engage' glances back to Pope's 'All, all look up, with reverential Awe' (167) in *Epilogue* I, and makes a similar point. The *adversarius* is on the side of 'All', the 'Lord Stewart', the 'puny Page', and everyone in between, and has an

immense superstructure of numbers, wealth, and opinion behind him. The satirist is merely one, alone in his perverse self-exile, with nothing but his principles for support. But, just as in Pope's *Epilogue*, this one-ness is triumphant, self-sufficient, and self-justifying, and its impressiveness lies precisely in its exclusivity. The Lord barely re-enters the debate after his opening attack, registering his presence only by the occasional ventriloquized question. The transition from a two-way exchange into what is essentially a monologue represents the extraordinary failure of consonance between the satirist and the establishment he rejects: it shows him refusing to dilute his pride and disinterestedness by trying to engage his adversary in reasoned debate.

Whitehead, Gilbert, and Loveling closely model their verse on the partisan rhetorical framework that Pope's *Epilogue* adapts from Persius. In all three poems, the satirist's speaker is represented as stern, public-spirited and brave ('Heav'n-directed' to 'rowze the Watchmen of the Publick Weal', *Epilogue* II, 214-17), in Pope's dramatic phrasing); the *adversarius* is a Walpolian placeman or some kind of political opportunist, unsympathetically cynical and weak; and the clash between the two is played out in such a way that the adversary always ends up ceding victory to the satirical persona, whether or not he seems aware of the fact. Patriot satirists of the late 1730s found this format congenial partly because of the success of Pope's example and the perceived connection between imitating his verse and adopting his political colours. But they were also drawn to it because of the longer historical view in which adversarial satire was felt to have been 'always' an oppositional mode (or even, in some sense, inherently so), particular to anti-establishment politics by virtue of its attitudes and arguments. In this longer view they valued the dialogue because it could draw on the exemplary Stoicism and distaste for political corruption of Persius' satires, and reprise this Stoicism and distaste in a contemporary context as ideological opposition to Walpole's ministry.

But this is only part of the story. I am interested in the political life of the dialogue not because of its singular ability to frame one particular kind of ideological position and one particular concept of political virtue, but because over the course of the eighteenth century it displayed a striking capacity to accommodate all kinds of positions and arguments, on both sides of the partisan divide and throughout major changes of administration. The ongoing history of the dialogue demonstrates that writing adversarial satire did not mean slavishly adhering to the pre-eminent literary and political example of Pope: in different ways and for different ideological purposes, it involved shaking that example off, and mounting a challenge to his distinctive rendering of Persius in the *Epilogue to the Satires*.

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The first challenge came as early as 1738 with the publication of a direct riposte to the *Epilogue*, Thomas Newcomb's *A Supplement to One Thousand Seven Hundred Thirty Eight*. Newcomb was a prolific ministerial apologist – his *Miscellaneous Collection of Original Poems* (1740) was explicitly presented as a '*Defence of the present Government and Administration*' – and in his answer to Pope he pits himself as the voice of sense and reason ('A.') against a caricature of the fired-up Patriot satirist ('B.'), who is meant to be an unflattering version of Pope himself.²³ This is a subversive arrangement because it turns Pope's moral hierarchy upside down, presenting his persona as a wrongheaded opponent to be talked out of his ignorance rather than a superior arbiter of the moral high ground. By inverting the partisan structure and reallocating the roles of poet and adversary, Newcomb seizes the political initiative and makes the dialogue form speak for the ministerial cause instead of the Patriot one; he transforms the traditional model of an incorruptible anti-ministerial poet and an incorrigible establishment opponent into something more competitive and social, a two-way conversation that creates space for rival ideas of what praiseworthy political activity is. Virtue, his poem argues, does not lie on only one side of the partisan

question. Politics is more complicated and pragmatic than that, and there are ideas and behaviours to admire on the ministerial side too. A., for instance, shows a fine ability to tell the difference between true and false panegyric, praising public-mindedness and a commitment to liberty in his political heroes: ‘There *R—chm—d* for his country’s safety wakes;
| Pays back the crown each honour that he takes.’²⁴

Newcomb’s Pope figure, on the other hand, is hapless and confused, suffering badly at the hands of his opponent who tends, as Weinbrot has argued, to ‘get the better of most arguments’.²⁵ Just as in ‘straight’ satiric dialogues, he is pushed to explain himself and provide a defence of his art, but in this inverted version his *apologia* is full of intellectual and ethical holes. Without much prompting, he is made to confess to Jacobite sympathies: ‘To things, you know, I ever gave right names, | Call’d *B—ngb—ke* my friend, my sovereign *James*’ (p. 15). Worse, when Newcomb’s persona presses him on the mutualist relationship between vice and satire (‘Shou’d courts no longer bribe, or villains hang, | How shou’d the poet lash, or priest harangue?’), he admits that satirists like him need men to be foolish and vicious in order to thrive in their trade, which places question marks over the supposedly corrective impulse behind his verse: ‘folly does herself almost acquit; | For folly always finds a theme for wit’ (pp. 30-1).

Most damagingly of all, Newcomb makes B. careless enough to admit that what makes satire particularly appealing to him is its lucrativeness, regardless of the moral or political principles involved:

B. Satire besides, keeps troops of wits alive:

Print truth, you starve; print legend, and you thrive!

Smooth lies on senates now, and now on Kings,

Whate’er you fancy, Sir, are gainful things,

They arch our grotto's, and they pave our springs!

(p. 29)

The line on 'grotto's' and 'springs' is typical of Newcomb's *ad hominem* approach: it takes a swipe at the emblematic significance of the grotto as a site of contemplation in Pope's later satires, and provides a snide reminder that even the most high-minded of landscape gardening projects cost money and have to be financed somehow. But it is also part of a broader strategy of unpicking the myths and codes of Patriot self-fashioning, and in particular the conviction that there is something inherently virtuous about retiring to one's estate or grotto, the notion that postures of self-abnegation and retreat have an intrinsic kind of political value. Slyly, Newcomb's persona steers his opponent around to the subject of Cobham's symbolic retirement at Stowe, which draws B. into an impassioned speech on the virtue of rejecting a place:

A. But since hemm'd in with *villains* all around,

Not one lean virtue near a court is found:

Why heap'd on C—m such rare gifts, and grace?

B. – What? ask a reason? when he lost a place!

Whoever quits his golden key or staff,

I reverence, I adore – while others laugh!

(pp. 9-10)

Having extracted from his opponent exactly what he needs him to say, A. proceeds to deconstruct the assumptions behind the Patriot admiration for relinquishing the 'golden key or staff' and turning one's back on ministerial politics. 'Does St—'s pure air, or Dawl-y's,

in an hour, | Cleanse just like soap; like purgatory scour?’ (p. 10), he asks, mocking the idea that it is enough for men like Cobham and Bolingbroke merely to retire to their country houses in order to profess their fitness for virtuous leadership. If the mythology of Patriot exile had any substance to it, he continues, it would be easy enough for just about anyone to cross the Thames and reform: ‘Whole years of guilt, two days conversion smother, | Knaves on one side the stream, and saints on t’other’ (p. 11). In reality, of course, it is entirely irrational that men should be ‘Corrupt at *H–mt–n*, and quite good at *K–w*’; the transformative power of the ‘mystick *Thames*’ cannot possibly be such that ‘At *Temple-stairs* you may each vertue lack, | Yet swim a *Cato*, or a *B——d* back’ (p. 12).

Newcomb’s mockery of Patriot retirement queries its practical value as a political stance, and points out that there is no obvious connection between absenting oneself from court or government and being a virtuous citizen. He uses A. to argue that those poets and politicians who feel themselves to be too disinterested and high-minded to participate in the partisan conversation – Bolingbroke, Cobham, Pope himself – would demonstrate more moral character (and more patriotic spirit) if they tried to engage with points of view they did not share, or tried to understand in a fair-minded way that courtiers might just ‘mistake sometimes’ (p. 14). But his assault on Patriot virtue works on a formal level as well as a substantive one, because it picks up on the particular felicities of the adversarial structure in order to make its point. By using a *dialogue* to attack the value of retreating from the political conversation, Newcomb stages exactly the kind of productive cross-party exchange that he observes to be necessary and wanting: he draws his Patriot interlocutor into the sort of hard-headed discussion that B. would rather avoid for fear of compromising his ‘principles’ or his posture of detachment. The idea of virtuous retirement, in other words, is critiqued explicitly for its intellectual blindspots and political cowardice, but Newcomb also dramatizes the

problems he has with it by turning Pope's aloof and dismissive straw man contest into a challenging battle of wits between well-matched adversaries.

At the end of the poem, A. is given a last resounding opportunity to make his case:

A. But since a friend's advice you scorn to hear,
 And still prepare the lash, you cannot fear;
 The breath I want, no more I throw away,
 But while you censure, rather choose to pray!
 'Genius of *Britain!* Spread thy guardian wing
 O'er thy lov'd isle, and round thy FAV'RITE KING.

...

Where'er her cannons roar, or crosses fly,
 Plant dread, and flight, and each pale terror nigh!
 Let *Iber* tremble, and let *Calpe* fear
 Soon as her navy's conquering flags appear!

(p. 34)

Here, Newcomb's persona leaves satire behind and turns to an entirely different province of writing. B., he says, is incorrigible: he will continue to write scurrilous poetry and 'prepare the lash' regardless of all attempts to steer him away from it, and there is little point wasting one's breath on him. For his own part, A. intends to practice a different kind of political verse, one that requires confidence and generosity instead of satire's relentless disparagement. Satirists 'censure', he says, but he would 'rather choose to pray'. Launching into a patriotic encomium to the 'Genius of *Britain*', the Hanoverian line and the national navy, Newcomb's persona attacks the cynicism of B.'s position, arguing that what he might

like to think of as proud independence or public-spiritedness is just self-indulgent posturing. True patriotic virtue, he claims, lies in acts of allegiance, not detachment, and in commitment rather than stand-offishness; and above all it is about expressions of collective feeling. Where Pope's persona in the *Epilogue* revels in the loneliness of his politics and takes pride in the fact that he speaks for very few men or none at all, Newcomb's dialogue celebrates the inclusive nature of A.'s patriotism, the way in which his apostrophic hymn is offered on behalf of an imagined community who share the same national values and enjoy the same national riches. The poem clinches its satiric point by appearing somehow to rise above satire, turning its back on criticism and lending its voice to a rousing chorus of praise.

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Newcomb's poem is a direct rebuttal of Pope in particular, but in answering Pope it also redresses the form that he and other Opposition satirists favour, adapting it to a different set of political purposes and commitments. After Pope's death satirists continued to return to the adversarial framework for partisan reasons, seeing as Newcomb had done that there was considerable potential in the dialogue for subversive political repositioning. Most notable among them was Charles Churchill, the majority of whose satires contain dialogic elements of a more or less formal kind.²⁶ Churchill started writing political verse in 1762, turning his literary talents to anti-ministerial propaganda for his close friend John Wilkes in the wake of the resignations of Pitt and Temple over the conduct of the Seven Years' War, and the instatement of George III's favourite the Earl of Bute as First Lord of the Treasury.²⁷ In his satires he attacked the aristocratic ruling classes for their undeserved privilege, pushed the idea that merit was the only proper criterion for determining the distribution of public offices, and insisted that commercial interests were not incompatible with political activity or intellectual freedom. His poetry drew strongly on the rhetorical strategies of the dialogic satires of the 1730s (especially Pope's), since these were pre-eminent examples of anti-

ministerial verse; but he also had to find inventive ways to make the adversarial structure say something new, because writing satire for Wilkes' Patriot opposition was a different proposition to writing for the Patriot opposition of Bolingbroke and Pulteney. It involved appealing to a new kind of politically engaged readership amongst the middling orders, equipped with distinctive interests, priorities, and grievances.

Churchill's sense of the political applications to which the verse dialogue could be put grew more radical and imaginative as his Wilkesite affiliations strengthened. In his early poems he approached it in a more straightforwardly imitative fashion, closely following Persius and Pope by pitting a corrupt *adversarius* against a principled satiric speaker. In *Night* (1761), for instance, he stages a dialogue between his own persona and a smooth-tongued courtier adversary, 'Sir PLIANT'. The satiric persona professes a similar kind of virtuous singularity to Pope's in the *Epilogue*: he declares that he is 'Unmov'd by vulgar censure' and 'Unaw'd by numbers'; he will stay 'STEDFAST and true to virtue's sacred laws' though, all around him, 'thousands rail at good and practise ill'.²⁸ His *adversarius*, on the other hand, is incorrigibly wicked, pushing the poet to make prudent choices and flatter his enemies ('Let not conceit, and peevish lust to rail, | Above all sense of interest prevail'), and insisting on the sheer unlikelihood of Churchill's being victorious as a lonely idealist amongst so many pragmatists: 'Too hard the task 'gainst multitudes to fight, | *You* must be wrong, the WORLD is in the right' (347-52). There is a similarly hostile opponent in *An Epistle to William Hogarth* (1763), where the speaker is challenged by the warning voice of 'Candour', 'cold monitor, half foe, half friend'. Candour urges him towards 'Soul-soothing PANEGYRIC's flow'ry way' and advises him to regard the promptings of 'Int'rest, pliant Int'rest' (173, 102, 93), but is duly resisted by lofty shows of defiance and independent-mindedness on the speaker's part, as he proves at every turn that he is impervious to worldly advice: 'I cannot truckle to a Fool of State, | Nor take a favour from the man I hate' (121-2).

Churchill began to experiment in a more radical fashion with the possibilities of the dialogue form in late 1763 and 1764, pushing it in unorthodox directions in order to frame a new set of political arguments. It was clear to him that the oppositional framework he had inherited from Pope, Whitehead, Gilbert and others could not meet the needs of anti-ministerial politics in the age of Bute and George III without a degree of adaptation. The civic ideals of landed retirement and aristocratic independence on which the verse dialogues of the Walpole era had been built were an unsuitable basis for political verse in an age of radical Wilkesite opposition, with its reformist ambitions and commercial interests, and its roots in popular and urban patriotism.²⁹ Moreover, Churchill's own personal credentials did not square with inherited Patriot ideas of what a satirist's economic background should be: he declared proudly that he had no land to call his own, that he was a self-made professional with few aristocratic connections, and that he was deeply reliant on the bookselling trade and his popular audience to keep him in paper and ink. 'A gen'rous PUBLIC made me what I Am', he wrote in *The Conference* (1763). 'All that I have, They gave' (150-1). Committed as he was to the importance of the commercial market as a platform for self-determination and social mobility, he found the idea of associating political virtue with aristocratic disinterestedness a profoundly unattractive one; and he saw that it would be as unappealing to the largely unenfranchised audience his satires sought to address. Patrician models of virtue were increasingly inapplicable and counterproductive. Churchill needed a dialogic form that would speak to the sort of men who had *always* been excluded from the forums of political decision-making, rather than those who found themselves temporarily in exile or out of place.

Churchill mounted a challenge to traditional Opposition ideas of virtuous patriotism in a comparable way to Newcomb. In *The Conference*, he used the adversarial dialogue to pit a tough and thoroughly rational opponent against a satiric speaker trying his best – but not entirely managing – to cling onto a posture of high-minded independence. The poem stages

an after-dinner debate between a dramatized version of himself ('C.') and a corrupt peer (the 'Lord', or 'L.'). C. is earnest and idealistic, bent on lashing vice wherever he finds it; L. is cynical and indolent, standing in for all the failings of the corrupt establishment and its culture of lazy placemanship. His attack on Churchill's honour begins with the familiar warning of Persius' adversary in *Satires* 1: writing satire is perilous, and it is better to save one's skin. 'Your Muse in general is too severe', he cautions, 'Her Spirit seems her int'rest to oppose, | And, where She makes on friend, makes twenty foes' (12-14). The satirist's response is a defence of his art in the tradition of Juvenal's self-justification in his *Satire* 1, insisting that it is impossible to sit by and *not* write satire: 'But shall the partial rage of selfish men | From stubborn Justice wrench the righteous pen?' (23-4).

These are formulaic statements of intent, and they suggest that the dialogue will take a well-trodden path. The *adversarius* will urge caution and make his threats, and the satirist will rise triumphantly above them. Unexpectedly, though, L. proceeds by attacking not only the concept of writing anti-ministerial satire, but also its vocabulary and mode. Systematically, he picks apart the keywords and principles of Opposition discourse:

L. To feign a red-hot zeal for freedom's cause,
 To mouth aloud for liberties and laws,
 For Public good to bellow all abroad,
 Serves well the purposes of private fraud.
 Prudence, by Public good intends her own;
 If You mean otherwise, You stand alone.
 What do we mean by Country and by Court,
 What is it to Oppose, what to Support?
 Mere words of course, and what is more absurd

Than to pay homage to an empty word!

...

Patriots and Ministers are much the same;

The only difference, after all their rout,

Is that the One is *in*, the Other *out*.

(153-66)

C. finds himself stymied because his opponent has ventriloquized, very successfully, the language he would usually employ himself, and proved that it is just another kind of cant. Patriot hobbyhorses – ‘freedom’s cause’, ‘liberties and laws’, ‘Public good’ – are ‘stale conceits’ (81), the Lord argues: politically, they are worn out, and poetically they are past their best too, because they issue from a bygone age of anti-ministerial satire and are beginning to sound second-hand and spiritless. Above all, they have lost their partisan force. Churchill’s way of juxtaposing ‘Country’ and ‘Court’ in one line (and ‘Oppose’ and ‘Support’ in the next) has the effect of diminishing the space between the ideological realms they denote, and the miscellaneous throwing together of traditional opposites cuts across the polar charge they carry. ‘Patriots’ and ‘Ministers’ *are* much the same, the Lord insists; speaking for the ‘Public good’ is just another way of serving the purposes of ‘private fraud’, and public-mindedness is most likely selfishness at bottom. The differences are contextual (‘in’ versus ‘out’), rather than intrinsic, and there is nothing special or privileged about the Patriot position.

Greater men than Churchill, the Lord continues, have seen the ideological problem and given up. It is a common thing, he says, to see ‘Protesting Patriots turn’d to Peers’, ‘WHITEHEAD take a place, RALPH change his pen’ (254, 260), or Pulteney and Pitt join

the government for a title. It would be better for Churchill to join them, stop pretending to be something he is not, and consider his own interests:

L. When from long fasts fierce appetites arise,
 Can this same Virtue stifle Nature's cries?
 Can She the pittance of a meal afford,
 Or bid thee welcome to one great Man's board?
 When Northern winds the rough December arm
 With frost and snow, can Virtue keep thee warm?

(31-6)

An interrogation like this would be easy to withstand if one were financially independent or had aristocratic patrons to call on. But *L.*'s questions are, as Lance Bertelsen has argued, 'hard and crucial' for a man of 'Churchill's history and social standing', because they are directed at a satirist lacking the landed security on which virtuous citizenship would traditionally be based, and without the intellectual autonomy that economic disinterestedness would bring.³⁰ Churchill's speaker can protest with all the bluster he likes that 'an Honest man dares starve' (80), but since there is a real chance that he or men like him might do so, the claim lacks the confident ring of improbability that it would have in the hands of Horace, say, or Persius or Pope. In his case, instead, it is smarter to 'advance | For once to real life, and quit Romance' (81-2) as *L.* advises, and cease making the kind of defiant stand that he is not disinterested enough to afford.

Churchill's persona is at a rhetorical disadvantage here because it is impossible for him to reconcile the reality of his economic and political circumstances with the ideal of aristocratic self-reliance that he has inherited from the Patriot tradition. The function of *L.* as

an *adversarius* is to draw this contradiction out, systematically revealing the intellectual and practical limitations of his posture of defiant independence. But Churchill's point in setting up such a formidable opponent is not to deride the value of political dissent, or to undermine the Patriot idea more broadly; it is merely to discredit a particular iteration of the Patriot idea, a particular kind of dialogic self-fashioning, which he feels to be unsuitable and even counterproductive for the purposes of radical Wilkesite opposition. Virtuous citizenship, for Churchill, has nothing to do with distancing oneself from ordinary economic imperatives, from all the worldly interests, compromises, and attachments that come with negotiating one's position as a satirist in the literary marketplace. He dramatizes the weaknesses of his satiric speaker so that he can put some space between his own identity as a political actor and the old-fashioned civic humanist persona that has been handed down to him, insisting that there is no necessary – or even rational – connection between eschewing commercial activity and writing satiric poetry with integrity.

The Conference uses its adversarial framework to point out the flaws in a pre-existing model of political self-fashioning. In *The Farewell* (1764), one of his last published pieces, Churchill went a step further and formulated his own idea of what an exemplary political citizen might look like. *The Farewell* dramatizes the decision of the satiric speaker ('P.') to relocate his muse from England to 'Eastern India', where she can attack 'Nabobs' and 'Moguls' (III, 453-5) instead of her usual targets closer to home. P. is deeply attached to his homeland and would rather look elsewhere to vent his spleen, and India seems as good a choice as any because the people there will at least supply 'something New' in the way of moral turpitude.³¹ The *adversarius* ('F.') disagrees vehemently with this plan. He insists that there is nowhere in the world quite as vicious and corrupt as England, so it is the satirist's moral duty to target his native country and hope in some way to redress it:

F: If Satire be thy object, search all round,
 Nor to thy purpose can one spot be found
 Like England, where to rampant vigour grown
 Vice choaks up ev'ry Virtue, where, self-sown,
 The seeds of Folly shoot forth rank and bold,
 And ev'ry seed brings forth a hundred fold.

(15-20)

If, he continues, *P.* had had the good fortune to be born in a land where he could count on the virtuous intentions of those in high office, and where legislative power was contractual rather than arbitrary, it would make perfect sense for him to leave it and seek out somewhere else to attack; but, as things stand, his pen is required at home. England is a 'barren and penurious' spot where 'Pow'r is Reason, Liberty a Joke' (190-4) and constitutional freedoms are overstepped by an unchecked executive. To love a country like this, *F.* insists, is not virtue; it is 'wild, untemper'd zeal', a 'grand Master Passion' (243, 170) that militates against impartial thinking and reasoned political judgement. What '*F.*' recommends instead is a cultivated intellectual detachment. 'Tis the sure symptom of a narrow soul, | To draw its grand attachment from the whole, | And take up with a part', he counsels: political subjects ought to be generously disinterested rather than narrowly partisan, and should suppress the local promptings of their passions in favour of the high-minded dictates of 'strict Reason' (33-5, 221). He urges Churchill towards a philosophy of Stoic self-governance, comparing his passionate 'human soul' to a garden that has been left 'Uncultur'd, wild, impatient of controul', and requires the 'steady hand' of 'wholsome discipline' to bring it to a state of order and rationality (85-102).

The advice F. gives here is recognizably civic in its emphases, and looks back to neo-Harringtonian ideals of active citizenship and autonomous decision-making. Satirists, he says, are duty bound to attack corruption and protect liberty where they can; political states escape censure only when their legislators are virtuous and the rule of law is enshrined; patriotism is a matter of disinterested public-spiritedness rather than passionate attachment; and virtue is realized by grand gestures of Stoic self-abnegation. What is surprising about the reiteration of these principles is that they are championed by the *adversarius* instead of the satirist. Putting recognizable Patriot satiric sentiments into the mouth of an opponent is an economical way of calling them into question: it shows that they are no longer normative and have begun to seem problematic, and the inversion allows space to be cleared for an entirely new definition of what patriotic virtue consists of. Dramatic form here has a negative function. It allows the satirist to dissociate himself from a moral or political position he does not believe in, so that he can state with more clarity the position he does hold. He is free to say something different, or at least to register his dissent from an inherited set of anti-ministerial postures that have come to seem unappealing and untenable. Churchill's negotiation of the political history of the adversarial dialogue is an expression of intellectual distinction rather than identity. It is a way of formulating concepts of what patriotism might look like if it were *not* tied to a traditional civic framework.

Being a patriot, P. insists, has nothing to do with disinterestedness. It is about indulging and channelling natural impulses rather than restraining them with reason. The 'specious art' of 'PHILOSOPHERS', he says, will 'Ne'er make me from this breast one passion tear, | Which Nature, my best friend, hath planted there' (151-4). Stoic philosophy has 'made e'en Virtue sowre': it aims 'not to correct our passions, but destroy', and its admiration for 'Apathy' would 'teach us, deeply feeling, not to feel' (120-4). Its tenets, moreover, are pure 'Theory', 'vain refinements ... | Varnish'd with sophistry' that have no

relation to real life; they are, as P. says sardonically, ‘Most fit for practice, but for one poor fault | That into practice they can ne’er be brought’ (45-54). As an alternative, he offers his own philosophy of political action, grounded in ‘Common Sense’, personal attachments, sociable affections, and local interests. Patriotic feeling, Churchill’s persona argues, is not an artificial creation of the intellect but manifests itself quite unconsciously and naturally, as ‘a strange Something, which without a brain | Fools feel, and with one wise men can’t explain’ (63-4). It is just the ‘Love we bear our Country’, nothing more or less complicated than a ‘duty, which the Good delight to pay, | And ev’ry Man can practice ev’ry day’ (281-2). This is a version of political citizenship that embraces ordinariness and the life of quotidian things over exceptional forms of virtue or self-denial. Churchill’s point is that patriots are sociable men who care personally about what happens to their nation, rather than disinterested philosophers who speculate and exhort others to the task. ‘Their’s be the praise to argue’, he writes, ‘mine to feel’ (224).

The adversarial dialogue is the right framework for this argument because the exchanges and accommodations of conversation are a working model of the new kind of patriotic citizenship that Churchill’s speaker recommends. In Persius’ *Satire I* and early eighteenth-century imitations, as we have seen, the moral and political incommensurability between the speaker and his adversary does not allow much room for conversational interplay, and the adversary will go on making his corrupt pronouncements regardless of the speaker’s attempts to educate him. But in *The Farewell* the two participants, though they have different ideas as to what constitutes a proper response to the nation’s problems, are largely in agreement about what its problems are: they both think, for instance, that a concentration of power in the hands of a Venetian oligarchy (a cabal of ‘British Lords’ who ‘hate the Commons, and who love not Kings’, 341, 346) would be a terrible thing, and they

are equally dismayed at the prevalence of corruption in the judiciary. Their debate is fast-paced and their exchanges are knowing and witty:

F. Whilst, the true guardians of this charter'd land,
 In full and perfect vigour, Juries stand,
 A Judge in vain shall awe, cajole, perplex.
P. Suppose I should be tried in Middlesex.
F. To pack a Jury they will never dare.
P. There's no occasion to pack Juries there.

(415-20)

Here, Churchill divides up couplets between his two speakers, so that the chime of shared rhymes ('perplex'/'Middlesex'; 'dare'/'there') attests to the mutual sympathy and ideological common ground they have. The lengthy set-piece speeches of earlier verse dialogues are exchanged for the cut and thrust of a proper conversation, and the *adversarius* is there not simply to act as a foil or straw man for the satirist's staged triumph: he answers back, he makes concessions where they are due, and he pushes the speaker to refine and retune his argument.

This kind of living conversation enacts the sense in which, for Churchill, political virtue is a matter of dependence and interest rather than lofty self-reliance. His speaker needs an interlocutor, not merely to stand in for a corrupt world that he himself rejects utterly, but because his morality is formulated in the process of exchange and flexibility. Raising the profile of the *adversarius* allows the poet to suggest that there is no such thing as a completely autonomous political actor, whose lofty concern for the public good is impervious to the tugs of circumstance, interest, and the passions. Such a posture belongs to a former age

of Opposition self-fashioning, and draws on old-fashioned ideals of landed citizenship. It has little to do with the pragmatic and inclusive notion of patriotism that this poem champions, a love of one's country based on 'ties of private nature' and the 'social Charities of blood, and friends' (289-96), as P. explains; and little to do either with the sociable and ordinary forms of political action that such patriotic feeling inspires, which might be nothing more spectacular than engaging in a conversation about public matters as a private citizen, holding a stake in one's country's trading fortunes, or being firmly committed to the preservation of its liberties. Churchill's persona, firmly disentangling his patriotic commitments from the civic ideals of heroic disinterest and self-reliance that the *adversarius* commends, stands up as a political actor within a modern commercial marketplace and refuses to be a mouthpiece for propertied independence.

* * *

After Churchill's death in 1764, the Roman adversarial dialogue was less readily adopted as a framework for political argumentation. Juvenal and Horace were more popular than Persius as poetic models, their satiric techniques seeming to represent polar alternatives. A 'neo-Juvenalian' style was admired among Tory Pittite satirists for its dramatic rage and its dark prognostications of corruption and decline, while satirists more apt to restrain their critiques or lighten them with a comic long view adopted an amicable Horatian mode.³² Persius, whose poetry was less obviously representative of either of the two 'rage' or 'raillery' alternatives, was adopted only infrequently as a model for political dissent and fell considerably behind Juvenal in particular.³³ Where the adversarial dialogue was employed during the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it tended to be used for the purposes of pro-ministerial propaganda rather than anti-ministerial complaint. High-profile Tory satires such as William Gifford's *The Baviad* (1791) and George Daniel's *The Modern Dunciad* (1814) are both full-length imitations of Persius's *Satires* 1, while Thomas James Mathias' *The*

Pursuits of Literature (1794-7) adopts its formal dialogic structure and deals with the same Persius-inspired themes of declining literary standards and compromised artistic integrity. Gifford's *Baviad* pits his own persona against 'F.', a voice of prudence who represents the fashionable literary taste of the day, and uses the ensuing debate to attack bluestocking writing, antiquarianism, and the poetry of the Della Cruscan circle. He derides the 'ropy drivell of rheumatic brains' that passes muster as accomplished verse in the critical magazines, and is highly censorious of poets who are lured to write by the 'sumptuous feast' of a great man's favour.³⁴ Mathias' satire stages a conversation between the poet's persona, 'The Author', and his adversary 'Octavius', who between them come to a depressing set of conclusions about the impoverished state of poetry and the stage; and likewise, Daniel's *Modern Dunciad* has the satirist ('P.') attack a litany of second-rate playwrights and poetasters while being cautiously restrained by his *adversarius* ('F.').

The subject matter here – a denunciation of modern letters and the low critical standards that allow writers to get away with it – is drawn directly from Persius' own complaints in *Satire 1*, as is the suspicion of networks of artistic patronage. The political bent of the satire, though, has little in common with Persius' oppositional stance, or with earlier eighteenth-century anti-ministerial applications of the dialogue form. Rather than using the adversarial framework as an opportunity to dramatize modes of resistance in the manner of Pope, Churchill, and other Patriot satirists, Gifford, Mathias, and Daniel conceive of it as an exercise in the reinforcement of conservative norms, denouncing popular or subversive trends in the literary sphere as a way of attacking radical Jacobin elements in the political one.³⁵ Their dialogues work as reinforcing devices of a formal kind, deliberately closing down avenues for debate or dissent rather than staging a clash between genuinely adversarial perspectives. Daniel's F., for instance, effectively takes on the role of fellow-satirist, helping to deride the Della Cruscan poets by belittling the scale of the threat they could possibly

represent: ‘CRUSCA (to GIFFORD thanks!) is fairly fled, | And COTTLE’s Epics sleep among the dead’.³⁶ Mathias’ Octavius is still more conciliatory, agreeing with the satirist that a dose of ‘plain common sense’ would improve the efforts of most contemporary writers, and even praising the ‘Indignant genius’ of Mathias’ critique (this, an adversary who is explicitly full of admiration for the satirist who should be his sparring partner, is a very long way from Persius’ hostile Monitor or Pope’s Friend).³⁷ Dialogue here stages consensus, not controversy; it calls for acquiescence in an authoritative literary and political orthodoxy, rather than dramatizing a partisan encounter between competing political perspectives.

Unlike Persius and Juvenal, whose satire has to appeal to the achievements of past heroes for a standard of virtue worth fighting for, Pittite satirists such as Gifford and Mathias locate a political order to admire in the contemporary Tory administration.³⁸ In a similar fashion to Horace at the court of Augustus, their poetry looks outwards with confidence to envisage a prince who will listen and an elite order that shares its principles; it projects an assured sense of the satirist as a legislative actor with real practical ability to make things happen in the world outside his art. For Tory satirists this notion of the dialogue as a model of political reciprocity – the satiric speaker as a mouthpiece for an administration of which he explicitly approves – was a comfortable and attractive one. But it was vulnerable to challenges from rival partisan writers who were sceptical about the value and efficacy of verse satire as a serious intervention into public debate. John Wolcot, for instance, who spent his satiric career attacking Pitt’s ministry and the royal person of George III under the pseudonym ‘Peter Pindar’, used his dialogue *One Thousand Seven Hundred and Ninety-Six* (published in that year) as an opportunity to laugh at the notion of traditional verse-writing as a means of registering political dissent.³⁹

Wolcot’s poem follows in the satirical calendar tradition of Pope’s *One Thousand Seven Hundred and Thirty Eight* dialogues, substituting George III for George II and the

younger Pitt for Walpole.⁴⁰ It stages a chatty encounter between ‘Tom’, a college graduate just arrived in London, eager to ‘blaze a Comet on the town’ by setting himself up as an infamous satiric wit; and ‘Peter’, the poet’s persona, full of jaded cautionary advice about the dangers of intervening in political affairs.⁴¹ This is an unsettling arrangement because it puts the poet in the role of the *adversarius*, rather than the satiric persona. Tom is keen on trying to stand up for virtue as a political satirist, but he is the butt of the poem’s joke; Peter, who represents Wolcot as the superior voice of sense and reason, has renounced writing satire and tries to make Tom do the same. Churchill, as we saw earlier, subverts the traditional rhetorical functions of his speakers by having a hostile *adversarius* unexpectedly get the better of the argument (*The Conference*) and by assigning unconventional political positions to the poet and his opponent (*The Farewell*), but nowhere does he go so far as to present the poet’s persona as anything other than a committed satirist. Wolcot, by contrast, discredits the business of writing satire systematically, and in two important ways. He makes the dissuading adversary into a credible and sympathetic figure; and he turns Tom, the crusading satirist who ought to be the moral centre of the poem, into a laughable curiosity, a young man who has read too much Juvenal and has no idea what modern politics under Pitt and Fox involves.

Tom is consistently made to look ridiculous. His rhetoric is neo-Juvenalian in the worst sense, extravagant without being impressive, melodramatic, bloated, and imprecise:

TOM: I’ll fabricate the Poetry of Death.
 O’er many a neck my scymitar shall flame,
 And Havoc’s corses form my road to fame;
 On Satire’s burning coals *this* villain fries,
 And roasted *that* with skewers in his eyes:

...

PETER: Heavens! Tom, be cooler; take advice.

(p. 394)

This kind of thing is impossible to take seriously as a satiric attack. Wolcot undercuts Tom's moral crusade with sly touches that puncture the high tone he is aiming for: the initial capitalization of key words that insists too much on its own importance ('Poetry of Death'), and the coarseness of the imagery ('fries', 'skewers') that makes for a comic mismatch with the intensity of satiric feeling. Peter's response comes as a relief because it is sane and decorous. The juxtaposition between his common sense and Tom's outburst makes the latter's rage look childish and impotent, an unsophisticated response to complex problems.

Tom's tendency to self-sabotage is a running joke. He is fond of vivid images of punishment, coming up with a series of wild metaphors for what satire does to its victims: there are many more in the same vein as the conceit about 'Satire's burning coals' and its 'roasted' villains, often comically strained or oblique. Some are sufficiently poorly chosen to require explanation. At one point, for instance, he threatens to 'thrive' on the 'skins of hungry Wolves', but since it is not clear who the 'hungry Wolves' are meant to represent, Wolcot has him clarify the metaphor clumsily in a parenthetical aside: 'On the skins of hungry Wolves (the Courtiers) thrive' (p. 387). He also makes Tom mix up his metaphors to comic effect. There is a memorable verse paragraph in which Tom compares his satiric attack to a bird of prey on the hunt, before shifting in a confused fashion back to the old idea of satire as a type of hellish punishment:

TOM: This reddens my rough vengeance, fans my flame,
And goads my Satire's Hawk to seek its game.

Yes, yes, I stand resolved upon the matter:

‘Fry’ is the word, and brimstone be my batter!

(p. 402)

Here, the bathetic linking of ‘brimstone’ to ‘batter’, the flat-footed feminine rhyme ‘matter’/‘batter’, and the clumsy tonal disjunction between Juvenalian fury and painfully judicious decision-making (‘Yes, yes, I stand resolved upon the matter’), undermine Tom’s satiric enterprise before his adversary has even opened his mouth. Peter’s measured dissuasions provide a welcome dose of common sense, but they are barely necessary as a critique.

Wolcot’s verse here is a crushing reduction of earnestness to farce, but the joke is not just on Tom, or on his ‘projects’. It goes further than that, because Wolcot situates Tom as part of a larger satiric genealogy, pointing out allusively the ways in which he is modelled on a long line of dialogic personae and his ideological battles on a tradition of similar battles. One of the clearest and most direct of these allusive nods is to the self-fashioning techniques that Pope and Churchill use in their political dialogues, the characteristic way in which they present their satiric personae as fearless and self-righteous warriors for the cause of virtue. When Tom throws down the satiric gauntlet and invokes his weapon-like ‘pen’ –

TOM: Arm’d with lightning’s pointed fire, my pen,

Brand thou the daring fronts of shameless men;

Drag thou, my arm, black Guilt to open day! –

Such are my projects: how d’ye like them, pray?

(p. 388)

– he is drawing on a recognizable lineage of satiric conceits. Behind his swaggering there is the battle cry of Pope’s persona in *Satire II.i* (‘arm’d for *Virtue* when I point the Pen, | Brand the bold Front of shameless, guilty Men’ (105-6)); the iconic moment of defiance in the *Epilogue to the Satires*, where P. promises to ‘draw’ the ‘last Pen for Freedom’ (*Epilogue II*, 248); there is Gilbert’s admiring nod in his *First Satire of Juvenal Imitated* (1740) to the same image in Pope (‘arm’d for Virtue manly *Pope* will write’);⁴² there is that menacing description of Churchill’s in *An Epistle to William Hogarth* of his ‘arm ... | For vengeance lifted high’ (157-9); and likewise his threat in *The Author* (1763) that his muse will ‘drag’ vicious men ‘trembling to the light’ (182).

Putting these dramatic claims in Tom’s mouth, in the context of all that Wolcot has suggested about his credibility as a satirist and a political citizen, is a way of reducing them to something like melodrama, or at the very least querying how meaningful they are in a practical way in the world outside one’s art. Allusion implicates Pope and Churchill’s rhetorical postures in the broader absurdity of Tom’s ‘projects’, so that the kinds of satiric ideals they stand in for – unwavering moral seriousness; heroic self-abnegation; proud singularity – find themselves subtly discredited. The joke here is on verse satire as a mode, or on a certain kind of high-minded satiric commitment that for Wolcot is embodied by the traditional posturing of the satirist’s persona in adversarial dialogue. Tom is a debased version of an ideal of virtuous political action that has come to seem naive and jejeune, so that what might have worked for Persius, Pope, and Churchill – or at least seemed impressive as a serious discursive intervention into public life – is now easily collapsible into youthful bluster.

To Peter, all this is obvious, and his role in the poem is to try and convey to Tom as gently as possible the futility of his position. In ‘spite of all that we can sing or say’, he warns, ‘Fools will be fools; and Ministers, betray’ (p. 413). As far as a man like Pitt is

concerned, impervious with his ‘Dog-like impudence, and Dog-like stare’, the furious attacks of satirists are just ‘the pop-guns of the World below’ (p. 392, 388):

PETER: Such is the minister, and such the man,

To dupe the State, and carry all before him.

TOM: So then, my Bull of Satire cannot gore him?

PETER: At every push the man would only laugh,

And prove thy bellowing Bull a whining Calf.

(p. 392)

Delicately, these lines invert the power balance of the relationship between the satirist and his target. Tom’s ‘Bull’ is comically emasculated by Wolcot’s hobbling feminine rhyme (‘before him’/‘gore him’), so that the verse plays out that reductive transformation of ‘bellowing Bull’ into ‘whining Calf’ that Peter describes. The ‘Bull of Satire’ is powerless because its victims have laughter on their side: the extravagant neo-Juvenalian style that has been associated for so long with a tragic kind of rage has begun to sound comic, and the satirist who indulges in it becomes the butt of the joke rather than its author. In this context, all Peter can do as the *adversarius* is to try to teach Tom that some kinds of order are insuperable, and that sometimes what is most deserving of a keen satiric eye is the foolish attempt to deny the fact.

These arguments are traditional in their cautionary intent; they are the kinds of things that the *adversarius*, interested in persuading his opponent not to threaten the established order he holds dear, usually finds to say. The problem with Peter, though, is that he is not the kind of adversary we are used to. He is not a lawyer for the establishment, or a ministerial hack, and he makes a point of denying that he is dependent on the royal court:

TOM: Ah, Peter, you're a Courtier.

PETER: No such thing:

I never drank at Adulation's spring.

...

Virtue's pure Robe with Dirt I scorn to load,

Or offer Incense to embalm a Toad.

(pp. 394-5)

Wolcot's idea here is that it is no longer necessary to be Trebatius, or Persius' Monitor, or Churchill's Lord, to disagree with the value or usefulness of the satiric critique, or to find its postures laughable. Peter is politically astute, democratically minded, sensitive to abuses of power, and wittier far than Tom is; he is intended to be a profoundly sympathetic voice, but all the same he is more apt to deplore the folly of oppositional satire than to engage in it. His common sense is a foil to Tom's satiric peacocking and inflexible notion of political virtue, and he is there to show that posturing of this kind is no longer commensurate – if it ever was – with the kind of moral redress that the world actually requires. Figures like Tom have had their day.

Exactly what *is* required, though, or what might make a difference, is never really made clear. Peter favours irony and Horatian ridicule as an alternative to Tom's anger, but Wolcot does not have him champion it strongly enough as a mode to suggest that it has any real corrective power. Instead, the poem pits the two styles against one another in such a way that each points out the other's limitations. Peter's laughter is sophisticated and engaging but it lacks moral conviction; Tom has the conviction but he is too absurd a figure to be listened to. Neither offers a complete solution. Dialogue here dramatizes a kind of stalemate situation, in which neither party 'wins' and neither point of view offers a position on the world worth

standing behind. It is a bit of private wrangling over style, rather than a confident intervention into the public conversation or a statement of serious political intent.

As such, it feels a very long way from the poise and faith of earlier eighteenth-century verse dialogues – from Pope’s passionate investment in an alternative political order to the compromised business of party, commerce, and credit; from Churchill’s imbrication of the dialogue in the mercantile world of Wilkesite opposition, with its radical new ideas about patriotism and citizenship; and further still from Gifford, Mathias, and Daniel’s sense of the dialogue as an exercise in excluding dissenting voices and appealing to an established political order. But the fact that Wolcot’s poem is recognizably part of the same generic lineage (with its adversarial personae, its characteristic dramatic postures, and threads of argument) says much about the extraordinary versatility and longevity of the Roman form during the second half of the century – its ability, during a process of comprehensive change in the political arena, to frame and organize a variety of arguments on both sides of the partisan divide, and to offer itself as a mode of dramatic self-fashioning for poets with radically different ideas about the role and function of the political satirist in civil society.

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¹ *The Satires of Persius, Translated into English Verse. Satire the First.* (London, 1741), p. 3.

² On Horace’s innovative use of dialogue in verse satire and its significance for the genre, see Paul Roche, ‘Self-Representation and Performativity’, in *A Companion to Persius and Juvenal*, edited by Susanna Braund and Josiah Osgood (Oxford, 2012), pp. 190-216 (pp. 204-9).

³ See Mary Claire Randolph, 'The Structural Design of the Formal Verse Satire', *PQ*, 21 (1942), 368-84 (p. 372); John M. Aden, 'Pope and the Satiric Adversary', *SEL*, 2 (1962), 267-86 (p. 267); Dustin Griffin, *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction* (Lexington, KY, 1994), pp. 39-44.

⁴ On the distinction between eighteenth-century 'translation as normally conceived' and the looser incorporation of Roman 'quotations, images, motifs, and stylistic features' into original poetry and prose, see David Hopkins, 'Roman Satire and Epigram', in *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English*, Vol. 3: 1660-1790, edited by Stuart Gillespie and David Hopkins (Oxford, 2005), pp. 218-40 (p. 218).

⁵ Horace, *Satire* 2.1, ll.21, 11, in *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*, translated by H. Rushton Fairclough (London, 1970), pp. 127, 129.

⁶ Howard D. Weinbrot, *Eighteenth-Century Satire: Essays on Text and Context from Dryden to Peter Pindar* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 130.

⁷ R. Clinton Simms, 'Persius' Prologue and Early Modern English Satire', *T&L*, 22 (2013), 25-44 (p. 30).

⁸ Aden (n. 3), p. 269.

⁹ Dustin Griffin would also include *The First Epistle of the First Book of Horace Imitated* (1738) in this list, because Pope argues in response to 'A Voice ... that whispers in my ear'. See Dustin H. Griffin, *Alexander Pope: The Poet in the Poems* (Princeton, NJ, 1978), p. 168.

¹⁰ See Aden, p. 272; Frank Stack, *Pope and Horace: Studies in Imitation* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 30.

¹¹ Aden, pp. 273-4; Griffin, p. 170; Julian Ferraro, 'The Satirist, the Text and "The World beside": Pope's "First Satire of the Second Book of Horace Imitated"', *T&L*, 2 (1993), 37-63 (pp. 39-40).

¹² Pope, *An Epistle from Mr. Pope, to Dr. Arbuthnot*, ll. 125, 306-7, in *The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope*, edited by John Butt *et al.*, 11 vols (London, 1939-69; hereafter *TE*), IV, 104, 117-18.

¹³ See Christine Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole: Politics, Poetry, and National Myth, 1725-1742* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 87-9.

¹⁴ On the *adversarius* of the *Epilogue to the Satires*, see Aden, pp. 280-6; Griffin, pp. 170-1; Jacob Fuchs, *Reading Pope's Imitations of Horace* (Lewisburg, PA, 1989), pp. 143-4.

¹⁵ Pope, *Epilogue to the Satires: Dialogue II*, ll.181, 123, in *TE*, IV, 323, 320. Further references are by line number, and incorporated in the text.

¹⁶ Fuchs, pp. 59-61. For the argument that Pope's mature 'Horatian' satires (especially the *Epilogue*) owe more to Persius than they do to Horace, see Weinbrot (n. 6), pp. 30-1, 136-9, 148; Griffin, p. 171; Aden, pp. 270, 279-80; Hopkins (n. 4), p. 230; William Kupersmith, *English Versions of Roman Satire in the Earlier Eighteenth Century* (Newark, NJ, 2007), pp. 65, 134.

¹⁷ Isaac Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and His Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole* (Cambridge, MA, 1968), pp. 80-2; J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*, 2nd edn (Princeton, NJ, 1975), pp. 477-88; Shelley Burt, *Virtue Transformed: Political Argument in England, 1688-1740* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 16-19; Gerrard, pp. 4-6, 35-40; Colin Nicholson, *Writing and the Rise of Finance: Capital Satires of the Early Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 2-5, 18-24.

¹⁸ See Hopkins, pp. 229-30.

¹⁹ Thomas Gilbert, *The World Unmask'd: A Satire*. (London, 1738), pp. 5, 6.

²⁰ Benjamin Loveling, *The First Satire of Persius Imitated* (London, 1740), pp. 5, 17.

²¹ Aden, p. 269.

²² Paul Whitehead, *Manners: A Satire* (London, 1739), pp. 4-5.

²³ Thomas Newcomb, *A Miscellaneous Collection of Original Poems, Consisting of Odes, Epistles, Translations, &c.* (London, 1740), title page.

²⁴ Newcomb, *A Supplement to One thousand Seven hundred Thirty-eight. Not written by Mr. Pope* (London, 1738), p. 19. Further references are by page number, and incorporated in the text.

²⁵ Weinbrot (n. 6), p. 46.

²⁶ Of Churchill's sixteen major complete and incomplete poems, only five – *The Apology* (1761), *The Duellist* (1764), *Gotham* (1764), *The Times* (1764), and *The Journey* (1764) – do not incorporate dialogic elements.

²⁷ Wilkes's political agenda – mercantile, expansionist, cautiously reformist – drew its support base predominantly from the commercial classes in the City and the urban poor. See George Rudé, *Wilkes and Liberty: A Social Study of 1763 to 1774* (Oxford, 1962).

²⁸ Charles Churchill, *Night*, ll. 371-5, 362, in *Poetical Works of Charles Churchill*, edited by Douglas Grant (Oxford, 1956), pp. 60-1. All quotations from Churchill's poetry are taken from this edition, cited by line number.

²⁹ See Vincent Carretta, *The Snarling Muse: Verbal and Visual Satire from Pope to Churchill* (Philadelphia, PA, 1983), pp. 242-3; Lance Bertelsen, *The Nonsense Club: Literature and Popular Culture, 1749-64* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 236-46.

³⁰ Bertelsen, p. 221. See also Thomas Lockwood, *Post-Augustan Satire: Charles Churchill and Satirical Poetry, 1750-1800* (Seattle, WA, 1979), p. 56: 'this is ... a moment in which an otherwise purely conventionalized dialogue becomes strikingly real'.

³¹ In its notices the *Monthly Review* pretended to be sentimentally horror-struck at Churchill's 'plans' to exile himself to India: 'Alas! should this woeful event take place, what will become of us poor Critics?' See *The Monthly Review; or Literary Journal*, 30 (London, 1764), p. 487.

³² On the bifurcation of Juvenalian and Horatian modes during the later eighteenth century, see W. B. Carnochan, 'Satire, Sublimity, and Sentiment: Theory and Practice in Post-Augustan Satire', *PMLA*, 85 (1970), 260-7; Weinbrot, *Eighteenth-Century Satire*, pp. 189-90, 195; Weinbrot, *Alexander Pope and the Traditions of Formal Verse Satire* (Princeton, NJ, 1982), pp. 342-64; Gary Dyer, *British Satire and the Politics of Style, 1789-1832* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 39-41; Stuart Gillespie, 'Literary History and Critical Historicism: Reading Wordsworth's Juvenal', in *Romans and Romantics*, edited by Timothy Saunders *et al.* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 127-44 (p. 134). In this regard, however, Ashley Marshall cautions that 'we cannot presume that eighteenth-century respondents would have shared our taxonomical schemes', and P. K. Elkin has shown that theoretical distinctions between Juvenalian and Horatian satire were frequently blurred in practice (Marshall, *The Practice of Satire in England, 1658-1770* (Baltimore, MD, 2013), p. 65; Elkin, *The Augustan Defence of Satire* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 157-65). Gillespie, Dyer, and Weinbrot's arguments here are part of a recent upsurge in critical attention to Romantic-period verse satire and its role in popular print culture. Other such work includes Marilyn Butler, 'Satire and the Images of Self in the Romantic Period: The Long Tradition of Hazlitt's *Liber Amoris*', in *English Satire and the Satiric Tradition*, edited by Claude Rawson (Oxford, 1984), pp. 209-25; Steven E. Jones, *Satire and Romanticism* (New York, 2000); Marcus Wood, *Radical Satire and Print Culture, 1790-1822* (Oxford, 1994).

³³ Dyer, p. 42; Robert Calvin Whitford, 'Juvenal in England, 1750-1802', *PQ*, 7 (1928), 9-16.

³⁴ William Gifford, *The Baviad: A Paraphrastic Imitation of the First Satire of Persius* (London, 1791), ll. 134, 276, pp. 23, 41.

³⁵ Dyer, p. 26.

³⁶ George Daniel, *The Modern Dunciad: A Satire; with Notes, Biographical and Critical*, 2nd edn (London, 1815), p. 9.

³⁷ Thomas James Matthias, *The Pursuits of Literature, or What You Will: A Satirical Poem in Dialogue. Part the First* (London, 1794), pp. 26, 40.

³⁸ See Dyer, p. 51.

³⁹ Wolcot's politics were popular and democratic, although as Dyer and others have observed his satirical method was 'essentially negative in character', irreverently anti-establishmentarian rather than programmatically reformist. See Dyer, pp. 35-7; also Grzegorz Sinko, *John Wolcot and his School: A Chapter from the History of English Satire* (Wrocław, 1962), p. 61; Ritchie Robertson, *Mock-Epic from Pope to Heine* (Oxford, 2009), p. 125.

⁴⁰ Weinbrot, *Eighteenth-Century Satire*, p. 199.

⁴¹ 'Peter Pindar' [John Wolcot], *One Thousand Seven Hundred and Ninety-Six; A Satire, In Two Dialogues*, in *The Works of Peter Pindar, Esq.*, rev. edn, 5 vols (London, 1812), III, 387.

Further references are to page number, and incorporated in the text.

⁴² Gilbert, *The First Satire of Juvenal Imitated* (London, 1740), p. 20.