Scriblerian satire of the philosophic persona and the Lucianic legacy of Thomas Hobbes

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(Draft only, some references incomplete)

Topicality alone can reduce much political and moral satire to almost complete opacity, a fate that is apt to stimulate rather than stymie academic attention. Curiously, philosophical satire is far less studied, despite the often more enduring and accessible issues with which it deals. It is as if it falls between the cracks of modern disciplinary divisions; consigned to literary studies, that conventionally have been chary of dealing with philosophers, satire has no legitimate place in philosophy’s self-perception. It is an absence serving the myth that superior rationality is sufficient to explain philosophical change.

This general impression may help explain relative neglect, but carrying a distinction between philosophy and literature back into the early modern world is historically corrosive. There was no field of study called literature, while philosophy was still a sprawling, ill-defined battlefield on which learned armies often failed to clash. In the confusion the very criteria that might be used to identify philosophy could diverge; there might be insistence on necessary procedure, or emphasis on suitable subject matter. Despite fissiperation, it was generally presupposed that if philosophy was an activity, then it had to have some delineating perimeter. As I shall suggest, Scriblerian satire used the notion of the laughable as such a criterion of demarcation and in this there was nothing idiosyncratic.

At least since Lucian, what was presented as and called philosophy had intermittently been an object of satirical attention. Lucian, it was recognised, made the
philosophical dialogue laugh, and from him followed a sporadic tradition of *serio laudere* argument. It was the use of humour to convey what was serious, or more precisely, it was the sustained attempt to provoke laughter at the expense of error as well as at the moral failings commonly associated with social satire.¹

Initially, however, the laughter of *serio-laudere*, needs distinguishing from other clearly recognised forms and functions of laughter, the merging with which can help obscure its argumentative potential. ‘Christian laughter’ was considered benign, and some was recognised as health-giving.² London had laughing clubs, groups of men who would meet and stand around laughing to each other for amusement and well-being.³ There was also the spontaneous laughter that might be provoked by nothing more than the unexpected meeting of old friends; there was the laughter generated by burlesque and beyond this, there was the humour of studied nonsense, writing as John Taylor put it, for no purpose, for all to enjoy.⁴ Often camouflaged in these entanglements lay the laughter of aggression the ‘scornful tickling’ that sought to isolate and humiliate by ridicule.⁵ This is the satiric laughter that Hobbes called the ‘sudden glory’ at the defeat of another, the laughter, he also remarked in which we join, irrespective of comprehension, seeking safety and to show we understand.⁶

Naturally, such laughter was not exclusive to philosophy, but in antiquity it had been held that there were only two authentic philosophical responses to the world, either to laugh at it, or to cry; hence it became a sanctioning adage for the *serio laudere* belief that satiric laughter was, indeed, the expression of the true philosopher.\(^7\) Humanity is a standing jest, wrote Mr Smith (?) paraphrasing Petronius, ‘the whole world is one great Farce... and those that acquit themselves with most applause render themselves the more eminently ridiculous’.\(^8\)

The *serio laudere* tradition, then, dealt with proposition usually conjoined with *persona*, a recognition that philosophical knowledge was, as it were, joined at the hip with the one who claimed to know or transmit it. So, just as those presenting a philosophy did so with the authority or credentials of a philosopher, the currency of a philosophical error might be explained by reference to a certain kind of human inadequacy; or it might be held responsible for a variety of corrupting consequences. How philosophers might dress, or comport themselves could be signs of identity and doctrinal commitment. As a corollary, *serio laudere* had among its repertoire of techniques *ad hominem* denigration, and refutation by purely straw-man argument, in a double sense of that expression. A belief might be taken in less than its strongest formulation, or an attack through a *reductio ad absurdum* might be launched at a position that had never actually been held. In either case, as Hobbes drew the distinction, the accusation of absurdity was not simply that someone had fallen into error, it marked the invitation to laugh at discourse beyond sense, beyond philosophy.\(^9\) It was scoffing at accidental nonsense rather than with the author who had chosen to play the fool. The line between the two could be uncertain and is now hermeneutically difficult to determine. Yet, for all their robust good humour, victimising laughter is crucial to the Scriblerians and to Hobbes and I will return to their understanding of inadvertent absurdity in the conclusion. In the meantime, it is little

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\(^8\) Anon., *Scarronnides*, ‘Preface to the Reader’ np.

wonder that the satiric has been occluded from philosophy’s authenticating awareness of its past.

II

Writing in the early-eighteenth century, the Scriblerians were within the Lucianic tradition and their work provides a prism, gathering the spectrum of established philosophical preoccupations and separating it into a sort of *ignis fatui* of misconceived doctrine and educational hubris.\(^{10}\) Throughout their satire, images of philosophical excess, the obliviousness to the scope and nature of the activity, were exercises in accentuating the absurd as Hobbes had understood it, albeit by means of just seeming to be silly. The invention personifying all this is, hardly surprisingly, not much short of a melancholic, polymathic mess. Looking like ‘a decayed gentleman of Spain’, with hollow eyes and a beard ‘neglected and mixed with grey’, he was utterly alien around St James where he might be found, stiff, cloaked, silent and austere;\(^{11}\) a Menippean wanderer, in the idiom of More’s cloaked and bearded philosopher Hythlodaeus.\(^{12}\) In this case, however, we meet the ruined creation of a lunatic educational process inflicted by an

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obsessive father:-- enter Cornelius Scriblerus, his son Martinus and Conradus Crambe, the hired educational companion, playing Sancho Panza to Martinus’s Don Quixote.¹³

The creation of these characters and the Scribleran project as a whole arose from around 1713 with a short period of intense activity and sputtered out by the late 1720s. In the clubbishness of eighteenth-century London it had the institutional environment that at once encouraged co-operative work and allowed its evanescence. This same setting witnessed philosophical and scientific issues being canvassed and popularised beyond the constraints of university and Royal Society organization with their heightened sense of linguistic and theoretical decorum. It would, however, be a mistake to see the Scriblerians as participating in that mythic ‘public sphere’ that Habermas imagined as growing from the coffee-house culture they enjoyed. They formed a closed and exclusive working group who neither practiced or preached the post-Enlightenment canons of rational debate Habermas projected onto a very different world. Whatever the import of the setting, the sociability of Swift, Arbuthnot and Pope stimulated a traditional London response. A Club was formed. Mutual stimulation and modified ambition (Pope’s to become famous, Swift’s to get a foot in court and Arbuthnot’s to have a good time) held it together.

Until the death of Queen Anne in 1714, they met on a roughly weekly basis in Arbuthnot’s rooms in St. James’s Palace (he was The Queen’s physician and her advisor on Scottish affairs). They wined, dined and scribbled not far, no doubt from where the cloaked and bearded one lurked. There were other, if less regular members of the Scriblerus club, the impecunious playwright John Gay, occasionally the printer John Morphew, Francis Atterbury, Thomas Parnell and Edward Harley, Earl of Oxford, Lord High Treasurer (1711-14) and effectively the Queen’s chief or prime minister.¹⁴ All were summoned with rhyming invitations, each answering in kind. Thus Swift to Harley:

The Doctor and Dean, Pope, Parnell and Gay
In manner submissive most humbly do pray,

¹⁴ Kerby-Miller, Memoirs Introduction, pp.26-9
That your Lordship would once let your cares all alone
And Climb the dark Stairs to your Friends who have none:
To your Friends who at least have no Cares but to please you
To a good honest Junta that never will teaze you.
From the Doctor’s Chamber
past eight.
A later reply from Harley reads
In a summons so large, which all clergy contains,
I turn Dismal’s convert, or part with my brains,
Should I scruple to quit the back stairs for your blind ones,
Or refuse your true juncto for one of—

All light-hearted and harmless: but during the eighteenth century it was recognised that there was a philosophical gravitas to the enterprise and its projectors; George Berkeley and then Dugald Stewart both thought highly of Arbuthnot as a philosopher and his collaborators were philosophically informed and engaged. Pope, in fact, saw his poetic Essays much like a philosophical summa. It is evident enough that Scriblerian satire was of intellectual pretension, more precisely of unrelieved, and so philosophically indiscriminate intellectual seriousness. Within this context, specific doctrines such as the scholastic opposition between realism and nominalism, Locke’s theory of the personality and a reductive materialism have been teased out. And it has been recognised that Scriblerian satire synthesised, occasionally lifted, more piecemeal hostility to near contemporary philosophy, of the sort found in Samuel Butler’s relentlessly antagonistic Hudibras; Thomas Shadwell’s parody of Boylean eclecticism in The Virtuoso, (1678); William King’s parodic reductio of The Royal Society’s language;

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15 Kerby-Miller, Memoirs, Appendix 1, pp351, 351. Dismal was the nickname of The Earl of Nottingham (alias Don Dismallo in The History of John Bull) at the time in opposition to Harley’s peace policies with France. Harley was called the ‘back stairs Dragon’.
16 Fox, Locke and the Scriblerian, pp.19-21.
Richard Head’s bogus advice on dishonesty and Arbuthnot’s own partially satiric analysis of Dr. Woodward’s theory of the Deluge.\(^1\)

But it is possible to go further in specifying the scope of the enterprise. The compound *personae* of Cornelius, Martinus and Crambe, is entirely appropriate to the centrality of the *persona* in the processes of philosophical consolidation and dispute; and it is used to ridicule competing generalised visions of metaphysics, modern and natural philosophy, and the last also in its medical application.\(^2\)

Cohering all of this is a caricature of the sorts of technical language, to which any intellectual sect might be given, specifically of the conceptual vocabulary that defined philosophical groupings by shaping procedures and foci of interest. For the Scriblerians language was simultaneously, as it were, the bricks of philosophic proposition and the mortar forming the philosophic *persona*. The most prominent example is found in what they took to be the linguistic implications of materialism. Implicit in this, I conjecture, was the need to exorcise the ghostly *persona* of England’s most notorious materialist philosopher Thomas Hobbes, at once a vicarious target of their ire and an informing presence as part of the same *serio-laudere* tradition.\(^3\) Recovering his relevance to the Scriblerians will draw the themes of this paper together.

The Scriblerian project was elaborate, as ambitious as it was potentially vindictive: it comprised first, the *Memoirs of the Extraordinary Life of Martinus*, including an account of his education and broad outlines of his enquiries and discoveries, both scientific and geographical. Second there were to be fully fledged examples of his stupendous output; third there might be threatened law suits for plagiarism by or on behalf of Martinus against any genuine author the members of the club considered misguided enough to be publishing works of Scriblerian awfulness. The *Memoirs* also


\(^2\) But see Levine, *Dr. Woodward’s Shield*, pp.238-52.

includes ad hoc announcements that works already published under other names, such as that of Richard Bentley, Master of Trinity and pedantic improver of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, were really by Martinus. At one point, we are informed that the Free Thinkers of Nuremburg had constructed an artificial man capable of reasoning as well as most country parsons; and we might conclude in turn, that the artificial *persona* of Martinus was something of a Frankensteinian monster of the intellect, constructed from bits of every available body of philosophy. He could well have been stopped because his creators feared him getting out of control, taking over their own lives, or damaging their friendships.

For whatever reason, the results were more meagre than the initial high hopes of the inventors, and most of the satire appeared with late adjustments in 1741. The formal Scriblerian corpus consists of *Virgilius restauratus*, a fragment of obtusely corrected Virgil, in the idiom of Bentley, later to find its way into Pope’s *Dunciad*; *Annus mirabilis* (by Mart. Scriblerus, *Philomath*) an astrological essay on the conjunction of planets; an account of the origin of the sciences; Martinus’s definitive manual on how to write genuinely bad poetry, *Peri Bathous, or the Art of Sinking in Poetry*; and of course, *The Memoirs* themselves. Additionally, however, there are peripheral Scriblerian pieces, true to satirc type but without the eponymous hero, that flesh out and anticipate, respectively, the Scriblerian philosophical thematic: *Three Hours After Marriage* (1717), by Gay, Pope and Arbuthnot, and Arbuthnot’s *Pseudologia Politike, or The Art of Political Lying*, 1712. *Three Hours* was a notorious farce, about the attempts of two city blades to bed the bride of an aging philosopher, physician and collector. It managed to offend almost everyone and everything except the Aristotelian verities of space, time and place. Arbuthnot’s *Pseudologia Politike*, is a short promotional pamphlet, purporting to encourage subscription for the publication of a two volume treatise, that has reduced

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22 *Memoirs*, ch.9, p.129; on the scope of the project, see at length, Kerby-Miller, ‘Introduction’pp.31-41; Bentley had already been satirised by King and Atterbury for not writing his own work, see Levine, *Dr. Woodward’s Shield*, p.248.

23 I am grateful to Aoise Stratford-Lloyd for making this association. It is quite likely that Mary Shelley would have been familiar with Scriblerian satire.

politics to a universal philosophical system. The anonymous ‘Author’ of the tome is Martinus, as it were, before his birth.26 My suspicion is that the pamphlet was an immediate stimulus to the whole enterprise.27 This had its last transmuted expressions in Pope’s Dunciad, an elaboration of Peri Bathous;28 in Ars Punica, or The Art of Punning, another art reduced to a formula, suppositionally by Swift.29 Kerby-Miller goes so far as to suggest that Gulliver is a transformed Martinus, but certainly, in Gulliver’s Travels The Academy of Lagardo is populated by fragments of the original Martinus as exuberant as he in their philosophical delusions.30 There is more than a touch of the Scriblerians in Tristram Shandy, so philosophy played its part in canonic literature.

Rather than going through the works seriatim, I shall take up the following themes as they are refracted through the extended Scriblerian corpus, each with different implications for the persona and conduct of philosophy. First I will outline the general competing images of philosophy brought together in the satires: philosophy as transmitted truth or as singular propositional creation; philosophy as fact gathering and experimentation, or as the application of deductive principles; I shall then outline the doctrinally specific satire on mutable personality and the implications of a rigorous materialism. This will lead directly to explication of the Hobbesian incubus in the context of the Lucianic idiom of critique.

III

26 On The Art of Political Lying see at length, Conal Condren, Satire, Lies and Politics: The Case of Dr. Arbuthnot, (London: Macmillan, 1996), as a Scriblerian text see Appendix B.
27 Arbuthnot had tried this sort of jape before, with some success on the Queen’s ladies in waiting, but there is no record of anyone being fooled about the authenticity of Pseudologia Politike until the literary critic Robert M. Adams lamented its loss in Bad Mouth, (University of California Press, 1977), a book that might more felicitously have been called Bad Luck.
28 Steeves estimates about half the gazetted poets are common to both works, Peri Bathous, ‘Introduction’.
29 Ars Punica, sive Flos Linguarum; The Art of Punning; Or the Flower of Languages; In Seventy Nine Rules; For the Farther Improvement of Conversation, And Help of Memory. By the Labour and Industry of Tom Pun-Sibi, &c, (Dublin and London, 1719).
30 Kerby-Miller, Memoirs, notes, p.315-7; There was a further set of memoirs (Memoirs, 2) printed in a short pamphlet in 1723, and re-printed in Memoirs, pp.377-85, the authenticity of which is unclear and dealing with other members of the Scriblerian family; see Kerby-Miller, Memoirs, Appendix VI., pp374-6.
Philosophy as transmitted truth and made knowledge.

Martinus and his education carried the heavy burden of the debate between the ancients and moderns. It was a well-established motif into which Swift had breathed fresh life with The Tale of a Tub and The Battle of the Books, 1704. Within the ambit of exploring the past relationships of society, the topos helped organise discussion about the nature of culture and education. In the largely tradition-centred world of medieval and post-medieval Christendom, there was a general expectation that the past carried authority but examination made this problematic in two principal ways; in the relationships between a Christian society and its pagan and Judaic inheritances, a prominent Renaissance emphasis; and in the relationships between the modern and the early Christian world, made so difficult from The Reformation. Moreover, depending upon the domain of enquiry in which people worked, so there were varying degrees of toleration for explicitly and proclaimed departure from the authority of an imagined past.

In some fields, novelty and cognates such as newness, singularity and innovation signalled disapproval, most importantly in debates touching religion, law and moral conduct. Conversely, approbation or defence was characteristically couched in a vocabulary of conservation, recovery, rediscovery or compliance, though some of these claims might seem implausible to us. In natural philosophy, however, from the sixteenth century, departure from the inherited gradually, if erratically, became an emblem of intellectual significance and responsibility. Indeed, a tolerance of innovation was implied by the success of the Baconian rejection of argument from authority. This carried with it the imperative to take nothing for granted and in Hobbes’s expression, ‘take things back to first reckonings’. A purging of the mind could be the initial spiritual exercise in philosophical development. And of course, discoveries as such had something new about them, even if, like the new found lands of the Americas they only uncovered to human eyes stable aspects of God’s universe. Thus an encomiastic biography of Descartes

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31 Levine, Dr. Woodward’s Shield, pp.19-21.
claims that his chief moral cum intellectual characteristic was his dedicated and courageous questing after the new.\textsuperscript{33}

Nevertheless, at the end of the seventeenth century, there remained a strong conception of philosophy as a body of transmitted truth, so making the philosopher mainly a mediator, transmitter or teacher. As innovation or discovery came within the context of communal endeavour and as what should be taught had been discovered by someone, we are not dealing with necessarily opposed positions. Rather, overall, we have shades of emphasis presupposing a degree of bi-conditionality, yet open to polarising rhetorical redescription. So the opposition between innovation as vice or virtue was neither sharp nor unaffected by polemical opportunism. Philosophers as novatores might stand alone as original and to be commended, or as examples of wilful singularity whose pride should be condemned. \textsuperscript{34} In this way, the debate between ancients and moderns could have a specific focus on the philosophic persona.

In the first decade of the eighteenth century, the claims and counter-claims are particularly apparent in disputes over the responsibilities of the physician and the direction of medicine, captured most obviously in controversies over the treatment of small-pox. \textsuperscript{35} Medicine had been profoundly text-driven and bound by learned authority, often marked by highly subtle and sophisticated theories of inference but frequently at a considerable distance from an empirical grounding in cases.\textsuperscript{36} The work of the Baconian Sydenham had done something to change this by bringing careful methodical examination of patients into the scope of practice, and apparently so dismissing learned authority that his recommended medical text was \textit{Don Quixote}. As one might expect, suggestions of experimental treatments could be forced onto the template of an ancient and moderns dispute. As Philip Hilton has pointed out, that itself was ancient, Galen had preferred the ancients to his own contemporaries; but the characteristics of modernity

\textsuperscript{33} S.R. trans., \textit{The Life of M Descartes}, (1693), pp.151-2.
\textsuperscript{35} Levine, \textit{Dr. Woodward’s Shield}, pp.9-17.
could point in differing directions, towards ordered empiricism and experimentation, or to general principles. Qualifications aside, ancients, like Dr. John Freind were suspicious of small-pox treatments that were alarmingly at odds with the wisdom of Hippocrates; many Moderns in medicine sought improvement by discovery. Precisely because of the variable nature of the relationship between discovery and transmission, for a natural scientist to be a modern on this issue does not give reliable guidance on others. Both the ‘Whig’ Bernard de Mandeville and the ‘Tory’ Arbuthnot were convinced moderns. With respect to other issues, Arbuthnot was happy to pillory moderns like Bentley and the critic Dunton for their Icarian pretension.

With innovatory propensities so easily and prejudicially redescribed, we are still some years from Edward Young’s unqualified insistence that originality is the mark of genius as such. These issues then, concerning departure from the authoritative, usually housed in the ubiquitous book, allowed the dispute between ancients and moderns to focus on arguments about experimental method, eclecticism, medical reform and deductive reasoning.

The ancients and moderns dispute is a dominant theme of the Memoirs used explicitly to create a reductive caricature of the misguided philosophic persona. Cornelius Scriblerus is a parody of the most dogmatic and recidivistic ancient, a man of such a superstitious veneration for antiquity that any contradiction between its texts was resolved simply by believing the last one he had read. This attitude extended impartially to all spheres of knowledge: from education and philosophical doctrine, to diet and health. Hippocrates could never be mistaken. It might be the case, Cornelius concedes to modernity, that the blood now circulates around the body, but things have changed. Moderns have extended the gut with gluttony, diminished the liver through drink, so it is

37 Hilton, ‘Bitter Honey’, p.198 n and 197-9 on Mandeville’s subtle play with the typology.
38 Levine, Dr. Woodward’s Shield, p.9-10, and p. 301 for the anecdote about Sydenham and Don Quixote, citing Sir Richard Blackmore, A Treatise on the Smallpox, (1723), p.11
39 Edward Young, Conjectures on Original Composition, 1759, in Jones ed. English Critical Essays, pp.270-311.
40 Memoirs, ch. 8, p.124.
still possible to ‘believe with Hippocrates, that the blood of the Ancients had a flux and a reflux from the heart, like a Tide.’\(^{41}\) Obviously a much more satisfactory arrangement.

With this typically Scriblerian over-extension of insight into an adamantine absurdity also goes an appropriate innocence about the authenticity of antiquity. The most unlikely artefacts are talismanic relics. The modern world hardly exists except as an irritant and source of decadence. Cornelius has a shield of awesome age. It is locked in a cupboard in order to prevent the destruction of its ancient ‘Aerogo’ (i.e. rust) with modern rust or its removal with ‘Modern Polishing’; but he gets it out at the birth of his son, because Theocritus had said that the cradle of Hercules was a shield. He drops both it and young Martinus, crying only ‘My shield, my shield’, when he realises that it has been cleaned; that the shield turns out to be only a damaged sconce or basin serves to make matters worse.\(^{42}\) Ancient texts outweigh nursing experience on child-birth and infant nutrition.\(^{43}\) Games are restricted to those Cornelius believes were invented by the Lydians to distract children from the pangs of hunger.\(^{44}\) Learning to write was contingent mastery of ‘Fabius’ Waxen Tables.\(^{45}\)

Cornelius’ philosophical persona then, is a concentration of a disposition also evident in what Blum has helpfully called schulphilosophie so important in the confessionally pure universities of Europe.\(^{46}\) The Scriblerian’s scholastic metaphysician is another example, one who bows to authority and stands, as John of Salisbury put it, like the dwarf upon the shoulders of giants. Truth is external, and having been discovered, intellectual integrity lies in its careful transmission. Taken to the Cornelian...

\(^{41}\) Memoirs, ch. 8. p.124.
\(^{42}\) Memoirs, ch.3., p.104; the motif had been used by Lewis Theobold, The Censor, (1715), Levine, Dr. Woodward’s Shield, p. 250. The whole episode is based on the shield purchased by Dr. Woodward and believed by him to be ancient that turned out to be probably 16\(^{th}\) century German. It is now in the British Museum, Kerby-Miller, Memoirs, notes p.206.
\(^{43}\) Memoirs, ch.4.
\(^{44}\) Memoirs, ch.5.
\(^{45}\) Memoirs, ch.4 p.108; even Kerby-Miller has not been able unpack the allusion, notes, p.218, but presumably it refers to the tabulae ceratae on which Romans wrote and to the earliest annalist Fabius Pictor.
extreme, proper imitation is not creative emulation, but rigid application. Here the philosophical, moral failings are lack of discrimination, critical courage, and modesty; the virtues of care and industry, prejudicially re-described, are innocent reverence and egregious pedantry. There is learning enough in Cornelius, but neither judgment nor wisdom; he is a Jesuit to the holy texts of Greece.

Martinus, the creation of his father’s manic enthusiasm for the antique, is very much a reactive modern; father and son, then, express the paradox of cultural continuity that can see an inversion of values and so of the criteria to assess any persona. It is a theme as old as Plato’s Republic. Martinus is certainly prepared to use antiquity, but his assumption seems always to be that he can surpass it, a giant hurriedly impressing his boot marks on the heads of dwarves; his intellectual ambition is unbounded but is largely unfulfilled. Indeed, it must be. For, on the one hand he wants to reduce all knowledge to communicable principles, yet on the other has a mind that struggles helplessly to comprehend more than disjointed material particulars. Thus he has an immediate appreciation of individual lord mayors, but the concept of a lord mayor is beyond his grasp. Exacerbating the disjunction, Cornelius instructs him that as a logician he must forget that which must be learned in natural philosophy—a Scriblerian attestation to a world of contradictory philosophical priorities and procedures. By contrast, his hired companion Crambe understands only the words, is satisfied if he can play with them and cannot fathom or recognise the particular. The impasse of realism versus nominalism, more generally res and verba drives Cornelius to distraction. Little wonder that the old and well worn Martinus to whom we are initially introduced is given to that philosophical pathology of melancholia; is isolated from his past and those around him in imagining himself as the sum of teachable knowledge but unable to sort wood from trees. There is, of course a Scriblerian explanation for these complementary inadequacies in the philosophic persona and like so much in their corpus, it extends from the highly plausible, or well founded into the absurd. Just as people who have one damaged sense enjoy compensating strength in others, we are told, so it is with the intellectual faculties.

This is no bad thing, it is added, unless the afflicted try to make any sort of judgement.\textsuperscript{49}

In sum, between father and son, the philosophic \textit{persona} is a transmutation of the hidebound into the hubristic. What they share is a relentless seriousness, devoid of humour or discrimination, the stigmata of philosophical inadequacy. They map the borders of philosophy, from the outside, in the secure delusion that they stand within.

Much the same image of the ancient is developed to help shape the \textit{persona} of Dr. Fossile in \textit{Three Hours After Marriage}, though his function is also to satirise additional dimensions of philosophy. Fossile is based on the collector and virtuoso Dr. Woodward who did indeed proudly possess an ancient shield (at the time, at least a hundred years old) and whose theories of God’s planting fossils to provide an aerogo of age to the world had earlier been attacked with a merciless courtesy by Arbuthnot.\textsuperscript{50} Fossile is himself an ancient bachelor who lives with his niece, Phoebe Clinket, an ink-stained compulsive poet, who scribbles her stuff on a desk carried on the back of her servant. Fossile wants a son only as a legatee for his collection of objects. The modern world invades his house immediately after his marriage in the form of the two young men about town, Plotwell and Underplot, in competition to bed his wife, Mrs Townley before he does. Mrs Townley, a party to their schemes, is herself an image of modern moral laxity, being already married and with a young child, of whom Fossil knows nothing. As he vacillates between paranoid jealousy and besotted naiveté, the young men manage to intrude themselves disguised as Trojan monsters for the collection, Underplot as a very mobile stuffed alligator or crocodile (he is called both), Plotwell as a perambulating Egyptian mummy; Fossile has trouble unmasking either. But rest assured, the play has a happy ending, as he is left holding the baby—for the collection. Phoebe Clinket, is left with something worth writing, the plot for the play that has just ended.\textsuperscript{51}

\textbf{IV}

\textsuperscript{49} \textit{Memoirs}, ch.7, p.118-9.
\textsuperscript{50} Arbuthnot, \textit{An Examination}, (1697).
Ecclecticism and systematics.

The indiscriminate gathering of what purports to be ancient is treated as a manifestation of the wider propensity towards eclecticism that itself could take differing forms:-- the collecting of all information, reliable or otherwise as a sort of under-labouring for more philosophical endeavour (John Aubrey); the eclectic use of differing theories depending on circumstances and problems (Walter Charleton); and the dealing with natural phenomena on a case by case basis, the inductive experimentation that does not reject theory but regards most theories as premature (Sir Robert Boyle). The Scriblerians made, or saw no discriminations here. What they did was to create, as it were, an omnium gatherum persona, industrious, curious, fetishistic and uncritical. Fossile has his collection of antiquities to be sure, ‘the spoils of Quarries and Coal-pits’; but he also has serpents, salamanders and a crocodile, or thinks he has, and also thinks he has no rope. Only a curiosity will find a place simply because he finds it curious.\(^{52}\) What he has is not a collection but a useless heap. He is also a modern physician, keen enough on seeing his patients, if only he could make the time, but when he can’t, confident in pre-arranged treatments (‘Give them all Quieting Draughts’) that can be used to cure in advance of knowledge of cases; an amalgam of Dr. Woodward and the iatro-mathematician Dr. Cheyne.\(^{53}\) Where he needs to be more empirically attuned Fossile relies on the authority of a formula, like Martinus an eclectic curiosity with a simple faith in a priori principles. Each brings together the diverging propensities of philosophy prejudicially deemed modern. So, boasts the Memoirs, it was none other than Martinus who first taught modern physicians to cure patients by intuition, at a distance or ‘without looking on them at all’.\(^{54}\)

In the same way, the ‘Author’ of Political Lying had reduced politics to a handful of universal principles but remained eager to encourage readers to add to his collection of examples. Martinus by the very range of his interests and discoveries, from the construction of giant lighthouses to measure longitude, the transportation of fresh air, to the uncovering of the cause of all causation, shows himself to be an innocent theoretical

\(^{52}\) *Three Hours*, act 1, p.9

\(^{53}\) *Three Hours*, act 1, p.11.

\(^{54}\) Cf also *Memoirs*, ch.17, p.168.
Underlying all this febrile play with ancient authority, modern inquisitiveness, eclecticism and principled enquiry is the question of what philosophical knowledge amounts to, by what means is it to be transmitted and to whom. Here we approach what has been given most attention in Scriblerian philosophic satire.

Identity and the instability of personae.

I want first to touch on the issue of human identity, which has been beautifully explicated by Christopher Fox. But a word is needed to situate the issues he discusses in a wider, if nebulous context of debate beyond philosophy, that itself helps explain philosophy’s indeterminant and contested shape. The very notion of a philosophical persona occurred against the background of a widespread conception of the moral social world as constituted by personae needing to have qualities and skills for their spheres of responsibility. In the broadest fashion, non-corporeal identity was defended and criticised in terms of the contingent personae appropriate to such social offices, and this was as true of the philosopher as it was of the mid-wife, prince, parent, priest and most pertinently here, husband or wife. The reliance on a nominal rather than an absolute and fixed moral identity, constituting a world of what Pufendorf had called entia moralia, carried with it a decided fear of mutability in two closely related ways. First, was the concern that anyone might make a spurious claim on official identity. Second, that people failing in their various personae were radically transformed. Most pointedly, the bad prince ceased to be as a ruler and became a tyrant, a shepherd turned wolf; more playfully, man turned mummy, or crocodile. In many cases a persona and his or her authority to act could be located within stable institutional environments and often a whole semiotics of presentation, so important in ceremonies of investiture, marriage, christening and legal judgement. Within this wider socio-linguistic context, however, posited intellectual

55 Fox, Locke and the Scriblerians at length.
offices, were identified largely through the sort of discourse developed and deployed by those assuming an appropriate *persona*. As a result, a readily available bogus and obscurantist technical vocabulary could be the sign of protean illegitimacy. What was crucial, yet so troublesome with all sanctioning claims to be holding and acting under the aegis of an office, was the matter of distinguishing and keeping stable moral *personae* without separating them from, or mistaking them for, the physical beings that manifested them.

Locke moved comfortably within this world of official *personae*. He regarded Cicero’s *De officiis* as a model of moral reasoning, and much of the *Second Treatise of Government* is about the transformation of the *persona* of the ruler into the tyrant/rebel and the casuistry of what might be done about it, by whom, acting in what sort of capacity. His theory of the Self, as no more than the sum of propensities held together by a spatio-temporal consciousness was disturbing in a world of acute sensitivity to moral mutability and could be seen as exacerbating the protean and so socially unreliable features of what it was to be a human being. Moreover, he also wrote of the soul as some inner core of humanity. Thus there was a perceived tension or ambivalence of relationship between two distinct ways of conceiving human individuality, as soul or conscious Self.\(^{56}\) Locke himself, by replacing identity of substance with that of consciousness refined questions about the soul, most pointedly in this context, of whether a soul can be shared by two physical beings.\(^{57}\) Such questions generated a focussed debate. The longstanding concern with human mutability meant that reflections and apparent allusions to Locke during the early 1690s might have been to others, including his erstwhile medical tutor Thomas Willis. Thus the author of *Scarronnides* remarked on our being ‘*such motly pie-bald things*’ in our actions and conceptions that ‘*we differ as much or more from ourselves than we doe from others*’, a fact that has led some to

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believe we have two souls. By the early eighteenth century, however, much attention was directly on Locke. His populariser, Anthony Collins argued that as consciousness varied on a daily basis, so too did identity, to which Samuel Clarke responded that this was to make identity both wayward and external to being. The result was what has been called the Clarke-Collins debate.

This Ovidian opportunity proved irresistible to the Scriblerians and human mutability is a pronounced theme throughout their satire: the editors of *Three Hours* correctly emphasise its almost surrealist presence in the play; it is celebrated through the analysis of mendacity as a creative art in *The Art of Political Lying*; changes in almost everything are enthusiastically awaited by Martinus as a necessary effect of the conjunction of Jupiter, Mars and Saturn. The exploitation, then, of some of the imagined implications of Locke’s theories of identity and the debates about them fits into a broader pattern of social concern. The Scriblerians prefigure the centrality of the issue in the *Memoirs* first through the views of Crambe. As he happily argues, ‘Individuality could hardly be praedicated of any man, for it was commonly said that a man is not the same as he was, that madmen are beside themselves, and drunken men come to themselves; which shews, that few men have that most valuable logical endowment, Individuality.’ Later, the Scriblerians report on Martinus’ quixotic quest after the seat of the soul in various parts of the anatomy in order to cure insanity. It is in the context of this pursuit that the Free Thinkers (Collins is certainly a partial target here) write to him, drawing explicitly on doctrines of official continuity to outline common confusions between conceptual and physical identity. They remark on ‘the great noise about this Individuality: how a man is conscious of himself that he is the same Individual as he was twenty years ago; notwithstanding the flux state of the particles of matter that compose his body.’

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58 Smith (?), *Scarronnides*, ‘Preface to the Reader’ np; cf Thomas Willis, *Two Discourses Concerning the Soul of Brutes, Which is that of the Vital and Sensitive Man*, (1683).
59 See Samuel Clarke, *Works*, vol. 3, (1738) in which both sides of the argument are re-printed;
60 Morton and Peterson, *Three Hours*, ‘Introduction’, xi-xiv
63 Cf Mandeville, *A Treatise*, at length.
64 *Memoirs*, ch.13, p.140.
The ground is well prepared for the most bizarre and notorious episodes of Martinus life, (tastefully omitted from later printings of the *Memoirs*); they recount his falling in love, his marriage and its subsequent dissolution in which soul, personal, corporeal and moral identity collide.\(^{65}\) Its significance goes beyond a joke at the expense of Lockean philosophy and may be taken as an allegory of the widely acknowledged imponderables of official identity.

In 1708 Judith and Helena, a pair of young Hungarian Siamese twins joined at the back had been brought to London for display in a freak show and for a while were the talk of the town, as they had been of Europe. \(^{66}\) This point of verisimilitude gives a particularly distasteful flavour to the inventive unreality of Martinus in love. It is accentuated further by the whole episode of courtship being related in a pretentiously high style, dripping with laboured allusions to ancient poetry and mythology and studded with portentous exclamations (‘Alas!’ ‘O ye spirits of Antiquity’ , ‘Heavens’ ‘behold a new Disaster!’).\(^{67}\) The exclamation mark is worn to a thread as subject matter and incongruity of burlesque bring together again the ancients and moderns.\(^{68}\) At an unspecified date ‘our youthful philosopher’, wandering in the vicinity of Whitehall, gains access to Mr. Randal’s curiosity show replete lions, leopards, a porcupine from the land of Prester John, a ‘Negroe Prince’ (Ebn-Hai-Paw-Waw) on a palfrey, sundry monsters from antiquity, including ‘the Man-mimicking mantegers’. There Martinus beholds Indamira and Lindamira ‘Bohemian Sisters, whose common parts of Generation, had so closely allied them, that Nature seem’d here conspired with Fortune, that their lives should run in an eternal Parallel.’\(^{69}\) Initially, he is transported by both. What others paid

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\(^{67}\) *Memoirs*, ch.14, p.147; ch.15, p.152.

\(^{68}\) The Scriblerian Parnell would provide the most extreme form of this incongruity in his *Homer’s Battle Between the Frogs and Mice* (1717); it is also a strong feature of Gay’s *Beggars’ Opera*.

\(^{69}\) *Memoirs*, ch.14, p.146.
to ogle as a monstrosity, Martinus perceives as a profusion of beauty.\textsuperscript{70} As he is shortly to write to Lindamira in trying to persuade her to withdraw from Mr. Randal’s show and the gaze of the vulgar, ‘Nature forms her wonders for the Wise, and such a Master-piece she could design for none but a Philosopher.’\textsuperscript{71} Martinus’s intentions to marry, however, constitute a threat to Mr. Randal’s income from what he regards as his property, his monstrous slaves. To make matters worse, Martinus comes to love Lindamira, far more than Indamira, who is thus provoked into deep jealousy of her sister. There is reconciliation but on the wedding day, the Mantiger attempts to rape the women as they are stuck in a window trying to get onto a rope ladder Crambe has provided to help them escape. A desperate fight ensues with Martinus eventually victorious. He hurls the hand of a sea-monster at the Manteger (shades of John Bull and the death of his first wife in a domestic) as the fenestrated women watch, like Helen we are told, overseeing a contest for her love before Troy.\textsuperscript{72}

They do escape, however, and Martinus is married, only to have Randal take him to court. The escalation allows issues of identity to be used to parody both the workings of the law, and philosophical enquiry into the soul, with the ancient and obscure doctrine of traducianism, (that the soul of the father is divided and transmitted in procreation) being treated as an established fact. Issues from various forms of discourse are as hopelessly interwoven as the characters themselves, the plausible taken as seriously as the discredited.\textsuperscript{73} Can slaves marry without the consent of their masters? Does monstrosity incapacitate a marriage? If Martinus is married to Lindamira, does he rape Indamira? It would seem that any attempt to fulfil marital duty is an abuse of marital office. Is a wife obliged to live with a concubine? Randal’s Counsel fails to make a case on all counts and so Randal institutes proceedings against Martinus for what again is an

\textsuperscript{70} Memoirs, ch.14, p.143-8.
\textsuperscript{71} Memoirs, ch.14, p.149.
\textsuperscript{72}Memoirs, ch.14, pp.152-3; in The Origins of the Sciences, Martinus concludes in an account ‘which is entirely my own’ (naturally) that mantigers were the first philosophers, Swift, Works, vol.6, p. 142; but he’d not read Montaigne, ‘Apology for Raymond Sebond’, where Democritus is first credited with the belief that the animals originally taught most of the arts and sciences. Essays, trans., Frame, p.340.
\textsuperscript{73} Kerby-Miller, notes to Memoirs, p.313.
entailed abuse of office in the attempt to adhere to its requirements: either Martinus commits bigamy or incest. Simultaneously, Randal designs to alienate Indamira from Martinus, even marrying her while she sleeps, to one of his own creatures, ‘the black Prince’ Ebn-Hai-Paw-Waw. Thus Martinus turns plaintiff, being forced to plead that the two women make but one wife.  

The court proceedings are given in some detail, and it is during these that the relevance of Martinus’ enquiries into the soul become crucial. Drawing on his converse with Free Thinkers, he argues on the authority of his standing as a philosopher, that it is located in the organs of generation and thus Indamira-Lindamira is one individual person ‘in the truest and most proper sense of Individuality.’ This is contested by Counsel for the defendant: the rational soul cannot be situated in the organ of generation, such a location would identify humanity with bestiality, confusing a pre with a post lapsarian condition. Moreover, if one soul is common to both, then consent to the marriage makes Martinus a bigamist, if there is not a double consent, a rapist; the paradox of marital office re-stated. The initial judgement was that both Martin’s and the black Prince’s marriages were sound, but as this pleased none of those involved, on appeal both were dissolved on the grounds of natural and legal absurdity.

VI

*Materialism and the language of philosophical identity.*

Martinus’ determined search for the physical location of the soul brings us directly to the fear of materialism that has been identified as the principle underlying philosophical concern of the Scriblerans. I am not sure that materialism did loom in such a singularly odious fashion for them. They had persistent fun at the expense of scholastic philosophy, the Jesuits and of course the *virtuosi* who might well be indelibly marked by a penchant for the eclectic collection of objects, but were not necessarily

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74 Memoirs, ch.15
75 Memoirs, ch.15, p.159,
76 The double identity of Mrs Townley in Three Hours is a less outré variation on the theme.
materialists in the Epicurean sense. Nevertheless modern Epicureanism, as Thomas Burnet referred to it, was certainly subject to the easiest and almost formulaic ridicule. The concern, however, was genuine and it amounted to this: that the world consisted of more than could be reduced to its material constituents and that materiality was not co-extensive with what was worthy of a philosopher’s attention. Hence to look for the physical location of the soul, as if one were just looking for an organ or a muscle, is fundamentally mistaken. Martinus, being in part the quintessential Epicurean is determined to find it, but having no better conception of the immaterial rational soul or philosophy than he does of a Lord Mayor, all he can do is rummage though human anatomy. Descartes’ argument about the significance of the pineal gland will come to mind as the butt of this satire and indeed Martinus hypothesises on the various shapes the gland must take on depending on the sort of soul inside it. Yet there is more at stake than the philosophical limitations of Cartesianism. There was an established tradition of Christian Epicurianism and the Scriblerians touched presciently on theological and philosophical propensities to reification that went well beyond it. Attempts to predicate the soul were characterised by treating it as an object, or even a socialised identity having an office within the body, such as that of a judge, court of appeal, an all seeing eye, indeed as an inner philosopher. The misleading inadequacies of the language traditionally used to make conjectures about the soul are inevitably subject to the gravitational pull of the Scriblerian intellect, and so Martinus is made to take them with an ingeniously dumb literality. Sometimes he believed that the soul was in the brain, sometimes the stomach or the heart. ‘Afterwards he thought it absurd to confine that sovereign lady to one apartment, which made him infer that she shifted it according to the several functions of life: The Brain was her Study…the Stomach her Kitchen. But as he saw several offices of her life went on at the same time, he was forc’d to give up this Hypothesis also. He now conjectured it was more for the dignity of the Soul to perform several operations by her little ministers, the Animal Spirits…’

79 Memoirs, ch.12, p.137.
For the Scriblerians, faith in reductive Epicurian materialism encouraged a further philosophical error, one that returns us to the Scriblerian play with eclecticism and philosophy as a priori principles. Once a phenomenon had been reduced to its material constituents, it could be held, or implied that knowledge of these alone was sufficient for all needs. Theoretical knowledge of principles, that is, the possession of a conceptual system for analysing and classifying things, was sufficient practical knowledge for conduct. This was to adjust an ancient topos to immediate needs, for the Scriblerians presented a reductio of the belief that ultimately the contemplative life of the philosopher was superior to, and could even replace, that of active engagement. Plato had come close to embracing this possibility in *The Republic*, though the Scriblerians turned it against Epicurean materialism in full knowledge that it had a certain relevance to contemporary understandings of artistic criticism and even what had been promoted in the newspapers of the time. The correct technical terms and only technical terms should be used for all purposes from advertising for lost dogs to admiring a painting.80 public discourse, as John Dunton had put it in apparent seriousness, should be one extended syllogism.81 Because philosophical argument was always appropriate and knowledge of philosophy always sufficient, it could become an eminently saleable commodity, to be peddled in a way not dissimilar to Lucian’s conceit of a market place for philosophies. Freed from the well-worn template of the active and contemplative ideals, however, the Scriblerian reductio now reads as a prophetic synopsis of some of the more foolish hyperbole of management theory: the right principles have only to be learned and applied irrespective experience and organisational environment.82

The ridicule of reductive systematisation, as nothing more than a material package, a crib masquerading as full knowledge, to allude to Oakeshott’s formulation, is a concomitant of the belief that Scriblerian folly is ultimately a failure to understand the scope and limits of philosophy: if you have no conception of discrimination, you are

80 *Memoirs*, ch. 7, p.121, an advertisement for a stolen dog should read ‘An irrational animal of the Genus caninum, &c…’
likely to think it can be transmitted indiscriminately to all and sundry. This concern is expressed through the satire of arcane conceptual language, together with the Scriblerians’ own reliance on a vocabulary that is appropriately obscure or precious---arietation, contentation, hebitate, vectitation, disembroge and of course aerogo. Here we have at the same time an impressionistic caricature of doctrines and a play with the fugitive nature of intellectual personae, not least that, or those of, the philosopher.

Building upon Locke’s understanding of identity through consciousness, the Scriblerians offer identity through utterance. In the Memoirs, we are told, there was once ‘a Project to banish metaphysics out of Spain’ to be effected simply by banning ‘any compound or Decomound of the Substantial Verbs…for…if you debar a Metaphysician from ens, essentia, entitas subsistentia, &c. there is an end of him.’ Again, we are told that the technical words are to be taken literally as both armour and weapons. Without the armour another’s weapons cut deep and draw blood. In keeping with this, the ornatus of argument can always be worn or put aside, like the sartorial presentation that might be a sign of being a philosopher. Crambe would promise not to use simpliciter & secundum quid, provided Martin would part with materialiter & formaliter.83

In Three Hours Dr. Fossile’s medical persona is little more than the mangled language of the physician. Establishing his credentials with a feigning-sick Plotwell, (alias a bogus Polish philosopher Dr Lubomirski, soon to be the Egyptian mummy), Fossile counsels ‘Emmeticks’, ‘Clysters’, ‘strong Hydroticks’ ‘Paregoricks’, ‘scarrifications’ and depuration of the blood’s ‘Faeculencies by Volatiles’, ‘Blisters and potential Cauteries…’ Reassuringly he adds, ‘I consult my Patient’s ease: I am against much Physick—he Faints, he is Apoplecktick, bleed him this moment.’84

The court scene in the Memoirs is at times heavy with legalese, largely derived from Roman Law and the Jesuit philosopher and canon lawyer Thomas Sanchez, which in being decontextualised to form lists of terms becomes quite meaningless and largely

84 Three Hours, act 2, p.36.
irrelevant to England in which the case is being heard. John Bull had earlier made the Scriblerian point, and with the same listing tactic about such scientific language use:

‘…Prothonotaries, Philisizers, Chirographers,,, Recoirdats, Nolli Prosequi’s…Supercedeas…Verily, says John there are a prodigious Number of learned Words in this Law, What a pretty Science it is!’ Declaiming thus he sinks into the ‘bottomless pit’ of litigation. The capacity to abuse language to fool others and fall into self-delusion is crucial to the philosopher manqué Martinus symbolises, regardless of the sort of philosopher specifically targeted. This common grounding in the language of persona and proposition, however, obscures the rather divergent understandings of philosophy under attack. Put the other way round, the virtuoso philosopher physician Martinus, is also a Epicurian reductivist, with faith in his possession of the systematic body of principles that can be conveyed to anyone who becomes the requisite persona by mouthing them in turn. The disturbing feature of this philosophical confection is that the fully fledged theories are remarkably plausible, up to a point; but this we might expect, for the intimation of the absurd must needs stem from what is recognised as insight, truth or sense, it marks a journey from the meaningful to a philosophical abyss.

The coalescence of persona and proposition, words and material reality are much more prominent in The Art of Political Lying and in Peri Bathous, each of which elaborates learned Greek conceptual taxonomies and universal laws that might just be strung together to create surface glitter of philosophical profundity. The Pseudologia Politike, or Art of Political Lying as the pre-text of Scribleran satire promotes a tome that has reduced the whole of politics to a simple set of rules and learnable principles, mastery of which is enough for any aspiring politician. The material constituents are the various types of lie given Greek names, such as the prodigious and the proof, described as if they were objects almost susceptible to the vocabulary of physics, velocity and narrowness of vortex; or as coins subject to clipping, modes of circulation, hoarding and distribution; or cards to be played in a game with its own rules. Indeed, the result is to reify the political as an autonomous realm with its own iron laws, distinct from morality. This discovery

85 Thomas Sanchez, Disputationen de Sancto Matrimonii, libri tres, (Genoa, 1592), see Kerby-Miller, Memoirs, notes, pp308-10.
86 John Arbuthnot, Law is a Bottomless Pit, (1712) in Aitken ed., Life and Works, p.212
and codification, we are told, is the triumph of the anonymous ‘Author’ the ‘Genius’ who has transformed the scattered theorems of antiquity into a science. From the perspective of a confessional state in which Arbuthnot had some faith, this autonomy is presented as an absurd reductio, but it has since been mistaken as Machiavelli’s particular achievement. The work is full of incidental insight and in being a carefully crafted example of its own subject matter, fitting its own technical categories is, as I have argued before, an authentic and distinct variant of the paradox of the Liar.87

The most extensive example of this amalgam of proposition and persona, however, is the only surviving and uncontentiously authentic of Martinus’ own works, the *Peri Bathous,* or *Art of Sinking in Poetry,* the clear echo of The Art of Political Lying can hardly be accidental. As poetry was often considered a form of lying, this might be expected and in both cases we have a theory of rhetoric, of how to create and transform through words alone. The Art of Sinking, however is not just a report, it is in its own right a treatise, a parody of Longinus on *The Sublime* (*Peri Huplous*) setting down the principles needed to guarantee writing really bad poetry. Again, if the presentation seems eccentric, it can be read, as both Pope and Professor Steeves have suggested, as a serious and instructive rhetoric.88 The individual components of bad poetry can be kept in a physical box, pulled out from their appropriate drawers and combined as needed.89 This, as with The Art of Political Lying, is all presented with an assiduity that is at once incongruous with the arguments and with the Scriblerian *serio-laudere* conception of the philosopher. That we should find it absurd, should tell us where philosophy stops, the *persona* of the philosopher be put aside.

The same motif is an interlaced feature of *Gulliver’s Travels.* It is found in that pointed satire of Royal Society language, or rather Spratt’s notion that the language of The Society is so plain, simple and mathematically pure that almost as many things can be as conveyed in as many words. So Gulliver meets men labouring under the weight of great sacks from which they take things rather than creating sentences to do all the things

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87 Condren, *Satire, Lies and Politics,* pp.144-158.
88 Steeves, *Peri Bathous,* Introduction’
89 Martinus Scriblerus, *Peri Bathous,* ch.10
that naming cannot; elsewhere it is suggested, if words are but names for things, language would be greatly improved by dispensing with verbs and participles. In the Academy of Lagardo a philosopher and his students have created what would now be called a jargon generator, a physical frame with concepts on rods and levers that are pushed and shoved until they come into some sort of profound alignment to discover the grand theory of everything. All in all, the Scriblerian understanding of Epicurian materialism is of a world sapped of mystery and creativity, it is literally soulless, requiring only a mechanical application and a persona of unselfconscious arrogance, one, ironically made not of substance but only of words.

VII

The case of Hobbes.

I want to pull some of the threads of this paper together by considering Hobbes in the context of the Scriblerian critique of philosophy. Hobbes cannot do everything to this end, for although he was more active in experimentation than is often thought, he was not an experimental natural philosopher or a virtuoso, indeed he was much at odds with one of the leading examples of the type, Robert Boyle. Neither was he a physician nor had he much respect for the profession. In all other respects he, or rather the received image of him, seems the very model of a displaced target. Of the fifty or so moderns the Scriblerians evoke, he is conspicuously absent; yet he was also part of the same Lucianic tradition drawing on a common repertoir of tactics and attitudes that inform Scriblerian satire.

Hobbes was a thorough going modern, expressing an unusual degree of hostility to the ancient world and its philosophy; he was an Epicurian materialist regarding the immaterial soul as an incoherent notion, a man who saw philosophy in terms of system and method and constructed proposition. He was impressed by the Harveyian deductivism that properly hypothesised the circulation of modern blood, one of the anatomical discoveries that allowed later physicians a serious claim on being natural philosophers, and involving a method that broadly, if metaphorically played a significant
part in the expression of his own system of politics. He regarded the scope of philosophy as co-extensive with materiality. This, however, was not to say he held that all discourse should be philosophical, but that anything material could be subject to causal analysis. Hence the very conception of God provided one limit to philosophical endeavour beyond which it became absurd, a point he insisted upon in arguing both with Thomas White and later Bishop Bramhall, to which the latter replied that Hobbes showed no sense of decorum in understanding the limits of causative analysis, a point to be endorsed by Scriblerian satire.90

Hobbes was notoriously combative, with a reputation for wilful singularity, given to refutation by arrogant scorn, and scoffing at men of straw. No other philosopher in seventeenth-century England so neatly exemplifies what the Scriblerians found so distasteful and risible about the new philosophical culture. If this is so, however, it is worth asking how and on what basis the negative image of Hobbes was established, for the Scriblerians were among its legatees. It was by no means entirely fanciful and had been partially crafted by his enemies from the very characteristics Hobbes had thought fitting for the philosophical persona.

First, was his sense of his own intellectual distinction. As an inheritor of the Baconian hostility to received authority and opinion, he was avowedly one of the novatores.91 Much at one with Descartes, the men fell out partly over competing claims to innovation.92 The philosopher was bound to be independent, needing courage to pursue conceptions of causal relationship, establish definitions and take things back to first reckonings regardless of anyone else. This was the intellectual honesty, the integrity,


demanded by the responsibilities of philosophical enquiry. Very few fields of human
eavour, he believed, had been subject to philosophical scrutiny and formed into
communicable bodies of knowledge worthy of the name. Geometry was an exception; but
in civil science, philosophical knowledge, as he notoriously put it, was no older than his
first treatise, *De cive*. This claim as to his own originality went hand in hand with his
disservice attitude to the learning of antiquity, not just useless but positively dangerous.
Nothing has been so dearly bought as our knowledge of the ancients.

What, he had asked rhetorically in *Leviathan*, had been the use of all their
disputations, what Science is there at this day acquired by their Readings…? Hardly
anything is more ‘absurdly said in naturall Philosophy, than that which is called *Aristotles
Metaphysics*’ nothing is more repugnant to government than the *Politics*, nor ignorant
than the *Ethics*.93 And as he would write later, it was the dogmatic warring of Greek
philosophical schools that had infected and corrupted the simple virtuous piety of
Christianity almost from its beginning.94 Sometimes he sounds like Cornelius inside out.
There was even something distinctly backhanded in his professed love for Homer. Pope
suspected that Hobbes’s translations were not so much inept as subversive. Paul Davis
has concurred, arguing that Hobbes deliberately reduced the lofty epics to burlesque, in
order to render implausible their reading as Christian allegory.95 It is a highly likely case.
The probable translator of Hobbes’s *De cive*, Charles Cotton had produced successful
burlesques of Virgil, so there was precedent enough for Hobbes to do something similar,
as indeed would the Scriblerians.96 However, where Cotton and his imitator Smith signal
a certain silliness or willingness to play the fool, there is nothing so obvious or
straightforwardly artless from a man whose competence in Greek was probably without

93 *Leviathan*, ch. 46, p. 461-2.
95 Paul Davis, ‘Thomas Hobbes’s Translations of Homer: Epic and Anticlericalism in late
96 Charles Cotton, *Scarronides, or Virgil Travesty on the First and Fourth Books of the
Aeneid*. (1665) and re-printings through to the eighteenth century. On Cotton as Hobbes’s
translator, See Noel Malcolm, ‘Charles Cotton, Translator of Hobbes’s *De cive*’, *The Huntington
Library Quarterly*, 61, 2, (1998), pp.259-87; for the Scriblerians in similar vein, see *Virgilius
restauratus*; Atterbury, *Homer’s Battle of the Frogs and Mice*. 
equal in his generation. Hobbes’s translations pointedly illustrate uncertainties of
distinguishing innocent humour from critique, and they are likely to when texts like the
Homeric epics are held as close to sacrosanct; using them as the means to satire can seem
little different from making them its target. The nicety of difference between these
possibilities and that of blundering translation raises a hermeneutic problem that reaches
back from Homer to cloud the force of Hobbes’s attention to The Bible in Leviathan.

As the objects of much of his most scornful, dismissive and *ad hominem* attack
were priests, pretty much of all denominations after 1651, it is not surprising that his
enemies were largely men of the cloth. They judged his claims to intellectual virtue
through expectations that regarded singularity as inappropriate to intellectual enquiry.
Noel Malcolm has indicated that many of the Restoration attacks on Hobbes had often
contingent and intangible dimensions, not least that they could form a surrogate attack on
the Stuart court in which, at least in a vulgarised form, many of Hobbes’s views were
fashionable.\(^97\) The condemnation of moral innovation, courtly decadence and departure
from decorous conduct easily merged with a suspicion of intellectual innovation.
Through the eyes of moral censors and with the Bible as a paradigm of textual authority,
Hobbes’s distinctiveness easily smacked of pride, immodesty, foolish arrogance and a
form of intellectual dishonesty, a refusal to accept truth where it was readily available.
His ideas might even be responsible for moral innovation. Shifted into a different
intellectual ambiance, the virtues of the *novator* could be redescribed to become co-
extensive with error. Thus, to summarise Lawson, one of the less severe of his critics,
where Hobbes has done well, many before have done better, where he has done ill, he has
marched on his own.\(^98\)

Secondly, particular attention was given to his scoffing tone.\(^99\) At one with the
conversion of innovation into singularity, he was held responsible for inventing the

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\(^{97}\) Noel Malcolm, ‘Hobbes and the Royal Society’, and ‘Summary Biography’ in *Aspects of

\(^{98}\) George Lawson, *An Examination of the Political Part of Mr. Hobbs, His Leviathan*, (1657).

atheistic drollery also fashionable at court and evident in the Restoration theatre. But here again, a shift in the context of expectations in which a persona is considered proves distorting. The innovation may have lain in turning a satiric humour towards the unique situation of the decidedly insecure Restoration clergy, but the character of that wit was in fact traditional and Lucianic and priests had hardly been immune to its barbs.

Hobbes himself came as close as such a relentless modern could to placing his style of philosophy in a Lucianic, serio-laudere tradition. Normally he was decidedly reluctant to admit, as Lawson recognised, that his arguments had precedent in antiquity. Thus the Hobbesian theory of laughter as aggressive, its provocation as an argumentative victory, the very understanding Lucian had exploited in attacking philosophers, was an unacknowledged summary of Quintilian, as readers of Leviathan would have recognised. Given this parsimonious acknowledgement of his elders, it is particularly significant that Hobbes’s few references to Lucian are mostly positive. He is treated as an authority in the essay prefacing the translation of Thucydides (one of the very few good ancients); Lucian’s striking image of people being chained to the mouth of the sovereign is carried into Leviathan and in the Latin Leviathan (1668) Hobbes falls into line with most scholars in commending Lucian’s style. More importantly, Hobbes allies himself with Lucian at the beginning of De corpore: in a reference that makes Lucian central to his project of replacing the bankrupt philosophy of the past with something fresh: “But what? Were there no philosophers natural nor civil among the ancient Greeks? There were men so called; witness Lucian by whom they are derided; witness divers cities, from which they have often been by public edicts banished [an allusion e.g. to Rome’s banishing of Philosophers in 161 b.c.]. But it follows not that there was philosophy.”

Hobbes’s friend Samuel Butler, clearly recognised the continuity of style and persona. In his character of ‘A Philosopher’, Butler scorns the very things the materialist

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102 Skinner, Reason and Rhetoric, pp. p.346, see p.232
103 De corpore, (1655), English Works ed. Sir William Molesworth, (London 1839) vol.1. xi, Opera…latine…ed Molesworth, (London 1845) vol.1
Hobbes attacked. ‘The Philosopher is confident of immaterial substances and his reasons are very pertinent, that is substantial as he thinks and immaterial as others do’.

Butler continues that ‘In Lucius’s time philosophers were commonly called Beard-Wearers, for all the strength of their Wits lay in their Beards’, a probable allusion to Lucian’s satiric account of the philosopher Hermotinus.104 Aubrey later recalled that Hobbes would not wear a beard, wanting more to be known for his wit than to be seen as a sage.105 Again, in his character of ‘A Droll’, the sort of wit for which, to repeat Hobbes was held responsible, Butler remarked that he is one whose jest is earnest and his earnestness jest.106

In the context of their own expectations, then, Hobbes’s critics had before them a vulnerable figure: they could either discount the long tradition of serio-laudere of which Hobbes was a recognisable part and so see him as indecorously innovating; or they could condemn distinctiveness as arrogant departure from sanctioning tradition; and of course, they could treat him to doses of his own medicine, so keeping the serio-laudere tradition on its feet. We find this with Alexander Ross who both scoffs and accuses Hobbes of scoffing, and above all with John Eachard, whose popular Lucianic dialogues against Hobbes promoted his own book in a telling parody of Hobbes’s claims for the significance of De cive. What you have here, Eachard informs the reader, is the sum of all knowledge. It is sufficient unto itself, it knows all things, can do all things. Just buy the book: it works even without reading it.107

Given all this, it is curious that the Scriblerians never mention Hobbes, but they could certainly draw on a received image of a bankrupt philosopher without needing to resort to the safe satire that traduced the dead. If so, it was a case of the biter bit, again.

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There is what seems to me an unnoticed body of allusion to Hobbes. His outspoken pride in the importance of *De cive* together with Eachard’s reductio of it, offer precedent enough for the similarly inflated claim of the ‘Author’ in *The Art of Political lying* to have invented a true political science, and for Martinus to announce that he has an infallible system guaranteeing bad poetry. Tantalisingly, Hobbes may have been encompassed by the heavily freighted imagery of monstrosity in the Scriblerian’s work: his most monstrous affront to orthodoxy and decorum was the work that emblazoned the great monster of the deep on its title page, but this possible point of allusion remains no more than a suspicion.

More substantively, scattered through the *Memoirs* are tantalising intimations of Hobbesian theory and dicta. We are told of the artificial man of the Free Thinkers just after their letter has outlined an Epicurian view of the body reminiscent of the ‘Introduction’ to Hobbes’s own ‘artificial man’, the sovereign of *Leviathan*, with its reference to the heart as but a pump, the nerves and muscles as springs and wheels. Among Martinus’ most outlandish claims are that he is the philosopher of ultimate causes, and that ‘by a Sagacity peculiar to himself he hath discover’d effects in their very Cause; and without the trivial helps of Experiments, or Observations, hath been the Inventor of most of the modern Systems and Hypotheses.’ Immediately following this echo of the Hobbes/Boyle disputes, we are told that Martinus has ‘enrich’d Mathematics with many precise and geometrical *Quadratures* of the *Circle*.’ Only Hobbes thought so many times (well over a dozen) that he had squared the circle. Only Hobbes was so derided for failing. Crambe too has something of Hobbesian singularity about him, as he is decidedly enraged that The Free Thinkers, no less, have stolen, he believes, his copulation theory of the syllogism. Hobbes’s famous image of words as the money of fools, is evoked to remark on the locquatious Crambe’s wealth in that regard and in context the whole passage might be a descant on Hobbes’s discussion of universals and

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108 Cf *Memoirs* 2, p.383 where the atheistic implications of this are explicit.


111 *Memoirs*, ch13, p.142.
particulars, over which ‘names’, his unfortunate shorthand for language, people tumble into confusion. In the same passage there may be an allusion to Hobbes’s image of the mind as a ranging spaniel. Martinus hypothesised that a philosopher’s mind ‘was like a great Forest, where Ideas rang’d like animals of several kinds; that… copulated and engender’d Conclusions…’ and might beget ‘absurdities’. In Hobbes’s terms metaphor is an abuse of language to be commended in Peri Bathous; and in the same work, it is shown how an epic poem can be created by recipe with ingredients kept in a box of counterfeit rhetorical tricks. It seems to echo of Hobbes’s own hyperbolic praise of William Davenant’s poem Gondibert, in the course of which Hobbes scornfully dismissed those, (so unlike Davenant), who relied on counterfeit boxes of inspiration. Alas, but how fittingly, Davenant was widely recognised, to Hobbes’s own embarrassment, as an appalling poet, so bored with his epic he didn’t finish it.

Despite Hobbes being putatively an easy and intermittent target, he and the Scriblerians shared much the same understanding of philosophical absurdity. Reference has already been made to the Scriblerian satire of bogus philosophical wisdom through decontextualised word lists, verbal impressions designed to give an inkling of the ludicrous by sounding without meaning; it was device employed by none more effectively than Hobbes both against clerics and philosophers. Hence, on the one hand, and with a wonderfully poetic cadence, the things they have made us worship include, ‘Men, Women, a Bird, a Crocodile, a Calfe, a Dogge, a Snake, an Onion, a Leeke, Deified’. On the other, there is the ‘learned rote from the Schooles, as hypostatical, transubstantiate, consubstantiate, eternal-Now, and the canting of Schoole-men.’ For Hobbes, on either hand, there is little doubt that such word conjuring goes beyond mere doctrinal confusion, it is part of a strategy of clerical control, an abuse of clerical office and an intrusion into philosophy, all incense and incantation.

113 Memoirs, ch.7, p.121.
115 Hobbes, Leviathan, ch. 12, p.79, ch. 5, p.35; Historical Narration, pp.393-5.
Hobbes, as I indicated at the outset, carefully distinguished error, as a mistake that anyone might make from absurdity, the use of words beyond philosophical sense, that is, trains of thought derived from philosophical endeavour, but creating a contrasting condition that defines the shape of true philosophy. By implication the shift into absurdity marks the point at which, ridicule, derision, laughter was the appropriate philosophical response. It adds unusual weight to the adage that the proper philosophical response to the world is to laugh at it. This remained the Scriblerians’ attitude.\textsuperscript{116} Moreover, Hobbes gave six main causes of absurdity: lack of method, the confusion of bodies with accidents, of internal with external qualities, of things with names, of predication with identity and the use of metaphors for ‘words proper’. Scriblerian satire illustrates each of these though not as separate categories.\textsuperscript{117} The addiction of the inveterate punster Crambe to the free association of words, (at one point he is sacked for punning),\textsuperscript{118} together with the incapacity of Martinus to understand the contexts that might give them different meanings, insure an easy slippage between Hobbes’s causes of absurdity. Thus Crambe’s \textit{Treatise of Syllogisms} is not just an elaborately extended metaphor about reason from sexual intercourse (of the sort for which Hobbes himself showed a partiality), it is indeed a tour de force of \textit{paradiastole}; confusing words with things and internal with external qualities.\textsuperscript{119} All syllogistic rules (naturally) are said to follow from it, thus an enthymeme is a secret marriage.\textsuperscript{120} A false inference is a bastard and absurdity itself is defined as an engendered monster.\textsuperscript{121} Crambe’s \textit{Treatise} does not illustrate lack of method, for

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{116} But see also, Smith (?), \textit{Scarronides}, ‘Preface to the Reader’, for a similar attitude to philosophers.
  \item \textsuperscript{117} Hobbes, \textit{Leviathan}, ch.5, pp.34-5. It is often over-looked that Hobbes is explicitly talking about scientific or philosophical discourse, his was not a hostility to metaphor used beyond its procedural strictness.
  \item \textsuperscript{118} \textit{Memoirs} 2, p.383 alludes to \textit{Ars Pun-ica}, which may be taken as Crambe’s last stand.
  \item \textsuperscript{119} \textit{Memoirs}, ch. 7, pp.121-2; \textit{The Art of Political Lying} and \textit{Peri Bathous} are replete with the same techniques and ‘Mrs Bull’s Vindication of the Rights of Cuckoldom’, a sexual and marital redescription of resistance casuistry is directly parallel, makes me suspect Arbuthnot’s hand was predominant.
  \item \textsuperscript{120} This is effective, however, only for the less significant of Aristotle’s definitions of an enthymeme (a statement involving a hidden minor premise), but it is also the meaning Hobbes took from his abbreviated translation of \textit{The Rhetoric}. The enthymeme as a probabilistic imperative and analogue to the syllogism was untouched.
  \item \textsuperscript{121} Recall, the twins are seen by everyone but Martinus as monstrous, the marriages are dissolved as legal and natural absurdities.
\end{itemize}
metaphor determines an ordered understanding, but then there are always the pilloried virtuosi.

The point here has not been to suggest any exclusive set of textual interrelationships and on its own, any one of these apparent allusions to Hobbes is of little weight. Considered cumulatively, however, they do deepen a relevant context of philosophical style and seen in conjunction with Hobbes, Scriblerian satire illustrates some of the wayward complexities of philosophical controversy. In addition to there being confrontational schools of philosophy, there are likely to be personal attacks on philosophers insofar as it is taken for granted that a philosophical persona is a sine qua non for or might even be a cause of good philosophy. So too, the necessary virtues for the integrity of the activity were contested and converted into vices by the operations of the golden law of transformation—a principle of redescription with which Hobbes was all too familiar. The general vocabulary of philosophic virtue, like that needed to legitimate anything approaching an office, or realm of responsibility, needed to be cashed into more specific moral economies of enquiry and was just as easily subject to redescription into the vocabulary of critique. In this way, the Hobbesian intellectual honesty of independent raciocination had been made into a form of mendacity and purblind pride; the forensic resources of humour used to expose absurdity, transmuted into a mere scoffing avoidance of genuine argument. All of this was inescapably carried in language, not just as a set of names for things or concepts, but as expressive of something about its users, and of what they hoped to promote or discourage. Not surprisingly, then, philosophical battalions failed to meet in the dusk of the early-modern world and disputes could be drawn out long beyond the point at which we may think they should have been settled.

The conditions for argumentative buoyancy have been more difficult to see as the serio-laude tradition itself, a principal vehicle for the linguistic confluence of doctrine

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122 Martinus Scriblerus, Peri Bathous, ch.14; cf. Hobbes, Leviathan, in which we here that tyranny is but monarchy misliked, anarchy a similar transformation of democracy; on the importance of redescription and Hobbes’s theories and practice of it see at length, Skinner, Reason and Rhetoric.
and risible *persona*, has largely been erased from philosophical respectability and respectable philosophers like Hobbes have been abstracted from it. With this loss, it has become so much easier to take seriously something presented as jest, --like the morally autonomous domain of the political as an object of science, and see as with the Scriblerians themselves, only humour in what was also deadly earnest. This, ultimately, was the insistence that philosophy depended upon discrimination; unless the philosopher understood both the procedures and appropriate subject matter of the activity, intellectual energy just bred absurdity. As Hobbes himself wrote, encapsulating that shared Lucianic principle: the necessary corollary of humanity’s capacity to reason is its subjection to absurdity, ‘And of men, those are of all most subject to it, that professe Philosophy.’  

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123 *Leviathan*, ch.5 p.34.