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Petty Differences
Hobby Horses, Pacing Saddles, Cane Chairs, and the Transmission and Transformation of Knowledge in *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus* and *Tristram Shandy*

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Abstract This article considers the relations between literature and science in the Enlightenment by comparing how two intertextual and interdisciplinary texts adapt their sources. *The Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus* and *Tristram Shandy* are both loose adaptations of *Don Quixote* and treat the pursuit of knowledge as Quixotic quests. A striking feature of the adaptive practice of both Sterne and the Scriblerians is that sometimes the source text is barely changed at all. The difference might be petty. These authors test the definition of adaptation and raise questions about what happens to both the source and the new text when a fragment is adapted.

Keywords Literature and science. Tristram Shandy. The Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus. Borges. Cervantes. Rabelais. William Petty.

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1 Preamble

In this essay I am riding one, or rather two, of my hobby horses: the relations between literature and science in the Enlightenment and between *The Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus* and *Tristram Shandy*.[1] The horsey theme is also a vehicle to transport me through my argument. My argument, it should be noted, does not concern wholesale adaptations of one work in another. However, both of the texts under discussion are loosely based on *Don Quixote* in that they have central characters – and, in the case of *Tristram Shandy*, numerous characters, including Tristram, Yorick, Walter, and Toby – who are embarked on Quixotic quests. The fact is that both texts adapt and incorporate numerous source texts; they are fully intertextual. Indeed, *The Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus* is one of the many sources for *Tristram Shandy* and they both draw on other Renaissance authors such as Robert Burton and François Rabelais.

Literary adaptation involves the translation or transformation of one work in another; it might involve substantial transformation but there must be some continuity, or the adaptation will constitute an entirely new work. The tension between continuity and change is, then, at the heart of adaptation. A striking feature of the adaptive practice of both Sterne and the Scriblerians is that sometimes the source text is barely changed at all. The difference might be petty. These authors test the definition of adaptation. Perhaps it would be more accurate to describe their practice as allusion, borrowing or appropriation. Yet it is useful to include them in this wider discussion of adapting and rewriting in the age of Enlightenment because they raise questions about what happens to both the source and the new text when a fragment is adapted. Does the new version change the old?

A famous short story by Jorge Luis Borges, in which an adaptation which is not really an adaptation, helps clarify what is going on in the *Memoirs* and *Tristram Shandy*. In "Pierre Menard, Author of Quixote", first published in 1939, an imaginary French symbolist poet sets out to compose the original *Don Quixote* – not an adaptation – by becoming Cervantes:

> He did not want to compose *another Quixote* – which would be so easy – but *the Don Quixote*. It is unnecessary to add that his aim was never to produce a mechanical transcription of the original; he did not propose to copy it. His admirable ambition was to produce

1 I have touched on these themes before in, for example, Hawley 2009 and Hawley 2025. *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus* was first published in *The Works of Mr. Alexander Pope, in Prose* (1741) but composed jointly over a number of years by a group of writers who included Jonathan Swift, Thomas Parnell, John Gay and John Arbuthnot. *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* was published in instalments 1759-67.

> pages which would coincide – word for word and line for line – with those of Miguel de Cervantes. (Borges [1939] 1965, 45)

He becomes Cervantes by fully imagining himself a life in the Spanish golden age. Yet, he decides it is more interesting "to continue being Pierre Menard and to arrive at *Don Quixote* through the experiences of Pierre Menard" (46). By dint of extreme effort, he manages to compose short fragments of *Quixote* and, although they are identical to the original, the narrator of the story pronounces them to be richer in allusion because of the intervening years between the lives of Cervantes and Menard. The narrator is so inspired by the idea of the project that he starts reading Cervantes's text as if it were by Menard and it has much more resonance for him. The point here is that he is not changing the text but reading it as if it had a different author: "the technique is one of deliberate anachronism and erroneous attributions" (Borges [1939] 1965, 51). He urges us to experiment with other old familiar books to see how they can acquire new meanings if we imagine them as written by other people. (Of course, *Don Quixote* itself plays with authorship and Part Two was written in response to a spurious continuation, so Cervantes is certainly not simple-minded about the complexities of authorship and attribution).

A passage that comes immediately before this famous discussion of the *Quixote* in which the narrator describes some of Menard's other projects is often overlooked but it is also relevant:

> Two texts of unequal value inspired the undertaking [i.e. recreating *Don Quixote*]. One was that philological fragment of Novalis – No. 2005 of the Dresden edition – which outlines the theme of *total* identification with a specific author. The other was one of those parasitic books which places Christ on a boulevard, Hamlet on the Cannebière and Don Quixote on Wall Street. (Borges [1939] 1965, 45)

The German aristocrat and polymath, Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg, writing under the pseudonym Novalis, opined: "I demonstrate that I have really understood a writer only when I am able to act in the spirit of his thoughts, and when I can translate his works and alter them in various ways without detracting from his individuality" (Fishburn, Hughes 1990, 142). Novalis and Menard represent two extremes of the practice of adaptation: Novalis communes with the spirit of the author to produce a translation or adaptation which is different from the original; Menard rejects that approach and appropriates both the life and the works of the author to produce something that is the same as the original but means something different. The usual debate in adaptation studies, especially in discussions of film adaptations of novels, is about the fidelity of the

adaptation to the original and thus implicitly the representation of the original intentions of the original author. In the case of Menard's *Quixote*, the text means more if it is appropriated to a different author.

Borges's story is particularly relevant to the texts under consideration because they are fake memoirs about characters who are supposed to be authors. Like Borges's story, the *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus* and *Tristram Shandy* have slightly deranged narrators who have a complex understanding of the nature of the relationship between author, source text, adaptation and reception. They also play with what happens when (natural) philosophy is transplanted into a fictional context. Both Sterne and the Scriblerians mount a critique of specialised branches of knowledge by grafting them into a literary work. I suggest that, like Borges's narrator who reads *Don Quixote* as if written by Menard, the Scriblerian narrator reads Richard Bentley, William Petty and the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* as if written by their Dunce, Scriblerus. Sterne, however, is more like Novalis. He writes in the spirit of Rabelais and Cervantes and uses their works to critique new targets – William Warburton and John Locke – whom he sees as the enemies of wit.

2 Scriblerian Stalking Horses

Adaptation is not just either faithful or free; it can be critical as is the case in the *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*. The *Memoirs* charts the life and researches of a scribbler who is both a dunce and a pedant. A forerunner of both Walter Shandy and Flaubert's Bouvard and Pecuchet, Martin dabbles in numerous sciences. This satire is the most substantial product of a group known as the Scriblerus Club, which met in 1713-14 to ridicule "all the false tastes in learning".[2] Its final fixed form was curated and published by Pope but it developed from Pope's proposal for a monthly journal to be called *The Works of the Unlearned*, "in which whatever Book appears that deserves praise, shall be depreciated Ironically" (Pope 1956, 1: 195; 23 October [1713]). Thus one of its initial aims was to parody regular scientific newsletters such as *A History of the Works of the Learned*. It also adapts the format of the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* for satirical purposes.

In the final chapter of the *Memoirs*, the narrator details some of the discoveries and works of the Great Scriblerus "made and to

2 Alexander Pope in conversation with Joseph Spence, Beinecke MS Osborn c463, p. 4. This text differs slightly from the account edited by James Osborn (Spence 1966). This MS was acquired by the Bienecke in 1985, after the death of Osborn. Text transcribed by Steven Karian. I am extremely grateful to him for sharing his research on Spence with me.

be made, written and to be written, known and unknown" (Pope et al. 1988, 18: 165). The narrator promises that in the future, "All these will be vindicated to their true Author" (Pope, et al. 1988, 18: 169). One immediately thinks of Pope's ambition in *An Essay on Man* (1733-34) that he would "vindicate the ways of *God* to man" (1, l. 16). Here vindicate means to justify or clear from criticism and Pope's line alludes to Milton's "justify the ways of God to man". But the term "vindicate" – derived from the Latin *vim dicare*: to make (someone) say (something) – has several senses which are equally relevant to the Scriblerus project. It can mean "To claim as properly belonging to oneself or another; to assert or establish possession (of something) for oneself or another" (*OED.com*, s.v. vindicate, vb.). In this sense, the Mormons retrospectively baptise the dead in order to recruit more members of the Church of Latter-day Saints. The Scriblerians also attribute *Gulliver's Travels* and *A Modest Proposal* to their author, recruiting Swift's works for their wider project.

The process of vindication is launched at the end of the *Memoirs* with a list of

> PIECES *of* Scriblerus (*written in his Youth*) *already published*.
> An Essay on the Origin of the *Sciences*, written from the deserts of *Nubia*.
> Περί ΒΑΘΥΣ: Martinus Scriblerus his *Rhetoric*, or, Of the *Art of Sinking* in Poetry.
> VIRGILIUS RESTAURATUS: Seu Martini Scribleri, summi Critici, Castigationum in Æneidem Specimen.
> *Annus Mirabilis*, or The wonderful Effects of the Conjunction of Jupiter, Mars, and *Saturn*.
> The *Report* of a *Case* in an *Action at Law* concerning certain *Pyed*, or *Black* and *White* Horses.
> Notes and Prolegomena to the *Dunciad*.
> *Bentley*'s Milton. (Pope et al. 1988, 171)

In this list, five works are pieces by members of the club, but one is not.[3] The foreign object is *Bentley*'s Milton, that is, *Milton's Paradise Lost: A New Edition, by Richard Bentley, D.D.* (London, 1732). Richard

3 "An Essay of the Learned Martinus Scriblerus, concerning the Origine of Sciences. Written to the most learned Dr. --- F.R.S. from the Deserts of Nubia", first pub. in *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* [by Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, John Gay and John Arbuthnot], "Third" Volume (1732); "[Peri Bathous]: or, Martinus Scriblerus his Treatise of the Art of Sinking in Poetry", in *Miscellanies*, "Last" Volume (1728, dated 1727); "Virgilius Restauratus", in *Dunciad Variorum* (1729), then in *Miscellanies*, "Third" Volume (1732); *Annus Mirabilis: or, The wonderful Effects of the Approaching Conjunction of the Planets Jupiter, Mars, and Saturn*, by Abraham Gunther, Philomath (1722), attributed to Scriblerus in *Miscellanies*, "Third" Volume (1732); "Stradling versus Stiles", in *Miscellanies*, vol. 2 (1727).

Bentley, scholar, critic, Keeper of the Royal Library, Master of Trinity College, Cambridge and Fellow of the Royal Society, exemplified a new critical and professional mode of textual analysis. The Scriblerians deemed him ungentlemanly both in the rigour of his supposedly scientific treatment of literary works and in his bull-headed manners. Swift crossed swords with him in one of the skirmishes in the War between the Ancients and the Moderns. He depicted the debate about whether the *Epistles of Phalaris* were genuinely ancient in his "Battel of the Books" (1704) (Swift 2010, Levine 1991). In "Virgilius Restauratus", an appendix to Pope's *Dunciad Variorum* (1729) mostly by Arbuthnot, the Scriblerians parodied Bentley's pugnacious and pedantic philology. In his edition of *Paradise Lost*, Bentley corrected what he saw as scribal errors in the text but, in practice, substituted his own inferior readings for those of the master (Bourdette 1980). For example, he "emended" the poignant and stately final lines of the poem:

> They hand in hand with wandring steps and slow,
> Through *Eden* took thir solitarie way. (Milton 1674, 333)

And produced this flat-footed piety:

> *They hand in hand* with SOCIAL *steps their way*
> *Through* Eden *took*, WITH HEAV'NLY COMFORT CHEER'D. (Bentley 1732, 399)

Pope, whose own emendations of Shakespeare had attracted the criticism that finally prompted him to publish his *Dunciad*, was certainly a better poet than Bentley, though both editors claimed to be conduits for the original spirit of the author (Walsh 1997). The point of the satirical inclusion of Bentley's *Milton* in the list of works by Scriblerus is that it is so bad that it must be the product of a pedantic or crack-brained dunce. Here, the other senses of "vindicate" come into play. That is, as well as "claim", they also "set free" the work from its original author and punish or avenge themselves on him. Scriblerian satire is a form of justice or of revenge against their enemies.

Before this list of published works, the Scriblerians describe "*the Discoveries and Works of the Great* Scriblerus" in more detail in the final chapter. In doing so, they adapt and elaborate on ways of thinking as well as on specific texts. They allude to numerous

scientific hypotheses masquerading as discoveries in this highly compressed and allusive chapter.[4] This section of the chapter ends:

> His were the Projects of *Perpetuum Mobiles*, *Flying Engines*, and *Pacing Saddles*; the Method of discovering the *Longitude*, by *Bomb-Vessels*, and of increasing the *Trade-Wind* by vast plantations of *Reeds* and *Sedges*. (Pope, et al. 1988, 167)

The term "Projects" has a particular resonance of for Swift, who attacked Projectors who tout their crazy schemes in his *Modest Proposal* (1720) and the third voyage of *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). This list exemplifies three Scriblerian techniques of satirical adaptation:

1. Appropriation (assigning a work to a different author).
2. Collocation (lumping together works by different authors).
3. Adaptation or parody of a specific source (in this case the table of contents of the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*).

They often make "petty" changes, small adaptations, implying that these supposedly serious discoveries and projects are really not far off the ridiculous.

This list lumps together a number of different projects as if they were merely hobby horses. In fact, one of them (the pacing saddle) is horse adjacent and all are either means of transport or related to the global travel on which Britain's expanding trade and empire depended.[5] The "pacing saddle" was a kind of light weight carriage invented by William Petty in 1676. It probably resembled the later calash or the Tilbury carriage. Petty argued that because it was only two-wheeled and lightweight, it would be cheap to construct and run. Three passengers could be pulled by one horse or two men. Furthermore, the wheels could be removed so the pacing saddle could be converted into a sedan chair. Petty claims he chose the slightly silly name in order to attract attention: "one that will best please those that will smile at inventions" (Lansdowne [1927] 1967, 2: 149).

On the face of it, this seems like a practical invention and a good example of the application of scientific knowledge to the problems of everyday life. Yet people did smile and openly laugh at it. They did so perhaps because one of Petty's earlier inventions, his

4 See Pope, et al. [1741] 1988, 323-49 for Kerby-Miller's discussion of the likely targets of the satire in this chapter.

5 On the perpetuum mobile and flying engine as scientific pipe dreams, see Pope, et al. 1988, 332-4. The Scriblerians mocked some of the attempts to determine the longitude in "Ode, for Musick, on the Longitude", in *Miscellanies*, 'Last' vol. (1728, dated 1727). Sterne alludes to the competition to find a way of determining longitude Sterne [1759-67] 1978, 1984, 3, 29: 255 and 9, 33: 721.

"double-bottomed" ship – another eye-catching name for what was essentially a catamaran – sunk in 1665 with a loss of all 17 hands on board. To be fair, this was in a storm in the Bay of Biscay and many other ships were lost that day. Nonetheless, his plans were scuppered.[6]

Yet he was not targeted by the Scriblerians just because his projects were impractical. More importantly, his methodologies were employed in the subjugation of the Irish, as Swift laid bare in his *Modest Proposal*. Petty was the proponent of a statistical method which came to be known as "political arithmetic" (Lein 1975). The size of populations and thus of labour to be exploited or wealth to be taxed could be calculated by means of the analysis of such things as numbers of households, and numbers of what we have come since COVID 19 to call "excess deaths". This kind of thinking is parodied in Scriblerus's discovery that "The Number of the Inhabitants of London" can be "determin'd by the Reports of the Gold-finders [i.e. latrine cleaners]" (Pope, et al. [1741] 1988, 167-8). Moreover, Petty led the Down survey in 1654, which was used to appropriate lands from native Irish people to give to Oliver Cromwell's troops and supporters. Petty himself benefitted enormously from his survey. He gained three baronies in the west of Ireland and used them as laboratories for his often unsuccessful experiments – this too has parallels in the third book of *Gulliver's Travels*.

The Scriblerians might have read about Petty's scheme in a couple of papers published in the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* in 1684-85. The contents for 20 July 1684 include "An Account of some Experiments to be made relating to a Land Carriage: proposed by the Learned Sr. William Petty Knight". We should remember that the *Memoirs* originated in a plan to write a parody periodical. Arbuthnot was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1705 and was familiar with the publications and the internal politics of the society. I assume Arbuthnot is largely responsible for the "Discoveries and Works" section. He must have been digging through back issues to have come up with this scheme. It was old news when the Scriblerians began their work in 1714 and decidedly old hat when the *Memoirs* were published in 1741. Arbuthnot would not need to have read all the articles themselves. We can imagine him turning over dusty copies of the *Transactions* and scanning the front covers because this section of the *Memoirs* appears to have been adapted from the contents pages of the *Transactions*. The brevity of the descriptions of the projects and the juxtaposition of seemingly disparate schemes resemble the table of contents. Petty's pacing saddle is listed in the same paragraph as a

6 https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/~cmi/books/miscWr/experiment.html.

scheme for increasing the trade wind by planting reeds and sedges.[7] This is a parody of a scheme listed in the contents page of another issue of the *Transactions* from the same year: "*Certain Observations of the Midland Salt-Springs, in* Worcester-shire, Stafford-shire *and* Cheshire. *Of the crude* Salt *which grows from the* Stone-powder *dejected by said* Brines *in Boyling. Of the Specific difference betwixt* Sea-salt *and* Common-salt. *A way* (*which seems to be the true Method of Nature*) *of distilling* Sweet *and* Fresh-water *from* Sea-Water, *by the breath of* Sea-plants g*rowing in it. T*h*at this* breath *probably is the* material *cause of the* Trade *or* Tropic-winds. *By the learned* Martin Lister *Dr. of Physick of the University of* Oxon" (20 February 1683/4).

Dr Lister adapted his observation about how the transpiration of plants assists in the evaporation of salt from sea water to a larger theory about how the movement of air they supposedly cause is actually the source of the vast movements of air known as trade winds, vital to shipping. The Scriblerians extract the most ridiculous part of the title. Equally importantly, I think they are adapting the form of the contents pages in this chapter, especially when they come to list Scriblerus's Philosophical and Mathematical works.

After mentioning the perpetuum mobiles, pacing saddles, trade winds, etc., the narrator then provides a numbered list of "a few of his Philosophical and Mathematical Works":

1. A compleat Digest of the Laws of Nature, with a Review of those that are obsolete or repealed, and of those that are ready to be renew'd and put in force.
2. A Mechanical Explication of the Formation of the Universe, according to the Epicurean Hypothesis.
3. An Investigation of the Quantity of real Matter in the Universe, with the proportion of the specifick Gravity of solid Matter to that of fluid.
4. Microscopical Observations of the Figure and Bulk of the constituent Parts of all fluids. A Calculation of the proportion in which the Fluids of the earth decrease, and of the period in which they will be totally exhausted.
5. A Computation of the Duration of the Sun, and how long it will last before it. be burn'd out.
6. A Method to apply the Force arising from the immense Velocity of Light to mechanical purposes.

7 William Petty also appears in the contents page of the 20 December 1784 issue along with an item about Tide-Tables which might have provided inspiration for the Scriblerians: "*Some Queries whereby to examine Mineral waters, by the learned Sr.* William Petty *Knight … A Correct Tide-Table, shewing the true times of high-water at London Bridg* [sic] *for every day in the year 1685. By* John Flamsteed *Math. Reg. and F.R.S*".

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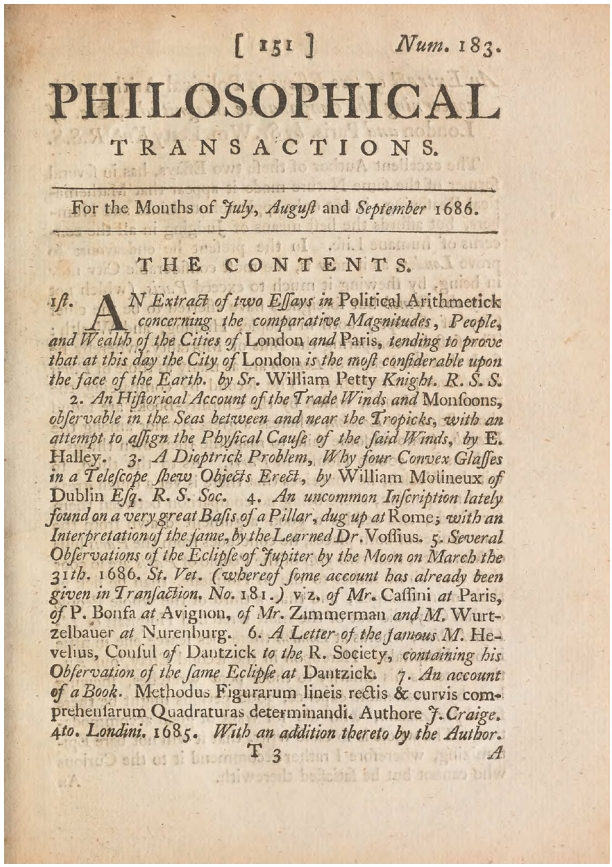
7. An answer to the question of a curious Gentleman; How long a New Star was lighted up before its appearance to the Inhabitants of our earth? To which is subjoin'd a Calculation, how much the Inhabitants of the Moon eat for Supper, considering that they pass a Night equal to fifteen of our natural days.
8. A Demonstration of the natural Dominion of the Inhabitants of the Earth over those of the Moon, if ever an intercourse should be open'd between them. With a Proposal of a *Partition-Treaty*, among the earthly Potentates, in case of such discovery.
9. Tide-Tables, for a Comet, that is to approximate towards the Earth.
10. The Number of the Inhabitants of London determin'd by the Reports of the Gold-finders, and the Tonnage of their Carriages; with allowance for the extraordinary quantity of the *Ingesta* and *Egesta* of the people of England, and a deduction of what is left under dead walls, and dry ditches.

The contents page for the *Philosophical Transactions* July to September 1686 is typical and it lists numerous items of interest to the Scriblerians.



[151] *Num.* 183.

PHILOSOPHICAL TRANSACTIONS.

For the Months of *July*, *August* and *September* 1686.

THE CONTENTS.

1*st*. AN *Extract of two Essays in* Political Arithmetick *concerning the comparative Magnitudes, People, and Wealth of the Cities of* London *and* Paris, *tending to prove that at this day the City of* London *is the most considerable upon the face of the Earth. by Sr.* William Petty *Knight. R. S. S.* 2. *An Historical Account of the Trade Winds and* Monsoons, *observable in the Seas between and near the Tropicks, with an attempt to assign the Physical Cause of the said Winds, by* E. Halley. 3. *A Dioptrick Problem, Why four Convex Glasses in a Telescope shew Objects Erect, by* William Molineux *of* Dublin *Esq. R. S. Soc.* 4. *An uncommon Inscription lately found on a very great Basis of a Pillar, dug up at* Rome; *with an Interpretation of the same, by the Learned Dr.* Vossius. 5. *Several Observations of the Eclipse of Jupiter by the Moon on March the* 31*th.* 1686. *St. Vet. (whereof some account has already been given in Transaction, No.* 181.) *viz. of Mr.* Cassini *at* Paris, *of* P. Bonfa *at* Avignon, *of Mr.* Zimmerman *and M.* Wurtzelbauer *at* Nurenburg. 6. *A Letter of the famous M.* Hevelius, Consul *of* Dantzick *to the* R. Society, *containing his Observation of the same Eclipse at* Dantzick. 7. *An account of a Book.* Methodus Figurarum lineis rectis & curvis comprehensarum Quadraturas determinandi. Authore *J. Craige. 4to. Londini.* 1685. *With an addition thereto by the Author.*

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Figure 1 Phil Trans, vol. 6, no. 183, July-September 1686. From internet archive. https://archive.org/details/Philosophicaltr16Roya/page/n183

1. *An Extract of two Essays in* Political Arithmetic *concerning the comparative Magnitudes, People, and Wealth of the Cites of* London *and* Paris, *tending to prove that at this day the City of* London *is the most considerable upon the face of the Earth. By Sr.* William Petty *Knight. R.S.S.*
2. *An Historical Account of the Trade Winds and* Monsoons, *observable in the Seas between and near the Tropicks, with an attempt to assign the Physical Cause of the said Winds, by* E. Halley.
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7. *An account of a Book*. Methodus Figurarum lineis rectis & curvis comprehensarum Quadraturas determinandi. Authore *J. Craige*. 4*to*. *Londini.* 1685. *With an addition thereto by the Author*.

The list includes papers relevant to the theories of Scriblerus already discussed: one by William Petty on political arithmetic and another by Edmund Halley debunking Lister's theory about grasses causing trade winds. It also includes papers on topics satirised by the Scriblerians in other publications: *The Humble Petition of the Colliers* plays with the use of convex glasses to create heat and fire; fears about the effect of eclipses were exploited in *Annus Mirabilis* and *An Epistle to the Most Learned Doctor W—d—d; From a Prude, That was Unfortunately Metamorphos'd on Saturday December 29, 1722*.[8]

Each issue of the *Transactions* lists a collection of papers on miscellaneous subjects. On the face of it, anything is included, whether of value or not. It is jumbled and appears more so because (presumably to save space), the list is not indented. The Scriblerians, on the other hand, curate their list. Both the appearance on the page and the array of subjects is more orderly. Note the gradual decline from the sublime to ridiculous; the universal ("the Laws of Nature") to the excremental ("the *Ingesta* and *Egesta* of the people of England"). We might read that orderliness as in itself a critique of the miscellaneousness of the projects pursued by Fellows of the Royal Society.

8 *The Humble Petition of the Colliers*, first published as a single sheet in 1716; rpt. Pope et al. [1727-32] 2002, 4: 72-8; *Annus Mirabilis: or, The wonderful Effects of the Approaching Conjunction of the Planets Jupiter, Mars, and Saturn*, by Abraham Gunther, Philomath (22 Dec 1722) is attributed to Scriblerus in Pope, A., et al. [1727-32] 2002, 4: 85; *An Epistle to the Most Learned Doctor W—d—d; From a Prude, That was Unfortunately Metamorphos'd on Saturday December 29, 1722* (1722) describes what supposedly happened to someone affected by the eclipse.

3 Sterne's Hobby Horses

Sterne's adaptation of Cervantes is free in that all his male characters are Quixotic and ride their hobby horses with romantic devotion. His adaptation of Rabelais, however, is often tightly constrained. Both Cervantes and Rabelais are invoked in the course of a quarrel between Sterne and the heavy-handed writer and critic Bishop William Warburton, conducted in private and in the pages of *Tristram Shandy*. Warburton at first admired Sterne's book, which he described paradoxically as "quite an original composition, and in the true Cervantic vein" and, according to Horace Walpole, told "a bench of bishops" that Sterne "was the English Rabelais" (Sterne 2009, 1: 136 fn. 4; 677 fn. 3; 678 fn. 4). Warburton soon turned against him and criticised him (with justification) in correspondence for writing in a manner not befitting a clergyman (Sterne 2009, 2: 686-91). Writing to him in a placatory manner, Sterne claimed: "I shall repent as sorely as ever Sancho Panca [*sic*] did of his following his evil genius of a Don Quixote" (Sterne 2009, 1: 154). Yet, Sterne repeatedly mocked Warburton in Tristram Shandy and in volume five, teased him by inserting a lightly adapted passage from Rabelais in the middle of an argument between Walter, Toby and Yorick about circumcision and polemical divinity.

To explain what a polemical divine is, Yorick reads a description of a battle on horseback, which is calculated to confuse the hobby-horsical old soldiers, Toby and Trim. The next chapter begins in media res with a description of the battle between Gymnast and Tripet. The account is taken almost verbatim from the chapter "How Gymnast very souply [supplely] and cunningly killed Captain Tripet and others of Pichrochole's Men", in Thomas Urquhart's *Rabelais*, a translation that is so free it is practically an adaptation (Rabelais [1532-64] 1750, 1, 35: 295-8).[9] Rabelais's narrator describes how the aptly named Squire Gymnast overcomes the forces of Gargantua's enemy, Picrochole, by dazzling them with a display of crazy leaps on the back of his horse. Yorick's reading begins *in media res* (----"which words being heard by all the soldiers which were there …") and Sterne makes some seemingly minor but still significant adaptations.

First, he omits a passage in which one of Picrochole's captains expresses his fear that Gymnast is a devil in disguise. Second, he changes a preposition: the original describes how Gymnast does a backflip so he faces the horse's tail and cries: "Now, says he, my case goes backwards". Yorick's text reads, "Now (said he) my case

9 New argues in effect that seventeenth-century British prose translations of the key Renaissance writers Rabelais and Cervantes shared the originals' love of freedom by the exuberance of their witty translations (New 1982, 267).

goes forward". Thus, Sterne indicates that he is taking Rabelais's text in a different direction. While Rabelais is attacking bad kings (specifically, he has in mind Charles V's imperial ambitions), Sterne is attacking narrow-minded theologians (i.e., William Warburton). Third, he largely omits a description of a complex manoeuvre called "the miller's pass" in which Gymnast turns "like a windmill" and ends up sitting "after the manner of gentlewomen", that is, side-saddle. Sterne only retains the comparison to a windmill and inserts it into a different sentence. Perhaps he felt the description was complex enough and did not want to complicate it further by playing with gender. Fourth, in the next acrobatic bout, he substitutes the enemy Tripet for Gymnast ("This done, he easily pass'd his right leg over the saddle" becomes "Then (*Tripet*) pass'd his right leg over his saddle") so that what had been a solo display becomes a competition thus a battle that Yorick can use a figure for polemical divinity. There are a couple of other minor changes ("a good seat" in the original is reduced to "a tolerable seat" by Sterne and "he fell to stand with both feet close together" is simplified to "and placed both his feet together") before the passage is cut short before Gymnast's final trick after which he triumphantly cries: "I rage, I rage, devils, I am stark mad; devils, I am mad; hold me, devils, hold me; hold, devils, hold, hold".

Rabelais's devils are distributed throughout *Tristram Shandy*. Melvyn New discovers an allusion to the dispute with Warburton in Sterne's depiction of "*John de la Casse*", the Archbishop of Benevento, who is afraid that "all the devils in hell broke out of their holes" to lead him astray when he is writing (see New 1982, 264 and Sterne [1759-67] 1978-84, 5, 16: 446-7). The Archbishop of Benevento, devils and Rabelais appear again in the incident which occasioned this whole riff on polemical divinity – that is Tristram's accidental circumcision: "FIFTY thousand pannier loads of devils—(not of the Archbishop of *Benevento*'s—I mean of *Rabelais*'s devils), with their tails chopped off by their rumps, could not have made so diabolical a scream of it, as I did—when the accident befel me" (Sterne [1759-67] 1978-84, 4, 26: 457). Let us remember that the debate about polemical divinity was occasioned by Walter consulting a treatise on Jewish rituals rather than a medical book, which could have brought some relief to his traumatised son. Sterne frequently demonstrates how Walter's (and to some extent Toby's) hobby horses are detrimental to physical and mental health.

Reading often takes place in real time in *Tristram Shandy*. Accordingly, one of the most significant adaptations that he makes to the passage concerning Gymnast and Tripet is that he dramatises the reading of it and does not just imitate it or otherwise incorporate it into his text. Yorick pulls *Rabelais* out of his right-hand pocket, where a clergyman might be expected to keep the Bible or the Book of

Common Prayer, and "read, or pretended to read, as follows" (Sterne [1759-67] 1978-84, 5, 28: 463). (Is he, then, holding a religious text and quoting *Rabelais* from memory?) The reading is first interrupted and then brought to an end by Toby's interjections. (Sterne similarly interrupts the reading of Yorick's sermon: 2, 17; Ernulphus's Curse: 3, 11, and the Tristrapaedia, 5, 31) This changes the appearance on the page – in Urquhart's translation of Rabelais, the text is a continuous paragraph – and turns the narrative into a debate. By introducing Tripet into the action, Sterne had already converted the solo performance into a duet; by inserting Toby into the reading of it, he turns a monologue into a dialogue. Finally, he gives the last word in the chapter to Walter:

> he turned him about like a wind mill, and made above a hundred frisks, turns, and demi-pommadas."—Good God! cried *Trim*, losing all patience, —one home thrust of a bayonet is worth it all.----I think so too, replied *Yorick*.----
>
> —I am of a contrary opinion, quoth my father. (Sterne [1759-67] 1978-84, 5, 29: 463-4)

They each demonstrate their characters in their responses: Trim the simple soldier, Yorick the wryly amused practical divine and Walter the controversialist. Walter is perhaps a figure for Warburton himself; New argues that "William Warburton was for Sterne a primary symbol of the gravity and prudery against which he battled—a symbol of that 'judgment' against which he waged his war of 'wit'" (New 1982, 246-7). Here, Sterne's adaptation, like the Scriblerians', adapts the text and uses it in a different context to mean something different. A more important adaptation of Rabelais in the spirit of the original occurs earlier in *Tristram Shandy* and is again part of Sterne's disagreement with Warburton.

4 The Author's Preface

Tristram's eccentrically positioned Preface (it appears in volume 3, chapter 20) addresses the "Anti-Shandeans, and thrice able critics" (Sterne [1759-67] 1978-84, 3, 20: 228) who claim that wit and judgment do not go together. He directly confronts John Locke, who made this claim his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), arguing that wit consisted of merely the fanciful assemblage of ideas, whereas judgment involved rational discrimination (Locke [1690] 1975, 3, 11, 2: 156; 3, 10, 34: 508). He also has in mind Warburton's warnings that he should exercise his judgment and not be led astray by indecent wit (such as *double entendres*) unbecoming a clergyman (New 1982 and Sterne [1759-67] 1978-84, 3: 236-53). The Author's

Preface is littered with unacknowledged borrowings from Rabelais (as well as from Swift, Chambers's *Cyclopedia*, et al.). At one point, when searching for a practical analogy to illustrate his sense of the relationship between wit and judgment, he inserts a passage from Urquhart's *Rabelais* in quotation marks to signal that this piece of wit is borrowed:

> I hate set dissertations,----and above all things in the world, 'tis one of the silliest things in one of them, to darken your hypothesis by placing a number of tall, opake words, one before another, in a right line, betwixt your own and your readers conception,---- when in all likelihood, if you had looked about, you might have seen something standing, or hanging up, which would have cleared the point at once,--"for what hinderance, hurt or harm, doth the laudable desire of knowledge bring to any man, if even from a sot, a pot, a fool, a stool, a winter-mittain, a truckle for a pully, the lid of a goldsmith's crucible, an oyl bottle, an old slipper, or a cane chair,"---- (Sterne [1759-67] 1978-84, 3, 20: 235)

Urquhart's *Rabelais* reads: "What hindrance, hurt, or harm doth the laudable desire of knowledge bring to any man, were it from a sot, a pot, a fool, a stool, a winter's mittain, a truckle for a pully, the lid of a goldsmith's crucible, an oil-bottle, or old slipper?"[10] The original reads:

> Que nuit savoir toujours et toujours apprendre, fût-ce
>
> > D'un sot, d'un pot, d'une guedoufle,
> > D'une moufle, d'une pantoufle?… (Rabelais [1532-64] 1913, 2, 16: 43; ellipsis in original)[11]

It appears as if the key phrase is a quotation from a poem or perhaps proverbial. Urquhart has elaborated considerably upon the original, incorporating the verses into his prose and extending the list from five to nine items. Assonance is the first principle of Rabelais's list (sot/pot; guedoufle/moufle/pantoufle). Metonymy might be the link from the first pair to the triplet: "un pot" might bring to mind "une

10 The context in Rabelais does not seem immediately relevant. The phrase is taken from Pantagruel's advice to Panurge that he should consult the Sibyl of Panzoust on the question of whether or not he should marry. Panurge is advised by all sources he consults that if he marries, his wife will be unfaithful to him. I briefly discuss this passage in Hawley 2009, 39.

11 My translation: a sot, a pot, an oil bottle, a mitten and a slipper. M.A. Screech also renders this list as prose: 'a sot, a pot, a mug, a kitten or a mitten'; he retains the principle of assonance in his translation (Rabelais [1532-64] 2006, 471.

guedoufle": a flask or long-necked vial. We can find a logical pattern. Urquhart generates his text from synonyms (hindrance/hurt/harm; sot/fool) and rhyme (fool/stool) but also throws in some apparently random items (a truckle …/a lid …), though perhaps there are puns on Rabelais's dialect which are lost on me.

Most of the changes Sterne makes to his quotation are petty differences of phrasing, spelling or punctuation: "**for** what hinderance, hurt or harm, doth the laudable desire of knowledge bring to any man, **if even** from a sot, a pot, a fool, a stool, a winter-mittain, a truckle for a pully, the lid of a goldsmith's crucible, an **oyl** bottle, **an** old slipper, **or a cane chair**" (Sterne [1759-67] 1978-84, 3, 20: 235; emphasis added). However, this quotation is a Trojan horse into which Sterne smuggles a foreign agent – a cane chair. The addition is a case of metonymy as Tristram is sitting on one (as perhaps is the reader). Outside the quotation marks, he then adds two knobs to this chair, and renders the analogy as explicit as an orator can make it: "----Here stands *wit*,----and there stands *judgment*, close beside it, just like the two knobbs I'm speaking of, upon the back of this self same chair on which I am sitting" (Sterne [1759-67] 1978-84, 3, 20: 236). Having built on Rabelais, he then removes one of his exemplary knobs and then bases his whole argument about the need for both faculties of wit and judgement on his addition and subtraction: "let us for a moment, take off one of these curious ornaments … did you ever see in the whole course of your lives such a ridiculous business as this has made of it?" (Sterne [1759-67] 1978-84, 3, 20: 236) Sterne's wit and judgement or imagination and reason are both deployed in constructing this argument and in adapting Rabelais's great example of the power of irreverent creativity to defeat the force of gravity.

Both Sterne and the Scriblerians can improvise on their sources, and like Cervantes and Rabelais, write in a spirit of copious adaptation (see Cave 1985). While there are similarities in their concerns and methods, we can use "Pierre Menard, Author of Quixote" to think about the differences between their practices of minimal adaptation. Neither the *Memoirs* nor *Tristram Shandy* is quite like Menard's *Don Quixote*: they do not become Cervantes in order to write their Quixotic texts. Rather, the Scriblerians behave like the narrator of Borges's story: they read *Bentley's Milton*, the *Philosophical Transactions* and numerous other texts, as if they were written by Scriblerus. As Borges's narrator argues, he is not changing the text but reading it as if it had a different author: "the technique is one of deliberate anachronism and erroneous attribution" (Borges [1939] 1965, 51). They appropriate in order to satirise and they detract from the individuality of the thinkers they mock by combining their works and also attributing them to a Dunce. Sterne, however, is more like Novalis, in that he could say: "I demonstrate that I have really understood a writer only when I am able to act in the spirit of his

thoughts, and when I can translate his works and alter them in various ways without detracting from his individuality" (Fishburn, Hughes 1990, 142). He very often completely incorporates his sources into his own text. Yet, in the instances discussed here, the quotation marks guarantee the individuality of the source even as his adaptation takes it in new directions. He inserts himself into the original by interrupting or adding to the text but continues in the same spirit. Rabelais is not the target of his satire but the hobby-horsical vehicle of it.

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