

Scriblerian Satire: Myth or Reality

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Abstract: The article examines the validity of the term “Scriblerian satire” as a concept in literary history. It attempts to dispute the views of Ashley Marshall, who has argued that the entity is a mythical construct, posthumously invented by scholars and critics. Marshall contends that the Scriblerus Club was a short-term phenomenon, while its members soon dispersed and wrote in very disparate styles. Apart from Jonathan Swift, others in the circle wrote no substantive works in satirical form prior to 1725. This article questions some fundamental aspects of Marshall’s case. It challenges her narrow definition of satire, as well as her assertion that a sharp break in practice took place between the first and second quarters of the century. Instead, the article considers a wider range of items produced under the aegis of the original Scriblerians. It proposes a much closer and more durable connection among the group; a far greater coherence in the methods, settings and targets of their work; a more extensive involvement in shared exercises; and it identifies a distinct mode of satire that can be meaningfully called Scriblerian. Neither the nature of this literary collaboration nor the character of its outcome in print was in any sense mythical.

Keywords: satire; authorship; Scriblerus; Club activity; eighteenth century

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Introduction

Distinguished as it is in many ways, the work of Claude Rawson may be most notable for the contribution he has made to our understanding of the literary sub-genre commonly known as Scriblerian satire. The most prominent share in this work has been taken by some hugely influential studies of Jonathan Swift, beginning with his book *Gulliver and the Gentle Reader* in 1973. However, he has ranged more widely across the activities of members of the so-called Scriblerus Club, including an edition with F.P. Lock of the poems of Thomas Parnell (1989), important essays on Alexander Pope, and scattered articles involving John Gay and John Arbuthnot. All these have helped to define the group's aims and methods more clearly. No one has done more in recent years to illuminate the satiric procedures of "Swift, Pope and their Circle," the title of one of the collections of essays he has edited. Few if any scholars have made such profound connections between the output of these writers and that of their predecessors or heirs, such as Dryden, Rochester, Fielding, Johnson, and Byron.

In what seems almost a paradox, an outstanding scholar of a later generation, Ashley Marshall, has been largely responsible for a fundamental challenge to our views on the work of Swift and his colleagues. Indeed, she has called into question the very notion of Scriblerian satire—not just its origins, procedures and *raison d'être*, but its whole existence as a valid descriptor. Her argument was first set out in an article on "The Myth of Scriblerus" in 2008, and then appeared slightly condensed in an important book on *The Practice of Satire in England* (Marshall, 2008; 2013). Its conclusions have gained some traction in the academic world, and have never been subjected to detailed scrutiny. Although Marshall makes many shrewd observations in support of her case, it seems to me flawed in several basic respects. The aim of the present article is to offer an alternative view of the subject, by restoring the validity of the central term at issue, and seeking to demonstrate that the entity it describes is real and valid.

The method adopted here is firstly, to summarize Marshall's case, as divided in her book between the first and second quarters of the eighteenth century. Secondly, to indicate what seem to me weaknesses and gaps in its coverage of the issues, with an attempt to meet particular claims. In the process, I shall try to indicate evidence of various kinds which suggests a radically different conclusion. Overall, this analysis will discover convergence where Marshall identified divergence; close

parallelism where she make claims for dissimilarity; and a coherent purpose where she sees mainly casual connections. The argument will draw on biographic and historic circumstances as well as textual and bibliographical features of the writings composed by original members of the (genuine, though admittedly shortlived) Scriblerus Club.

The Case for Myth: Phase One

For the sake of convenience, the summary of Marshall's argument which follows is based on its later incarnation within *The Practice of Satire*. The revised case presents some matters in a rather more succinct form, and gains added cogency from its place in the author's considered estimate of the development of English satire, as regards theory as well as practice. Her sweeping discussion covers a wide temporal range, from the work of writers such as Marvell, Butler and Rochester to that of Fielding, Smollett and Sterne among others—an arc that Rawson has helped to reinscribe in literary history. It follows that an alternative version of the facts will offer a slightly different context in which to assess the output of the Scriblerian group.

Marshall divides her analysis between two chapters, one covering the years 1700 to 1725, the second those from 1726 to 1745. The section on the earlier period contrasts the satirists under review with Defoe and other writers of hard-edged “religiopolitical satirists” including Mandeville, and didactic authors such as Addison and Steele. Here, the aim is to separate the Scriblerians from their contemporaries and show “how little the work of those writers (excepting Swift) fits the satiric milieu” of the other groups described in the chapter (151). This is the gravamen of Marshall's whole argument, restated in different terms as part of the following chapter devoted to the succeeding decades. In paraphrasing her case, I omit numerous small cases of repetition or duplication of ideas.

In setting up this account of the period, Marshall asserts, “I will begin with Pope, not because he is the star satirist in the quarter century before *The Dunciad*, but because, unlike the others, he is barely a satirist at all” (174, repeating a claim on p. 153). In *The Rape of the Lock*, “his criticism is gentle and sympathetic,” as compared with *Mac Flecknoe* (174). “What negative satire Pope writes in his early career is small scale and mostly unpleasant.” This comment applies to a prose pamphlet on Edmund Curll and the ballad-style poem “The Worms,” both from 1716: the latter item is “mean spirited but essentially frivolous.” These works “have little to do with our image of [Pope] as a high-toned moralizer and a denunciatory cultural warrior” (175).

The next author considered is Gay, whom Marshall treats as “a master of burlesque,” in travesties of epic, pastoral and georgic productions, and who “makes a hobby of lampooning John Dennis.” In his poetry and drama, “Gay mocks people and ideas and genres to wonderful effect, but the satiric thrust of his early pieces is by no means always obvious” (175). As for *The Fan* and *Trivia*, they “both reflect Gay’s discontentment with existing social structures, but they are also jolly” (176). After this comes a discussion of Arbuthnot’s writings, noting that his “reputation as a satirist depends largely on *The History of John Bull*” (177). In this work, the author mocks individuals, political factions, religious sects, and institutions, “but he does so without much animus.” Closer to the practice of other satirists considered in this chapter is *The Art of Political Lying*, even though Arbuthnot’s motives “are hard to discern” throughout a work styled “a frustratingly indirect satire” (179).

There follows a key statement of Marshall’s theme:

Clichés about the “Scriblerians” and longstanding assumptions about their interconnections have made scholars assume more commonality than actually exists. Pope, Gay and Arbuthnot (with Swift) spent some time together in 1714; they were friends and sometimes allies; at different times and to varying degrees, they were in touch with each other and occasionally made suggestions about each other’s works. (179)

What is the reality, “If we look for incongruities as well as correspondences, without trying to make these men into a ‘Scriblerian’ cohort”? The same answers appear: What little satire Pope writes in this period is “either pure fluff or personal lampoon.” The complaints against society that Gay makes are “usually obscured by or neutralized by tone and contexts.” Meanwhile, “Arbuthnot’s preoccupations are largely political” (179). This section of the chapter concludes with a restatement of the general proposition adumbrated in its title, “The Alleged ‘Scriblerians’” and refers back to the categories Marshall has set up in her preliminary discussion of the genre.

The notion that Pope, Arbuthnot, and Gay are three of the four chief practitioners of a “Scriblerian mode” of satire is a critical delusion. Another much-cherished fantasy is that this “mode” is somehow central to and illustrative of the world of early eighteenth-century satire. Except in very loose terms, the satires of these writers does not really “belong” to the categories discussed [earlier in the book]: attack, defense, warning, ideological

argumentation, and didacticism are not what we find in Pope and Gay.

Arbuthnot stands “closer to his contemporaries,” but in the crucial case “Pope is particularly out of sync with what is going on around him.” As a result, there is no single mode “practised by the ‘Club’ members.” Pope, Gay, and Arbuthnot produce “utterly different types of satire—and Swift is another beast altogether” (180).

The discussion now turns to Swift’s work, with the observation that he “writes a lot of satire in this quarter century, and his practice is far from uniform” (180). This section considers a variety of works that represent “Swift before *Gulliver*.” There is much intelligent commentary on poems and political pamphlets, with dispersed insights into *A Tale of a Tub*. Despite its merits, this portion of Marshall’s book does not bear directly on the issues debated in the present article, until a summarizing paragraph near its conclusion:

A Tale is usually regarded as a “pre-Scriblerian” enterprise; it gets twinned with *Gulliver’s Travels* as pinnacles of achievement; its author is viewed as a great literary satirist and a devoted confrere of Pope, Gay, and Arbuthnot [...] His friendship with Pope and company notwithstanding, what they are doing in the early eighteenth century is ultimately irrelevant to what he is doing. Forcing Swift into a “Scriblerian” pigeonhole badly misrepresents his early career as a satirist. (190)

This process by which Swift is “miscontextualized” as “an ‘Augustan’ and ‘Scriblerian’ writer” (190) falsifies his place in literary history.

So we come towards the end of Chapter 5 in *The Practice of Satire*. What follows in Chapter 6, “Harsh and Sympathetic Satire” can be seen as a logical extension of the case mounted in its predecessor.

The Case for Myth: Phase Two

At the outset of the new chapter, Marshall repeats some of her contentions. She identifies four numbered cases that she intends to maintain. No. 1 is that “In fact there is little continuity from the first quarter of the eighteenth century to the 1726-1745 period, and we need to take these years on their own terms.” No. 2 reiterates the view that Pope, Swift and Gay had no “life-changing commitment to the ‘Scriblerian’ mission,” and that, granted “some shared values and occasional collaboration,” to lump them together is to “mischaracterize the subperiod at issue here” (195). No. 3 concerns *Gulliver’s Travels*, where Marshall’s conclusion is that

“Swift’s satire is a one-off, [...] largely unconnected to the culture of satire in this period.” No.4 can be left aside here: it claims that Henry Fielding is wrongly seen as a would-be “Scriblerian,” since “his concepts of satire are remote from those of any of the Scriblerians” (195). This last case is interesting and often convincing, but it can be left aside here as it does not have an immediate bearing on the reality or otherwise of the key concept, and does not depend on the accuracy of Marshall’s account of the work of the earlier group of writers.

A short section on “Pope and Swift among their Contemporaries,” argues that a sharp break occurred in 1725, after which “the culture of satire alters in major and not wholly explicable ways” (196). This discontinuity affects the key figures in the period, and serves to produce “an awkward problem: Pope, Swift, and Gay are substantially different both from what goes on around them and from each other.” In discussing these authors, Marshall declines to give special weight to Pope’s *Moral Essays* or Horatian *Imitations*, texts which have been “pretty well understood” (197). To show how they “belong in their contemporary context,” she sets out a map of the forms of satire in the period, identifying their salient aspects in politic commentary and debate, culture wars of the era, and social satire. Here she considers *The Dunciad* as exemplar of one *Kulturkampf*, in which both the 1728 and 1743 versions are seen as “primarily” punitive (203).

This section is a prelude to a second analysis of Pope, Swift and Gay, once more emphasizing the disparity of their aims. The principal aim is wittily defined as an attempt “to dispute the enduring notion that Pope and Swift are Siamese satirists” (217). The contrast derives from a “glaringly obvious” feature of their works: “Pope is first and foremost an artist, Swift a sociopolitical warrior” (218). Once more, Marshall fixes on the appearance of *The Dunciad* as the moment when its author becomes “the mature Pope,” who finally emerges as a regular satirist, with a more aggressive approach to the world he describes. Three paragraphs are devoted to the works that appeared in the 1730s, during the phase that Pope has links with the opposition to Robert Walpole. On Swift, what needs to be said is that “*Gulliver* is not representative of his output, and neither does it share much, except a few particular targets, with the practice of Swift’s fellow ‘Scriblerians’ or his less well-known contemporaries” (211). Accordingly, the present chapter defers consideration of *Gulliver* to a later section, with immediate attention turned towards some of the most familiar poems such as *Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift*. There is only brief mention of *A Modest Proposal*. Marshall downplays *The Memoirs of Scriblerus*, on the grounds that the lengthy commentary by their modern editor, linking the travel chapters there later evolved into portions of *Gulliver* “rests wholly upon

supposition” (Kerby-Miller 315-320).

Similarly, she discounts the *Miscellanies* of 1727-1732, as they “do not, on the whole, reflect a shared satiric agenda.” Rather, they consist of “a range of not very related works produced by quite dissimilar men” (216). Under Gay, we are given a single page on *The Beggar’s Opera* and the *Fables*. Arbuthnot does not figure in this chapter.

The separate discussion of “The Problem of Meaning in *Gulliver’s Travels*” has already been mentioned. It offers much food for thought, but like other observations scattered through the book regarding Swift and his friends it does not deal centrally with the extent or kind of commonality in their satiric output.

A General Assessment of the Case

For all the considerable merits of Marshall’s book, her argument with respect to Scriblerian satire and its makers appears profoundly misleading. The approach is heavily dependent on a stipulative definition of satire. Its historical contextualization of the group rests in part on an over-schematic “break” around 1725 that seems the product of an idiosyncratic map of the genre rather a clearcut sequence of events. It confuses the firsthand dealings of its members (which are themselves underestimated) with their decades-long association on a literary level. It has an eccentric range of coverage, omitting some important aspects of the group’s works and almost wilfully ignoring evidence of collaboration. It plays down inconvenient features of their careers, such as the recurrent political animus in much of the work of Pope, especially, and Gay prior to 1725. It understates the presence and the significance of shared targets. It overlooks features of their practice, such as the pervasive influence of *A Tale of a Tub* on what they wrote. In maintaining that members of the fraternity lacked any “life-changing commitment to the ‘Scriblerian’ mission,” it neglects the inconvenient fact that Gay, Arbuthnot and especially Pope began to write in a more scabrous and biting fashion, often in a manner Swift had introduced, soon after the Club was dissolved.

Some brief examples may be given of what seem to me evidence of these flaws. The narrowness of the definition when applied to the Scriblerians comes out in numerous places. There is something very odd about an analysis of satiric practice that lets through Ned Ward and Mandeville’s *Fable of the Bees*, for instance, but can easily jettison *The Rape of the Lock* because it is too friendly towards the world of its heroine and lacks the dose of savage indignation called for by the critic’s recipe. This tendency is particularly clear in Marshall’s willingness to see that “not all satiric moralists are punitive,” and to allow in the “soft” version

of reformatory satire exemplified by *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* (169-170), while debarring some of the most incisive uses of mock epic ever written. *Alma*, a poem by the Scriblerians' ally and Arbuthnot's intimate friend, Matthew Prior, is awarded mention as a burlesque with a philosophical point (173), with no recognition of its intertextual links with the *Rape* and with the still unpublished *Memoirs of Scriblerus*. More generally, an almost Pickwickian definition of satire is required to disqualify Gay's *Trivia* because it is "jolly" (not that this describes the only mood of the work), or the farce *The What d'ye Call It* because "its potentially trenchant social satire [is] diffused by its appearance in a nonsensical plot" (176). *The Marriage of Figaro* might be in danger if we were to apply such stringent criteria.

The arbitrary nature of the date 1725 under this aspect is plain if we consider the obvious continuities in the work of all the Scriblerus group, for example between Swift's poem *The Bubble or Upon the Horrid Plot*, composed well before the line, and one such as *To Mr. Gay*, comfortably on the other side. They are "palpably from the same hand," as Constant Lambert said of Duke Ellington's pieces in faster and slower tempos (214). Likewise Pope wrote Horatian imitations, familiar epistles and mock heroics before the break, besides incorporating earlier lines into the *Epistle to Arbuthnot*. The doctor himself composed short satiric pamphlets throughout his career, all in very much the same idiom.

With regard to the contacts between the group, Marshall appears to believe that the collapse of the Club as a social institution signalled a decline in intimacy and a loss of literary cohesion. The facts hardly support this assumption. It is certainly true that the Club as a human entity met only for a short spell in the later years of Queen Anne, with a few slight efforts at resuscitation of their meetings afterwards. As well as the departure of two members from London, other external factors may have played a part in the break-up of the group. After the Hanoverian accession, their patron and honorary affiliate Lord Oxford was impeached and confined in the Tower of London for two years. Arbuthnot was deprived of his lodgings at St James's Palace, where the Club normally met. Gay no longer had favour at court, while Pope was subject to severe anti-Catholic legislation, which meant the loss of his family home and ultimately his move to Twickenham. The social nexus that had existed under Queen Anne (as in the Tory group known as the Brothers' Club, to which Swift and Arbuthnot belonged) would soon collapse.

As noted, one of the team, Swift, soon left for permanent exile in Ireland, and he was followed by the poet Thomas Parnell, who died not very long afterwards. This left Pope, Arbuthnot and Gay as the only founding members still around. Their major collective production did not come out until there was just one left—

Pope, who published *The Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus* in 1741. It is also true that the individual writers had some specialisms of their own, and that some of their works have little relation to the overall satiric project (Gay's *Fables*, to take a single example). But even *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), which belongs to an alternative tradition of mock musicals, had its roots in a suggestion from Swift concerning the opportunity for a "Newgate pastoral."

Yet the principals went on corresponding with one another, boosting each other's work, and often plotting a satiric course in tandem. We might not guess from what Marshall says that the three English-based members of the group were in regular contact for more than two decades, and all spent a lot of time with Swift on his all too brief return visits to London in 1726 and 1727 (Marshall's phrasing in the passage quoted above from p. 179 might suggest that Pope, Gay and Arbuthnot were only regularly together in 1714.) Their joint projects went on beyond the grave, because it is certain from physical evidence, as well as a mountain of other clues, that Arbuthnot took a share in the *Memoirs of Scriblerus*, although Pope did not bring the book out until several years after the death of the doctor.¹

The central goal in the Scriblerus movement had been to produce items of learned wit, in which attacks were launched on pomposity, pretentiousness, bogus scholarship, fatuous intellectual schemes, and preposterous innovations. Some of these targets are most evident in the third book of *Gulliver's Travels*, but the ridicule of figures at the court of Lilliput who institute impeachment (I. ii) and the Houyhnhnm senators sitting in judgment on Gulliver (IV. x) partakes of the same quality. Beyond this, the plot of the book enacts a movement common in satires by members of the group, whereby an apparently rational narrator turns out to be thoroughly demented, like Gulliver skulking in a stable at the end of his story. Among Swift's other works, this process of gradual revelation is found most obviously in *A Modest Proposal*, where it takes a little time before we realise just how crazed the proposer is. The parallel effect of a shifting narrative voice occurs in the writings of the highly unreliable narrator "Isaac Bickerstaff" in the Partridge Papers, as well as the tricky persona to be found in the *Drapier's Letters* (1724-1725) and the *Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift*. But we must keep in mind that the reader has to negotiate similar hermeneutic twists in Pope's *Key to the Lock* (1715), with its absurd Jacobite interpretation of *The Rape of the Lock*, and in Arbuthnot's pamphlets casting scorn on quacks and pedants. Thus, techniques as well as topics and targets are shared.

¹ See Charles Kerby-Miller, *The Memoirs of the Extraordinary Life, Works, and Discoveries of Martinus Scriblerus*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, 58-61, 364-369.

While such elements do appear in the work of other writers, their use is more pervasive and rhetorically much more skilful in writings by the Club group. An able parodist of the Royal Society was someone Marshall does not mention, William King (d. 1712), but he seldom achieves the full ludic absurdity of the Scriblerian narratives. Swift and his friends hardly ever fail to be funny.

Collaboration

The matter of collaboration is one of the places where the case for a mythical entity is at its weakest. A considerable weight of evidence serves to augment the cohesiveness of the satirists' output. For one thing, they did not need to be in one another's company to get their Scriblerian act together. Pope, Gay and Arbuthnot all corresponded extensively with Swift during his absence in Ireland, and as soon as he was able to visit England in 1726 and 1727 immediately resumed their intimate relations. The letters contain plans for forthcoming works. Long after Swift left for Dublin, his colleagues kept exhorting him to carry on with his Scriblerian activity. It is here, along with messages to a close associate, Charles Ford, that we can trace the origins of the *Travels* and the progress Swift made on them in the early 1720s. In the immediate aftermath of publication, it would be Arbuthnot who gave the author his first account of the ways in which the book had been received.

This is not exactly the impression we are given by Marshall's comment on the group, cited above, that "at different times and to varying degrees, they were in touch with each other." In all, Swift and Pope exchanged almost 300 surviving letters between 1713 and 1740, including letters some written jointly to or from Gay and Arbuthnot. By comparison, the tally with Arbuthnot is smaller: only 31 are known between Swift and the doctor, mostly from the latter, while there are about twenty with Pope (but of course the two men were living at close distance for much of this period, and none of the surviving items addressed to Arbuthnot "were recovered by Pope and published by him" (Arbuthnot 457). Gay left only an exiguous correspondence that has come down to us, but it includes a good deal of relevant items: the members of the group are represented in more than half of the 81 letters that survive, with Swift by far the highest scorer at 33.

There is a second consideration here. The friends went on collaborating for many years after the breakup of their meetings. Pope and Arbuthnot seem to have shared responsibility for a number of pamphlets from around 1716 (see the section on "Coverage" below), while it has never been doubted that they are the joint authors of the *Memoirs*, the key text in assessing how the project evolved over time. The three London Scriblerians were identified by hostile critics as a "triumvirate"

who put together the farce *Three Hours after Marriage* (1717). It is often impossible to tell where one writer breaks off and the other takes over. Pope wrote a parody of his friend in the form of a Horatian epistle “Imitated in the Manner of Dr. Swift,” which never strays far at all from the Dean’s language and versification. A poem called *Bounce to Fop* (1736), is full of innuendo concerning political figures. Swift may have started this item, and Pope completed it. But if so, at what point did he seize the pen, and did he revise Swift’s supposed portion extensively? We do not know. Despite periodic differences, the two men remained extraordinarily close to one another in outlook and in literary mannerisms. It is possible that Marshall was influenced by Dustin Griffin’s book on Swift and Pope as “satirists in dialogue,” an excellent study that does everything it can to accentuate discrepancies in the outlook and practice of the duo and to minimize their congruences.¹

In respect of the *Memoirs*, Marshall acknowledges that “the authorship is far from clear” (215), noting that Pope may have been the most committed to its composition, but that scholars now believe Arbuthnot wrote much of it (on very strong grounds, it might be added). As we have already seen, she challenges the links to *Gulliver* proposed by Charles Kerby-Miller, stating “Whether Swift in particular had anything to do with the composition of this key ‘Scriblerian’ text is anybody’s guess” (216). What this leaves out is the parallel with many other items found in the *Miscellanies* and elsewhere, that remain impossible to attribute with any certainty to individual members of the group—or indeed to identify as lone or collaborative exercises. A parody of Gilbert Burnet’s historical manner, *Memoirs of P. P.*, written about 1715 and published in the *Miscellanies*, might be the handiwork of any one (or two, or three, or four) of the group. This does not suggest profound idiosyncrasies in their separate manners of writing, or easily detectable signs of their presence.

A clinching issue lies in the fact that, as already noted, the group maintained their identity by producing a series of jointly written *Miscellanies* from 1727. *The Dunciad* was originally scheduled to appear in this setting. Items that did make their debut include *Peri Bathous*, another Pope-Arbuthnot collaboration. A host of smaller items were included in the set, originally running to four volumes. Pope included numerous well known works by Swift, who had a very good idea of what was going on and did not raise any objections until much later. By the time that he brought the *Travels* before the public, the author had an inkling of his friend’s intentions. Thus, the masterpiece emerged from a larger matrix of satiric practice in

1 See Dustin Griffin, *Swift and Pope: Satirists in Dialogue*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

which all four survivors among the group took part.

An observation by Marshall that the series comprises “a range of not very related works produced by quite dissimilar men” (216) is also misleading. The items found in the *Miscellanies* embody a wide assortment of materials by each of the individuals concerned. Thus, Swift’s contributions begin with his weighty prose in the shape of *Contests and Dissentions* at the opening of Volume I, and then cover his writing in almost every vein from grave to gay, with trifles and solemn treatises side by side. Volume II has Arbuthnot’s most extended satire, *John Bull*, and shorter examples of his work, in addition to Pope’s brilliant *Key to the Lock*. The so called “Last Volume” contains *Peri Bathous*, preceding some of Swift’s best known poems, such as *Cadenus and Vanessa*. The so called “third” volume that came out in 1732 has the most recognisably “Scriblerian” colouring of all. Its contents are split between serious essays on political and moral themes by Swift, the immortal *Modest Proposal*, and some biting verses from the same hand, together with short satirical pamphlets by Pope and/or Arbuthnot, including *The Narrative of Robert Norris*, three items on Edmund Curll, and *Annus Mirabilis*. All four living members of the original Club are present, in various capacities.

Once more, there is a difficulty that might have troubled Marshall more than it seems to do. We have little idea of the authorship of numerous pieces in the *Miscellanies*, with Pope’s subsequent identifications providing no clear light on the subject. If the four survivors were such an ill assorted bunch, wouldn’t we expect to distinguish with ease their separate hand? A large quotient of the materials (but by no means all) are cast in the form of satire. This is precisely what a reader of the day would expect to find in a set of *Miscellanies*, as it displays characteristics of the genre seen in Curll’s *Miscellanea* (1726), a publication which may have spurred his foes into retaliatory action.

References by Marshall to the *Miscellanies* fail to observe one striking parallel found in many of the items: the various writers often choose identical targets. A frenzied ideologue or system-maker commonly appears at the centre of the story, as with the critic John Dennis in Pope’s *Narrative of Dr. Robert Norris* (1713), told by a quack. It is only a single step to the once competent medical man Lemuel Gulliver, now become a deluded misanthrope as a result of his voyages. We recall that three pamphlets concern the descent into madness of the publisher Edmund Curll, who also figures in Swift’s *Verses*: two of these are by Pope, the third may have been written partly or wholly by Arbuthnot. Other short pieces by the group attack the self-important geologist John Woodward, along with astrologers and astronomers like William Whiston, in terms similar to those used in the third voyage. “Jeremy

Thacker,” a mathematician created by Arbuthnot to make fun of wild proposals to find the longitude, would have little difficulty fitting into Laputan society. A few of such productions are found scattered through the *Miscellanies*, and several others appeared in continuations to the series emanating from London and Dublin in the following decade, as also in the collections of Arbuthnot’s works. Diverse as they are in their occasion and in their bibliographical history, they serve collectively to cast doubt on the claim that the volumes “do not reflect a shared agenda” and are simply the productions of a disparate group, “our Scriblerians” [who] wrote very different kinds of work” (216).

Coverage

While Ashley Marshall deals with a number of important areas of the subject, there are some surprising omissions. The list of works covered seems arbitrary and selective in places, while the narrow definition of satire means that several compositions by the group are given short shrift.

The most obvious lacuna relates to Thomas Parnell, a founder of the club and an active participant in the activities of its members until his death. He is never mentioned in the text of *The Practice of Satire*, and none of his writings is included in the bibliography of primary sources that extends to thirty-six pages. It is a strange decision on the author’s part for several reasons. Parnell was a friend and correspondent of all the other Scriblerians, and there is no clear justification to relegate him to the role of a fifth Beatle offstage. His oeuvre contains much that relates to the practice of his colleagues, in satire as well as in epic. His first important work was *An Essay upon the Different Styles of Poetry*, published in March 1713. It was dedicated to the political ally of the group, Lord Bolingbroke, who along with Swift saw the poem in manuscript and suggested revisions. As Parnell’s editors note, the poem “is in the tradition of Horace’s *Ars Poetica*, a tradition that had most recently been embodied in Pope’s *An Essay on Criticism* (1711). Although TP’s poem was published after Pope’s [...] it may have been conceived before Pope’s appeared” (Parnell 432). Indeed an earlier version is found in a surviving notebook that contains seventy-eight mainly humorous items, many first published by Rawson and Lock in 1989. Collectively, they belong to the mode that contemporaries recognized as the satiric genre: the shortest is an epigram based on Martial, an author whom his near-namesake Marshall would probably concede underlies much Augustan practice. The *Essay* by Parnell also has some links with Pope’s *Temple of Fame*, which have not been fully explored.

In fact, the dealings between the two men in the immediate post-Club years

were extensive. Parnell has claims to rank as Pope's closest literary associate for a time. Some signs of this relationship may be briefly stated: (1) The second major poem in Parnell's career was his translation of *Homer's Battle of the Frogs and Mice* (1717), the supposedly Homeric mock epic of uncertain date entitled *Batrachomyomachia*. The verse here is prefaced by a life of the ancient critic Zoilus, used as a means to ridicule John Dennis, Richard Blackmore and Richard Bentley as pedantic and uncomprehending readers of literature—the first two had already tangled with Pope. (2) It has generally been agreed that Parnell was drawn to this task by the work he did to assist Pope in his translation of the *Iliad*, which was not confined to the "Essay on Homer" he provided for the first volume (1715). (3) Parnell contributed a complimentary poem at the head of Pope's *Works* (1717). (4) Although he left for Ireland in 1714 and became Vicar of Finglas, he returned to England in 1718 and joined with his friends in planning a resumption of Scriblerian activities. This never came to pass, and he died on his way back to Ireland. (5) It was Pope who assembled the edition of Parnell's poems in 1721, after his colleague had bequeathed his papers to Pope "almost with his dying breath." In a dedicatory epistle to the honorary Scriblerian Lord Oxford, the editor pays a warm tribute to the departed poet, as "Blest in each Science, blest in ev'ry Strain!" (Pope 1954, 238) Rather slighter connections include a number of short items entitled by Parnell's editors "Scriblerian Epigrams," some involving Pope by name. There is also a translation into Latin of an excerpt from the first canto of *The Rape of the Lock*, that Pope himself published in 1717. All this evidence serves to reinforce the conclusion that Parnell must figure centrally in any account of the evolution of "Scriblerian" activity (whether the precise term is accepted or not), as members of the group went about their careers in the years following the demise of the Club.

Generally, Marshall treats the work of all the coadjutors in a selective manner. Even in the case of Swift, the most thoroughly explored among them, there is no room for some of his distinctively Scriblerian exercises, notably his *Examination of Certain Abuses, Corruptions, and Enormities in the City of Dublin* (1732). Although this sometimes excremental performance lacks a named persona, the author belongs to the line of unreliable narrators that extends back to the *Tale*-teller, Isaac Bickerstaff, Gulliver, and the modest proposer, as well as numerous disguises adopted by Pope and Arbuthnot. The current "examiner" is a rabid Whig and vehement critic of the Harley administration, who confidently decodes the seditious messages hidden by Jacobites behind the street cries of vendors marketing their goods—in London, as well as now Dublin. This piece has numerous tentacular roots in the work of the group since the time of the Club meetings, a period to which the

text obsessively returns.

However, it is Pope and Arbuthnot who suffer most from the skewed picture of their careers that the strict criteria impose. On Pope's later career, the treatment is sketchy on the *Imitations of Horace* and *Moral Essays*, and apart from brief remarks on *Peri Bathous* and the *Memoirs* the prose works such as the *Letter to a Noble Lord* go unexamined. The gaps stand out even more sharply in the earlier period. There is no room for *An Essay on Criticism* (acknowledged only at second hand as "at least quasi-satirical" (174), or for the satiric element in *The Temple of Fame*. A persistent shortfall concerns some of the briefer items. Among the many attributes of Pope's *Epistle to Miss Blount after the Coronation* (written 1714), often regarded as his most perfect creation on a miniature scale, are delicate vignettes contrasting urban and rural society. One of the author's pet genres in the period was the mock ballad, exemplified by *A Farewell to London* (1715), *Sandys's Ghost* and *The Court Ballad* (both 1717), *Duke upon Duke* (1720), and *The Discovery*, which just edges over Marshall's border line in 1726. The only example mentioned is *The Worms* (1716), which has been described as "probably the most popular poem (at least in his own day) that Pope is supposed to have written" (Pope 163). Marshall's dismissive comment, cited above, misses much of the intent: the pseudo-ballad is frivolous on the surface, but it has its roots in the battle with the Addisonian wits at Button's coffee-house over the *Iliad*. In *The Practice of Satire*, we are never made aware of this heated debate which temporarily dominated the political and literary discourse of the capital. Pope's work at this juncture is as heavily inflected by party issues as anything he wrote in 1730s. Even his slightest versicles around 1715 and 1716 display an urgent sense of the topical situation, in particular the Jacobite rising and the government's measures against the Catholic community. Again and again, the ballads take up divisions between Tory and Whig, Papist and Protestant, Jacobite and Hanoverian, in a manner that embodies the warring approach that Marshall sees as characteristic of satire, but that she denies to the younger Pope.

As regards prose, the book touches only on the first of the three pamphlets ridiculing Curll, one of them possibly written in whole or part by Arbuthnot. Moreover, it pays no attention to works from this phase such as *The Narrative of Dr. Norris* (1713); and *A Key to the Lock* (1715). Marshall might argue for their exclusion on the grounds that they are short and highly personalized. But in other contexts she is willing to admit lampoons against individuals like those of Marvell, Dryden, Defoe, and Swift, which are found in works of comparable length. *Norris* and the Curll pamphlets, in particular, act out the familiar Scriblerian plot in which a deluded figure rages as he is subjected to increasing humiliation.

It is often hard to determine the authorship of items in this category. However, we can be certain that several were written by members of the group: for example, *The Dignity and Use of Glass Bottles* (1715); the prefatory material to *Homer in a Nut-Shell* (1715); *God's Revenge against Punning* (1716); and *Mr. Joanidion Fielding His True and Faithful Account of the Strange and Miraculous Comet* (1716, directed against the astronomer John Flamsteed). There is also *An Essay Concerning the Origine of Sciences*, which was published in the *Miscellanies* in 1732, but probably written in the initial Club phase: Pope and Parnell have some claims, but the main author was doubtless Arbuthnot, whose anthropological interests led him to write of an ancient pygmy race with surprising links to the Yahoos. The favourite Scriblerian target of arrogant scientists appears in *A True and Faithful Narrative*, now thought to be by Gay and also included in the *Miscellanies*, which ridicules the predictions of William Whiston. While some questions of date and attribution remain open, the pamphlets listed above are clearly united in exploiting “a common satiric agenda.” They consistently employ learned wit, a familiar concept that Marshall largely denies herself. Several of them present a vision of an almost dystopian London, reduced to a chaotic state either by some kind of natural disaster or by the folly of the principal figure.

The narrow selection of Arbuthnot's works that Marshall discusses is easier to explain. Like most commentators, she evidently accepts the deattribution of most of the doctor's works that were found in the collection of 1750-1751. This shrinkage was caused by the efforts of George Arbuthnot to clear his father's name from the charge of writing such disreputable tosh. His attempt was well answered at the time, but its contentions have lingered on until recently, thanks mainly to the influential discussion of Lester M. Beattie in 1935. Later students of the period including Joseph M. Levine and Richard Nash have been more willing to examine the evidence carefully, and to reinstate Arbuthnot's authorship of particular pamphlets.¹ It is enough here to state that there are very strong grounds to reclaim at least half a dozen works printed in his *Miscellaneous Works*. This in addition to works already firmly established in the canon, such as *Mr. John Ginglicutt's Treatise* and *Virgilius Restauratus* (an appendix to *The Dunciad*), both dismissed by Marshall in an endnote as “scrappy satires on learning” (340). Another example is *Annus Mirabilis* (1722), the fantastic account of a supposed universal sex change that throws

1 See Lester M. Beattie, *John Arbuthnot: Mathematician and Satirist*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935; Joseph M. Levine, *Dr. Woodward's Shield: History, Science, and Satire in Augustan England*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977; Richard Nash, *Wild Enlightenment: The Borders of Human Identity in the Eighteenth Century*, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003.

London into turmoil. Unless we take account of such apparently “scrappy” satires by Arbuthnot and his friends, we shall overlook a large part of the characteristic offerings that made up the Scriblerian enterprise, and that took their inspiration from the original goals of the Club.

Conclusion

In 1986, the editor of Pope’s later prose works, Rosemary Cowler, wrote a pertinent sentence: “Because the productions of the Scriblerians were as collective as their closely shared attitudes and antagonisms, matters of attribution are sometimes [...] difficult, and problems of dating are often insoluble” (Pope 1986, 104). This is of course precisely the approach that Marshall set out to challenge, in its emphasis on the “closely shared attitudes and antagonisms” of the group. *The Practice of Satire* is a remarkable achievement, which has taught many students of the period, myself included, a great deal about the subject. The view set out here is that the book falsely mythologizes Scriblerian satire in denying its reality as an identifiable mode. As a result, Marshall is in danger of misaligning literary history and misdirecting criticism of the course of letters in this era. It remains the task of others to adjudicate on the issue.

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